

## EDGE 2020

EVENING 2

Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020  
6:00 pm onwardsUNLOCK  
EDUCATIONProtecting education  
from another crisis

According to recent insights by the World Bank, the pandemic has caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth from 161 countries to be out of school. The enforced closure of educational institutions worldwide posed a severe challenge to the continuous learning and development of students. In India, this sudden halt became an impediment and has affected all the milestones achieved by State-run schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA), currently known as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan, in terms of enrolment and learning outcome. As experts continue to deliberate on taking education digital, the pandemic has made us realise that going digital will take a bigger timeline and a lot more conversation on correlations between economic status, privilege, nutrition, caste and basic outcomes tied to the schooling systems. A pathway to restarting schools with backup plans for future crises is important. The following set of conversations are an attempt to understand the challenges that lie before us and use the perspectives shared by multi-level stakeholders, to build solutions.

## SEGMENT 1 – GROUND ZERO



**Aksha Ali and Shahzadi Gulafsha from Samaritan Mission (High) School, and Vinod Ram, Principal, Samaritan Mission (High) School (SHM) in conversation with Atul Gandhi, Head, Investment, EdelGive Foundation.**

Aksha, a student of Class X, shared her experience as a student in the lockdown. While the initial announcement seemed to not have a very severe impact on her studies; as the days progressed and the lockdown extended, she started to get concerned on the future of her studies. When online studies was announced, a month into the lockdown, though challenging, Aksha was able to adapt to the new online format. Shahzadi, on the other hand, in addition to existing challenges, also had to deal with the circumstances of absence of connectivity and strain on her health due to the prolonged hours of online study. The dream of topping the district was marred with the challenges that online studies impose in terms of practical engagement especially for important subjects. Support from her community, her neighbours and her family has enabled her to continue her education to the best of her ability.

This interaction highlighted the toll and stress that students have faced over the months:

- **Connectivity is not a luxury for all**, the situations are different for different students, and access is also a concern. The **financial pressure to gain access to a smartphone** or internet connectivity is also a challenge which leaves out many students from a right to education.
- **Prolonged hours affect engagement for important subjects** such as Mathematics, especially for the higher grades who have to appear for board exams.
- The exposure to the system/mobiles effects the **health** of a few students.

Principal of Samaritan Mission (High) School, Vinod Ram echoed the student's sentiments and further elaborated on the challenges he has faced as an educator. Some of them include:

- The school **experimented with technology for the first time**. Learning and unlearning new platforms and programmes was challenging, but also an innovative experience.
- Understanding that **effective engagement was important** with teachers played a great role in extending support.
- The School had to adopt new ways **to keep the students engaged** even online and curb the number of drop-outs.

Atul concluded the session by highting the incredible work done by [Samaritan Mission \(High\) School \(SHM\)](#) founded by Mamoon Akhtar in Tikiapara, Howrah, West Bengal. He reiterated the impact of the Pandemic, at a humanitarian level, where all the focus on Education was lost. Loss of equity and learning has been incremental. In such a situation SHM's interventions are commendable as they continue to work with children from marginalized communities, those who don't have access to technology and in particular, and also the girl child who are the most affected.



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## SEGMENT 2 – FRONTLINE FORWARD



“Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you. And do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come?” - Rumi

**Vivek Kumar, Co-Founder and CEO, Kshamtalaya Foundation opened the deliberations with this beautiful quote as he explored the impact of the pandemic on grassroots organisations of different scales in conversation with Nikita Ketkar, COO, Masoom; and Aditya Natraj, Founder and Director, Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF).**

Aditya Natraj spoke in-depth about the different types of crisis that affect children during the lockdown. He believed that the Learning Crisis was a flawed framing of the term as there were different components that affect learning under the current circumstances:

- Emotional Crisis – Dealing with sudden changes, such as missing school, friends and witnessing problems at home. These cause confusion and give rise to anxiety.
- Nutrition Crisis- The ICDS, PDS supply chains have been interrupted during the pandemic, and learning only happens on a full stomach; that’s a much bigger crisis.
- Attention Crisis- 25% to 50 % of children who have devices, were not willing to learn beyond 45 minutes to 90 minutes in a day. Many found it difficult to sit for online classes for 5 hours a day.
- Gender inequity crisis: In the new environment, girls are staying home more, eating less and working more. We will eventually have to deal with a much bigger gender crisis as the work done over the year has been affected.

