



महाराष्ट्र शासन



The Collaborators for Transforming Education

Annual Report Year 5: 2020-2021

Supported by



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SOUJANYA

Implementing Partners



Abbreviations

BDO	Block Development Officer
BEO	Block Education Officer
BRG	Block Resource Group
CRG	Cluster Resource Group
DEO	District Education Officer
DIET	District Institute of Education Training
DRG	District Resource Group
DSES	Department of School Education and Sports
DTP	District Transformation Programme
GPF	Gyan Prakash Foundation
HM	Head Master/ Head Mistress
HT	Head Teacher
KEF	Kaivalya Education Foundation
KP	Kendra Pramukh
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
QEP	Quality Education Programme
QUEST	Quality Education Support Trust
SDP	School Development Plan
SFD	Special Focus District
SMC	School Management Committee
STP	School Transformation Programme
The Collaborators	The Collaborators for Transforming Education
VFS	Virtual Field Support
ZP	Zilla Parishad

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Executive Summary

EdelGive Foundation has always considered education as a means of change for human development. In 2016, EdelGive launched the Collaborators for Transforming Education, a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model initiated to support the Quality Education Programme (QEP) of the state of Maharashtra. The programme is facilitated through its 3 implementing partners i.e., Gyan Prakash Foundation (GPF), Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF) and Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST). In 2020-2021, the programme was able to reach 1,182 government functionaries, 49,388 teachers, 14,49,696 children and 12,718 schools, and has managed to effect significant change in terms of the learning outcomes of children.

The year 2020-21 has proved to be challenging and unique, with India and the rest of the world entrenched in the battle against COVID-19. Initially, the unexpected pandemic caused disruptions to the programme. However, the implementing partners acted quickly to redesign the field interventions, combining both virtual and on-field support, while maintaining all the safety guidelines put in place by the government. The programme has now reinvented itself by taking into account the urgent needs on-ground, while also keeping the programme objectives and the levels of intervention intact. Interactions that were necessary for the effective implementation of the programme, such as meetings with government officials/functionaries and capacity building sessions with the stakeholders were initiated through online platforms. Further, the implementing partners adapted an altered mechanism for the programme interventions that involved a 60% virtual and 40% on-field approach, depending on the requirement and situation on the ground.

When the pandemic first struck, government officials in Maharashtra were overburdened with COVID-19 relief work, and therefore, the progress and continuation of education took a back seat. However, even during this chaotic time, our implementing partners in the field ensured that education remained a priority, and that the programme deliverables were kept on track. Through Virtual Field Support (VFS), multiple voice broadcasting calls were scheduled and conducted for government officials, teachers, parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members on COVID-19 and the prudent safety precautions to be adopted for the same. Thereafter, from October 2020 onwards, things improved for a short while before the second wave of the pandemic impacted field interventions, and slowed down the progress of the programme once again.

As is aforementioned, the implementing partners redesigned the programme interventions, and even formulated a plan to ensure the continuity of the programme during the pandemic, by taking various collaborative measures to ensure that children were engaged with as often, and as much as possible. The implementing partners worked towards providing technical support to government functionaries, enabling them to use the different virtual platforms to conduct government meetings, as well as sessions for teachers.

The community played a particularly important role in ensuring the continued engagement of children in the learning process, despite the sudden closure of schools. More than 10,000 Shikshan Mitras (youth volunteers from the community identified by KPs, teachers and SMC members with the support of the implementing partners) disseminated academic content to children across the 7 districts with the support of teachers and implementing partners. Further, in the districts of Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur, block-level educational workshops were organised for SMCs and Sarpanches (Village Head) to create awareness about online education, the role of the community in education and to ensure support for teachers in providing learning opportunities to children. Teacher capacity building sessions were also conducted to ensure the implementation of online education and offline education through engagements with Shikshan Mitras; and Social-Emotional Ethical Learning workshops were conducted for the Shikshan Mitras focusing on mindfulness using art therapy, which could help to overcome stressful situations caused by the pandemic.

All these measures and efforts came together to create opportunities for nurturing foundational learning in children despite the on-ground challenges.

