

## The Collaborators for Transforming Education

### 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Collaborators Meet, 16th September 2021 Event Report

On 16th September 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> Collaborators for Transforming Education Meet was organized virtually to celebrate the completion of five years of the program and discuss the way forward for 2021-22. All the funding and implementing partners participated in the meeting and shared their valuable inputs. The meeting began with an overview of the significant achievements of the program in the past year in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the partners then shared their planned interventions for the next year, complemented by a perspective on the Government of Maharashtra's plan for the same period. The meeting concluded with a discussion between all partners on how best to respond to the complex and evolving situation.

#### Key Takeaways

1. The Collaborators has reached 1 million children over the past five years and helped to develop models for transforming quality of primary education in Maharashtra.
2. Addressing the crisis of learning loss and dropout from schools caused by the pandemic is the key priority for both the administration and the CTE.
3. The state is mobilising its resources for a re-enrolment drive, filling vacant teaching positions, implementing the national Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission, and supplementing infrastructure gaps especially in vulnerable areas.
4. To support the state's vision, the CTE will focus on strengthening digital/hybrid learning while schools remain closed, and to address gaps in enrolment and learning once schools reopen.

#### Five years of The Collaborators program

The Collaborators program was launched in 2016 to support the Government of Maharashtra (GoM) to address persistent gaps in the learning outcomes of children in government schools. Its unique model of strengthening the education system has been recognised as a best practice at the state and national level due to its comprehensiveness, responsiveness to the needs of its stakeholders, and sustainability. At the same time, the mechanisms put in place for accountability and consistency of engagement over time have made the CTE a trusted partner for government stakeholders at all levels, turning them into the program's biggest advocates. Finally, the CTE has built a model for distributed and engaged leadership that creates strong conviction among its donor partners. Its successes so far provide evidence for the effectiveness of risk capital when deployed in the philanthropic ecosystem.

Through the course of its outreach to over 1 million children over the past 5 years, the program increasingly focused on improving quality, with the understanding that lack of access to education was no longer the biggest challenge for the state. This may no longer hold true.

### **The impact of a year of COVID-19 on Education**

Naghma Mulla, CEO at EdelGive, shared how the CTE program has managed to engage with the children and continue the learning process in these challenging circumstances. While the government has made tremendous strides in building schools and getting children into classrooms over the last two decades, improvement in learning outcomes and the capacities of teachers to fulfil the needs of their diverse classrooms remained a challenge. The pandemic intensified this crisis, as most primary-age children have not set foot in a school in over a year.

Efforts to keep children learning through other means — including television, radio, WhatsApp groups and even small-group tutoring — have met with little success. A switch to large-scale digital education was found to be unviable and inequitable, especially in rural India, where only 4 per cent of households had access to digital devices. Education systems nationwide were also hugely unprepared for such a shift: The education ministry's budget for digital e-learning was slashed to Rs 469 crore in 2020-21—the year COVID struck—from Rs 604 crore the previous year.

The effects of the pandemic on children's education were not only felt in schools, but even more at home- Evidence suggests that poverty is forcing significant numbers of children, particularly girls, out of education and into work or early marriage. A World Bank report, 'Beaten or Broken: Informality and COVID-19 in South Asia', has quantified the impact of school closures in monetary terms: India is estimated to lose \$440 billion (Rs 32.3 lakh crore) in probable future earnings.

### **The Collaborators' Response**

The initial lockdown in March 2020 and movement restrictions affected the field intervention, but from October 2020 the interventions were resumed. These were again brought to a halt by the second wave. Besides its impact on the program activities, the second wave also took a personal toll as some field staff lost their close ones. We also lost some government officials who were close allies of the program since its inception.

The implementing partners adopted a range of approaches to establish a 'new normal' in engaging children in education and foster foundational learning despite the on-ground challenges:

- Through 60% virtual and 40% field interventions, they have been supporting teachers and government officials to implement the guidelines for e-learning.
- They have provided technical support to the government to use virtual platforms to conduct meetings and sessions for teachers, as well as capacity building for government functionaries.
- Communities play a key role in sustaining learning during school closures. School Management Committees (SMCs) and Gram Panchayats were also connected using technology platforms.
- Due to these efforts, all government forums, including meetings of district and block resource groups, Shikshan Parishads and SMCs, were conducted virtually through the Zoom platform.
- A key achievement was that despite prolonged school closures over 70% of children were engaged in learning through offline and online processes, especially through community participation with the support of 10,000

Shikshan Mitras (youth volunteers jointly identified by Kendra Pramukhs (Cluster heads), teachers and School Management Committee members).

## Plans for the current year of the program 21-22

The three CTE implementing partners Gyan Prakash Foundation, Kaivalya Education Foundation and Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST) shared their program achievements and challenges from 2020-21 and intervention strategy for 2021-22.