### Key positive outcomes from the pandemic:

- There is an **opportunity** to accelerate socio-economic learning.
- **Parents and communities** became better support systems which helped address gaps in education at the time of the pandemic.
- **EdTech** took over some areas of learning seamlessly and was accepted widely, though it has its limitations.
- **Collaborations** are on the rise. From KEFs experience, six different organisations collaborated within a month and were able to assimilate a curriculum for online education.

For more information on Kaivalya Education Foundation click [here](#)

### Key positive outcomes from the pandemic:

- Moving to an online system for education has worked beautifully; the **cost per child has come down**.
- **Institutional budgets have come down** drastically, e.g. with regards to residential training which can be taken online. This model makes it lighter to handle compared to the earlier style.
- Another positive aspect is the support from the government with its **decision to reduce the weight of the syllabus by 60%**. The night schools can leverage this, to get the learning levels right.

For more information on Masoom click [here](#)

Moving beyond compulsory education, Nikita Ketkar spoke about the specific issues that the Night School students faced due to the lockdown. Loss of livelihoods and subsequent migrations played a major hurdle, thus bringing it to a grinding halt.

The organisation’s was to ensure the basic survival of its students and are currently involved with the process of getting the students back to school. The pandemic has affected 2500 students across 85 schools.

Masoom has managed to pool in **400 smartphones** from various support systems. The challenge was also to convince donors to help with such requirements as their mandates did not allow much margin.

She stressed on the need for the government to think on how all other sector players such as not for profits and civil society can also be brought together on time for support. This makes for efficient management.

Vivek summarised the findings of the discussion stating that the best way forward will be to - **Optimize, Collaborate, Accelerate, Impact and Scale.**

He concluded that while the crisis in the education sector has always been existent, the Pandemic has exposed them as a much bigger scale.

Wrapping up the conversation on a hopeful note, Vivek reiterated that a crisis is a crisis on Day 1, on Day 2, it becomes an opportunity.

### Key interventions of Kshamtalaya:

A Radio learning program, was organised as an **adaptive response** to the current learning crisis amidst COVID-19 aimed at reaching out to communities with low/no internet, mapped with the Rajasthan state curriculum.

**Kshamta Radio – Paathshaala ki Ghanti Bajao** in partnership with a community Radio Madhuban 90.4 FM, a radio learning program to build connection, culture of community learning and develop resilience in areas with limited access to devices.

For more information on Kshamtalaya click [here](#)



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## SEGMENT 3 – COLLECTIVE ACTION



**Osama Manzar, Founder and Director, Digital Empowerment Foundation was in conversation with Naghma Mulla, President & COO, EdelGive Foundation** to look at the role of technology and how the digital inclusion and digital intervention in the area of education needed to be taken up as a long-term plan. Osama Manzar is a global leader on the mission of eradicating information poverty from India and global south using digital tools through the Digital Empowerment Foundation, an organisation he founded in 2002.

He compared the impact of COVID to a mirror, which had projected how various existing designs that were in place with regards to the country, the family, life, education, etc.

His advice was clear that only connectivity could bridge the digital gap. Meaningful digital integration was crucial.

Over the years in the sector, digital integration was not an integral part of education. COVID has highlighted the intensity of suffering in the area of education for stakeholders who were teaching, funding, planning and receiving the education.

1.4 million schools in India were not connected and yet they were expected to be connected and have a digital lab, this was the gap. The plan now must go micro and at an individual level, not in classrooms alone, but into 280 million homes.

Osama has been leading the discussions for democratizing internet since a decade.

### **Solutions for bridging the gap :**

- **Teachers must receive training in enhancing digital skills.**
- **A critical requirement is to strive for meaningful connectivity. 2G would not solve problems in the remote areas. Entrepreneurship with regards to the internet as an essential piece of infrastructure. Anyone should be in a position to provide internet access.**
- **All schools can become hotspots and all teachers digitally abled.**
- **While we celebrate stories about how students connect with great difficulty in remote areas; 2G will not solve our problems, and the only way we can think of integrating education is by connectivity.**
- **The organisation has effectively taught 7000 people using video conferencing, and a substantial push digital integration is required.**

For more information on Digital Empowerment Foundation click [here](#)

***“We see education not as an elitist, not as a marketing product, it is time we think education as an integral part. We all are in the same stage and situation as everyone, it is important that this point of time that we think that digital is an integral part, devise is a furniture and internet is a human right and content was never a problem.”***