1. Introduction

The Collaborators for Transforming Education

The Collaborator for Transforming Education is a coalition, anchored by EdelGive Foundation with the Government of Maharashtra (GoM), non-profit organisations, and diverse funding partners, to improve the quality of education as envisaged under GoM's Quality Education Programme (QEP) for 4.4 million children attending primary and upper primary government schools, through a systems-change approach. EdelGive launched the Collaborators in 2016, to support the GoM in addressing persistent gaps in the learning outcomes of children in government schools. The programme initially started with its intervention in 5 blocks of 4 districts and eventually expanded to **70 blocks in 7 districts, with the support of 7 funders and 3 non-profit organisations (NPOs), reaching over 1.4 million children in 5 years**. It has earned the Indian Government's recognition for being among the best practices in CSR and has been acknowledged as a **"Bold Philanthropic Initiative"** by Bridgespan.

The three main objectives of the programme are stated below:

- Enhancement in the learning outcomes of children.
- Supporting the education system by conducting capacity building of educational functionaries
- Improved community engagement for sustainability.

The Collaborators takes a holistic approach and works on the principle of "demonstrate and scale" under three phases:

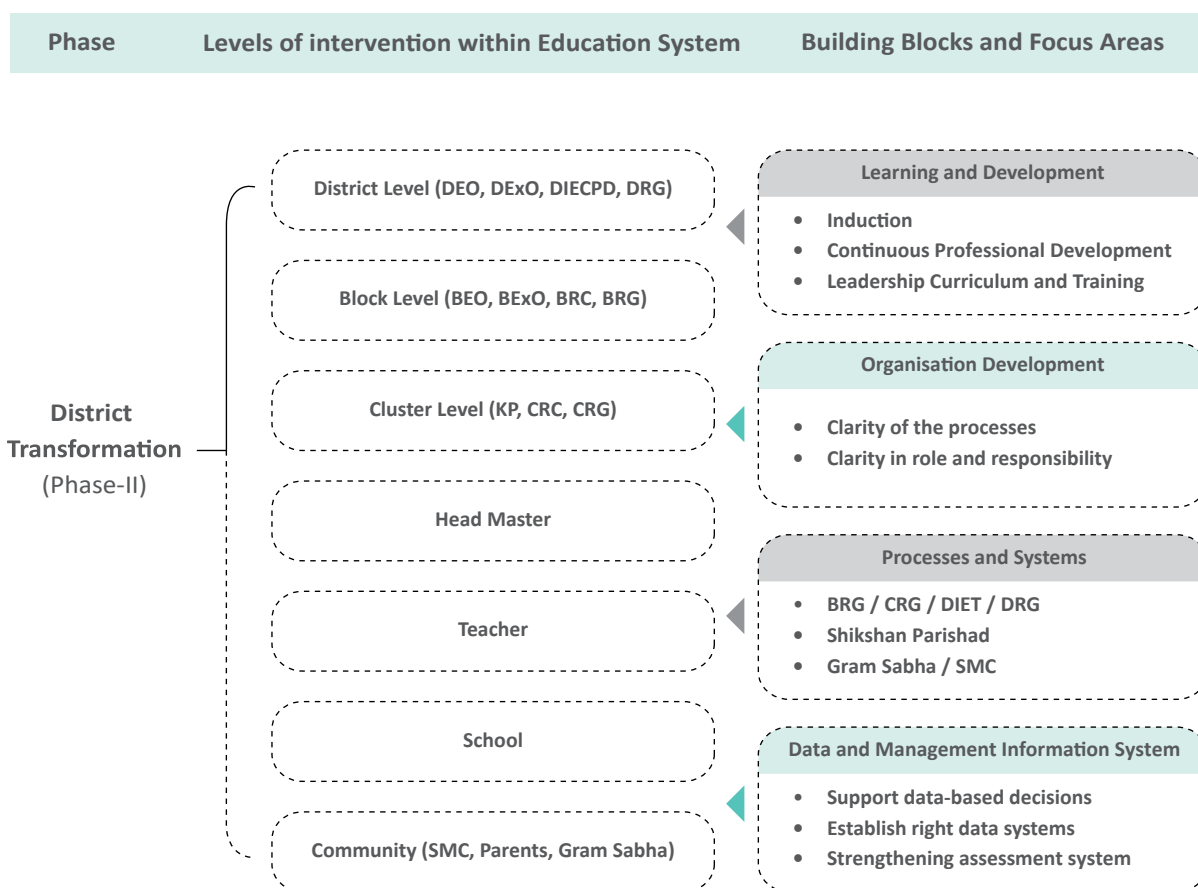
• Phase-I: School Transformation Programme (STP)

The STP commenced in 2016 as a pilot, in 4 Special Focus Districts (SFDs) namely Amravati, Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, and Parbhani. It focused on testing and demonstrating innovative result-oriented processes at the cluster, school, and community levels to enhance learning outcomes. The programme impacted 270 schools from 5 blocks of 4 SFDs. The Work under the STP has been appreciated as a model by the system. Significant changes have been observed in teachers and government functionaries as regards their understanding, knowledge, and practices. Phase-I culminated in June 2020 and laid the groundwork for Phase-II.