The situation remains critical in 2021-22, and so the program will continue to follow the same operating mechanisms this year of 60% virtual and 40% on-field interventions. Considering the circumstances, a limited number of school days are expected this year, with schools restarting only by the third quarter and mostly beginning with the higher classes. The full extent of the learning loss among children, as well as the number of children who have dropped out from schools, will be known only once schools reopen. Presently, the program plans to focus on the following priorities:

1. **Strengthening digital learning while schools remain closed:** Revisit the teaching approach and build teacher capacity to help teachers and students master the online/offline/hybrid classroom.
2. **Ensuring re-enrolment when schools reopen:** Map out and mainstream children into schools through joint efforts with teachers, SMCs, and PRIs, to ensure enrolment and retention of children. As schools are expected to reopen post-Diwali, special support will be provided to the government for bringing children back to school and improving enrolment with the support of SMCs, Gram Panchayat and Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI) members.
3. **Bridging the gaps in foundational learning:** Provide remedial support and focus on foundational learning as soon as schools reopen, in alignment with the government plan and building on the initiative by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). The focus will be on cluster development by building model schools, aligning with the government. Under the New Education Policy, Anganwadis will also be supported to enable foundational learning.

## Perspective from the Government of Maharashtra

At present, secondary schools have reopened in rural areas in Maharashtra, but schools remain closed in urban areas. The state is aiming to improve its rank in the Performance Grading Index (PGI) and become the best-performing state in the country. Foundational literacy and numeracy for all children is especially an immediate priority for Maharashtra and the country. Mr Siddhesh Wadkar, Education consultant with the Government of Maharashtra, shared the measures taken by the state government to respond to the post-COVID challenges:

- **Increasing enrolment and access:**
  - As returning to high enrolment is a priority, Aadhaar validation will be used during the enrolment drive to avoid duplication.
  - The state will fill the vacant posts of Headmasters and Kendra Pramukh on priority, and also improve the Transfer Policy that governs teachers' rationalization and deployment.
- **Improving learning outcomes:**

- The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission will provide intensive support to help students achieve grade-appropriate learning outcomes through a planned developed activity using workbooks by SCERT. Funding of Rs. 150 crore has been sanctioned for this under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- The National Achievement Survey is planned for this academic year.
- **Strengthening the education system:**
  - Under the SSA, Anganwadis will now be part of the state education initiatives.
  - A Command-and-Control Centre will be set up to ensure more effective use of forums and institutions like the CRC, BRC and DIET.
- **Ensuring required infrastructure:**
  - A budget of around Rs. 200 crores has been sanctioned for repairs and maintenance of school buildings, particularly in the Marathwada region. The government will pay 80% of the cost, and Zilla Parishads and the community will provide the remaining 20%.
  - The government is setting up Science and computer-aided learning labs with internet connectivity in schools on priority, to increase children's digital access.
  - For Children with Special Needs (CWSN), functional CWSN-friendly toilets will be set up in schools.

### Insights from Funding Partners

All the donors expressed appreciation for the program and efforts taken by implementing partners. Susanne Grossman from Dalyan Foundation expressed her interest in understanding the effective implementation of the child wise action plan, an integral mechanism of the program from its initiation. Yonca Even Guggenbühl from Dalyan asked how the program plans to address the learning loss and about dialogues required with teachers for addressing this issue. Valmik Ahuja from Douglas B. Marshall Jr. Foundation expressed his concern regarding the burden of completing the syllabus by teachers in a situation where schools are closed for over a year. To achieve grade-appropriate learning teachers, need intensive support from the government. From Sita Devi Malhotra Charitable Trust, Subhamay Chattopadhyay appreciated the implementing partners and their efforts, and suggested the possibility of repeating part of the 2020-21 curriculum so that children do not miss out on crucial building blocks of further learning.

These questions were discussed collaboratively and provided key inputs to strengthen the program for the next year of collective efforts towards sustainable impact in education.



## Attendees

Organization	Representatives
Douglas B. Marshall Jr. Foundation	Valmik Ahuja
Sita Devi Malhotra Charitable Trust (SDMCT)	Harsh Dhanuka
Sita Devi Malhotra Charitable Trust (SDMCT)	Subhamay Chattopadhyay
Sita Devi Malhotra Charitable Trust (SDMCT)	Kailaspati Jha
Sita Devi Malhotra Charitable Trust (SDMCT)	Shivani Mehta
Dalyan Foundation	Susanne Grossman
Dalyan Foundation	Yonca Even Guggenbühl
Dalyan Foundation	Yesim Yagci
Soujanya Colors	Amol Mulajkar
Kaivalya Education Foundation	Manmohan Singh
Kaivalya Education Foundation	Arun Poddar
Kaivalya Education Foundation	Shiksha Gupta
Kaivalya Education Foundation	Jeetendra Soni
Kaivalya Education Foundation	Rubina Saife
Gyan Prakash Foundation	Daljit Mirchandani
Gyan Prakash Foundation	Ashok Pingle
Gyan Prakash Foundation	Pallavi Mukhedkar
Gyan Prakash Foundation	Madhukar Mane
Quality Education Support Trust	Preeti Shenoy
Quality Education Support Trust	Vrushali Phatak
Quality Education Support Trust	Hussain Sayyed
EdelGive Foundation	Vidya Shah
EdelGive Foundation	Naghma Mulla
EdelGive Foundation	Atul Gandhi
EdelGive Foundation	Siddhesh Wadkar
EdelGive Team	