**- Osama Manzar**

***“It is extremely important for us to remember that our work is for these children and millions of their kind and that their aspirations, fears and voices need to be heard and accounted for while we build amplified solutions or technological solutions.”***

**– Naghma Mulla**



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## SEGMENT 4 – REBUILDING TOGETHER



Two leading foundations that operate in the education sector in India discussed the kinds of solutions both organisations implemented to reach out to the masses during the lockdown. **Geeta Goel, Country Director, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation India; and Anurag Behar, CEO, Azim Premji Foundation; were in conversation with Gayatri Nair Lobo, COO, A.T.E Chandra Foundation.** The organisations have managed to work closely with the state government programmes and especially in the government school models.

Anurag Behar was of the firm view that online education did not work. His viewpoint was that if we look at the lower grade, teaching took place with the engagement between the pupil and the teacher. The constant handholding and everyday interactions are what constitutes an education. Anurag divided the pandemic in three stages:

- When the lockdown was announced education took a back seat and basic survival was the focus for everyone.
- During the months of June and July there was no real economic revival and the pockets of populations saw children either working with their parents, playing or some children trying manage their education.
- Period 3, is the coming months of Jan – Feb – March, where they will have to watch out for the exact effects on the sector and what kind of children will drop out. The foundation is not going to wait to discover, they will have to go out and make sure that children don't drop out.

### Anurag's view on why he felt online education did not work:

- Even for the small percentage of children who had access to technology, online education was ineffective because the majority of the remaining students did not have access.
- The nature of education was to reach curricular goals, the nature requires intimate interaction between students and teacher, holding the child's hand, taking step by step going back and forth, this is not possible online. Thus, in his view, it was ineffective for kids.
- The notion that one could covert education did not work. It has been observed, that state after state, after the initial enthusiasm of May and June, have all retreated.

For more information on Azim Premji Foundation click [here](#)

***“We need to consider the nature of education to reach curricular goals – the nature requires intimate interaction between a student and a teacher, holding the child's attention, taking it step by step. This doesn't happen online. Online education is therefore ineffective for kids.”***

### - Anurag Behar

#### Geeta Goel's view about online education:

- Digital access is a big issue
- Governments have to widen their minds and accept blended learning as a possibility.
- If we have budgets, we should encourage practiced learning while using technology. Technology was a great enabler as it improves quality.
- Going forward we need to design a hybrid model recognizing that we will not be back to a full fledged education, so a mix of online and off-line education is needed.

For more information on Michael & Susan Dell Foundation click [here](#)

Geeta began the conversation by looking at the three reasons that affected learning and the scenario when the pandemic became a reality.

- The helpline numbers were inundated with several calls.
- Because of migration most students had to shift from private schools to government schools.
- Dropout rates increased for the girl child.

There was also great worry of a drop in funding but at the same time it was remarkable to see NGOs work with the govt, by discarding all labels of what they stood for, and the way in which they all collaborated. On the Education front, they were working in three states, one thing was clear was where the state department and teachers, were already focussed on learning outcomes versus the infrastructural concerns, the engagements was much higher.

***“Going forward we need to design hybrid models recognizing that we will not be back to full fledged education, so a mix of online and off line education is needed.”***

### – Geeta Goel

With close to 20 years of sector experience, Gayatri Nair Lobo skilfully curated the conversation that held diverse opinions on approaches to the same problems. She recounted a statement she had noted at a webinar and shared:

***“As foundations, it's not just a duty and responsibility to be able to serve at this point, but it's actually a privilege that we are able to do the work that we do.”***

#### A.T.E Chandra Foundation works with a strategic problem-solving approach to address social issues in **two core verticals:**

- Social Sector Capacity Building
- Sustainable Rural Development combines data and people-driven approach to create templates for solving problems in rural India at scale.

For more information on A.T.E Chandra Foundation click [here](#)



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## SEGMENT 4 – REBUILDING TOGETHER



The final discussion for the evening was between **Ashish Dhawan, Founder-Chairman, Central Square Foundation and Vidya Shah, Chairperson and CEO, EdelGive Foundation.**

Central Square Foundation is a grant-making organization, and policy think-tank focused on transforming the quality of school education in India. The organization works closely with the government machinery to influence systems change. In 2014, he spearheaded the launch of India's first liberal arts university, Ashoka University, a philanthropic effort of over forty leaders in education and industry.