• Phase-II: District Transformation Programme (DTP)

The DTP phase commenced in July 2018 and is a scaled-up intervention to take result-oriented best practices to the entire district. It incorporates the best practices of the STP, has the system implement it in the entire district, and then builds the system's capacity for planning, coordination, implementation, and review. Presently, there are two types of DTP models – Direct Field Support (DFS) and Virtual Field Support (VFS). Virtual Field Support is a technology-based delivery platform created to provide support to teachers, government officials, parents, and communities through call-centers. It has been adopted to pilot a cost-effective and result-oriented model for scale, which can effectively reach the last mile of delivery. As per VFS, 80% of the support is provided through a virtual support system, and 20% is through on-field support based on situational needs and requirements of the stakeholders.

DTP is implemented in five districts, namely, Gadchiroli, Parbhani, Nandurbar, Satara and Solapur. In Amravati, the VFS methodology is implemented. The initial success of the VFS intervention encouraged the programme to spread its intervention in two new districts of Solapur and Satara in 2019-2020.



The programme model for 2020-21 is demonstrated in the given diagram.

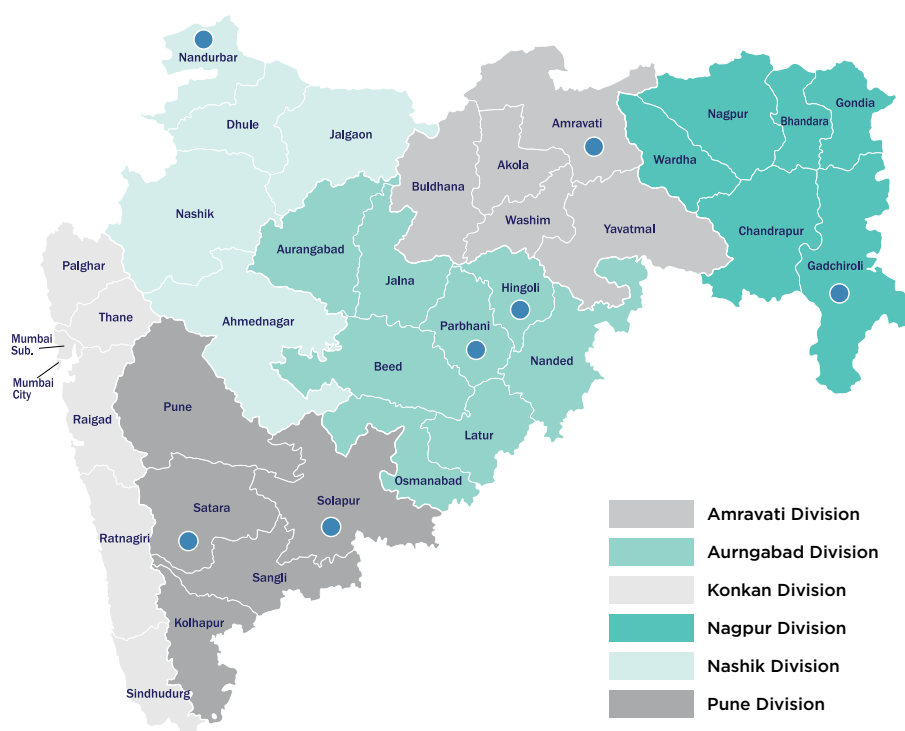
Programme Model for District Transformation

The DTP is a scaled-up intervention that adopts result-oriented best practices of the STP. The programme covers all the constituencies from the district to the cluster level and is implemented by collaborating with the district, block, and cluster-level government officials. Below the cluster level, the process of implementation is taken care of by the government.