Ashish shared his journey from Indian private equity investor to a philanthropist along with some insights on how organizations could structure and function to deliver outstanding results. To begin with, he did not consider the move from the profit to the non-profit sector a sacrifice; he carries high regard for the people who make tremendous sacrifices, young people are entering the sector straight out of college. There are sacrifices in terms of compensation or posting in terms of geographic location that is real sacrifices. He had achieved success early on and was already a successful entrepreneur when he made the change happen. He further narrated that the decision to switch was hard emotionally. The words he chose to express the journey were experimentation, going into the unknown, breaking away, setting out of inertia.

Looking at the reform for the education sector, he stressed that the country has to prioritize foundational learning as a mandate. Countries across the world, such as USA, Peru, Vietnam, China, among others, were prosperous because years ago they had invested in this model. He was glad to note that **India's' NEP** calls this out very clearly in their plan.

***“I think you need a bold Vision and Mission. But you also need a good team, and you have to invest in getting the right team on board to make it happen because it's not a side activity for an NGO it's your revenue, right? you have to do lots of meetings you have to deal with the frustration of any process you'll have a 95% rejection rate but that's okay you got to wake up every morning saying I'm going to do it again and not give up, so that is the methodical approach.”***

**- Ashish Dhawan**

***Lessons learned through the years:***

- ***A bold Vision and Mission that excites donors.***
- ***Show early wins.***
- ***A methodical approach.***
- ***For the leaders of NGOs- spend 20% to 60% of your time in fundraising. And make it the no. 1 priority alongside delivering against your programmes. This was the only way to scale the organisation if that was the organisations objective.***
- ***Take the time to think differently, look globally to see what's working and think strategically.***
- ***All of us can come together and work in conjunction with the government, state governments, NGOs and Funders.***
- ***It's a frustrating experience at times, the highs are higher, and the lows are lower.***
- ***Invest in the right team***

For more information on Central Square Foundation click [here](#)

***“Maharashtra with over 600,000 teachers alone employs more people than at TCS, one of India's largest companies. But without the same organisation systems backbone that an equivalent private sector organisation has – in terms of people, processes, infrastructure, budgets. So, the scale of the issue is large. Secondly, the correlation between education and employment – education must match the skills that employers need with improving learning outcomes and vocational training. Finally, the role of Access to Financing and Technology to leverage educational and learning aids - Student loans and skilling loans for e.g. to bridge the access to opportunities needs highlighting.”***

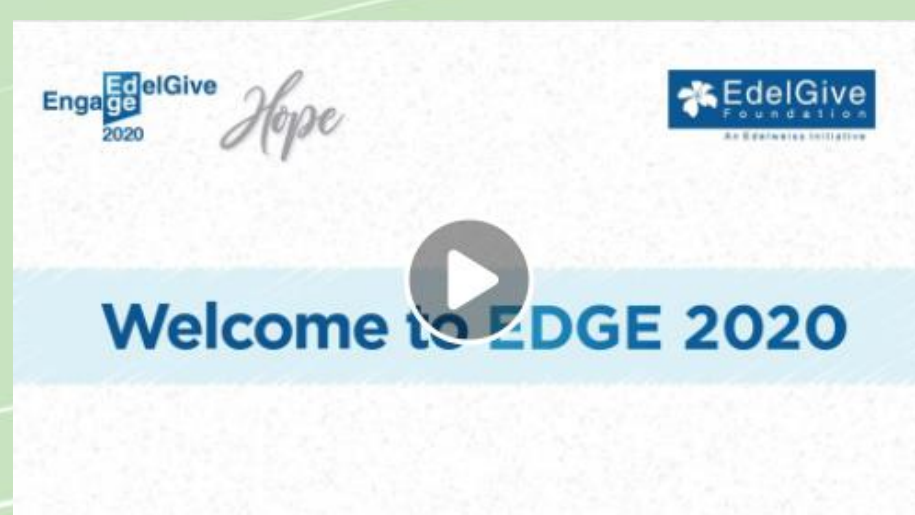
**- Vidya Shah**

Thank you for joining the conversations at EDGE!

We hope to see you on **Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> of December at 6:00 pm IST live at [www.edelgiveedge2020.com](http://www.edelgiveedge2020.com)**

If you haven't registered for EDGE 2020, **you can register [here](#).**

**Please write to us at [edge@edelweissfin.com](mailto:edge@edelweissfin.com) for any concerns.**



If you missed Evening 2 you can watch it on the link above!