The two most important components of the programme are the stakeholders and the processes. The programme focuses on the capacity building of stakeholders, and the quality improvement and regularization of processes. Both these components are integrated into the DTP, with the aim being to improve student learning outcomes. The programme works towards strengthening and improving the functioning of forum meetings like the District Resource Group (DRG) and Block Resource Group (BRG) meetings for planning and review purposes; and focuses on creating a synergy between SMCs and Gram Sabhas with Zilla Parishads, to ensure critical resources and support for SDP implementation are provided by the administrative bodies. The programme also provides capacity-building support to government functionaries through on-field support, workshops, and trainings, by using different government forums such as the Kendra Pramukhs collective at the block level and the SP at the cluster level. The desired outcome is for these processes to eventually be owned by, and become a part of the system. With the assistance of Kendra Pramukhs, and as facilitated through the Shikshan Parishad, need-based training is provided to teachers to help them use assessment data to create child-wise action plans. All these measures together, have strengthened the government education system and have influenced classroom interactions, leading to improvements in student learning outcomes.

Programme Reach

This year, the DTP expanded to an additional district of Hingoli, where our newest implementing partner i.e. QUEST, is now working to ensure the programme's success. The programme has expanded its interventions to 7 districts encompassing 1,182 Government functionaries, 49,388 teachers, 14,49,696 children and 12,718 schools. The details are as given below:



	Nandurbar	Parbhani	Satara	Solapur	Amravati	Gadchiroli	Hingoli	Total
Government Functionaries	132	112	277	287	119	117	138	1,182
Students	3,49,342	4,17,188	1,50,634	2,30,882	1,17,905	63,745	1,20,000	14,49,696
Teachers	10,794	4,489	8,835	10,874	6,336	4,060	4,000	49,388
Schools	1,505	1,165	2,773	2,974	1,791	1,618	892	12,718

The Year of the Pandemic

The programme year 2020-21 was unprecedented. As per MOE¹, the pandemic caused more than 25 Crore children to be out of school, creating a loss in learning, equity, and nutrition. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted a large section of society, adversely affecting health, livelihoods, and social relations. The health and economic burdens imposed by the pandemic have placed great stress on families and communities, especially those from low-income groups. In the midst of the ongoing chaos, education has taken a back seat with schools being closed for an extended period, resulting in a disruption in learning for children across the country.

Technology has emerged as one of the primary solutions to reach out to children, particularly in terms of content dissemination, augmenting relationships with teachers, and personalization of content. However, technology has

¹Ministry of Education

not been able to bridge the gap with respect to providing a safe environment for children, that physical schools are able to provide. Further, income inequalities have created a digital gap that has left several children without devices or reliable internet connections, thereby completely cutting them off from the learning/education process. The pandemic has resulted in a continuous loss of learning, nutrition, engagement, safety, and most importantly, equity.

To mitigate the challenges of the present situation, the Collaborators has aligned its plans with those of the government, so as to ensure that measures can be taken collaboratively. Implementing partners have been continuously interacting with government officials to jointly work towards sustainable solutions. Across Maharashtra, from July 2020 onwards, the government began employing both online and offline methods to enable children to continue their learning under the “School Closed but Education Resumes” initiative. Acknowledging the limitation of online education in terms of holistic reach, the focus was on the participation of parents and the community to ensure continued and consistent education for their children.

Initially, to understand the situation and challenges, the Collaborators facilitated rounds of discussions at various levels. Each implementing partner engaged in multiple discussions with district-level stakeholders like the District CEO, DIET, KPs, HMs, BEOs, SMCs, and Gram Panchayat members to create an intervention plan. Basic aspects of the plan included a stable mix of remote interventions with an increased physical presence of the team, in a planned manner. The intervention plan was designed in a way that ensured a 60:40 percent mix of virtual support and on-field support. This, in turn, ensured that on-ground needs were met, while also abiding by all the COVID-19 guidelines as stipulated by the government.

Once it was understood that the COVID-19 situation was here to stay, the plan was built on three broad assumptions:

- There is a chance that schools will be closed for the whole year.
- Schools will open later in the year, with secondary sections most likely to begin first.
- That the implementing partners would need to be prepared to get back in the field as the situation changed and evolved.

Recognizing these complexities and uncertainties, the programme approach was redesigned. However, the objectives of the programme and the levels of the intervention have remained the same. In 2020-21, the Collaborators focused on the two most important components of the programme:

- Preparing the system to mitigate immediate challenges.
- Engaging children in the learning process through both online and offline interventions.






During the last 12 months, intensive interventions have been facilitated across the seven districts to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic. Implementing partners initiated capacity building sessions for government functionaries on technologies introduced in response to the pandemic, including the guidelines for e-learning by the Education Ministry (PRAGYATA), use of government platforms such as DIKSHA, NISHTHA and E-PATHSHALA, and virtual meeting platforms including Tilli Milli (by Government of India), SWADHYAY (Government of Maharashtra), Kruti Patrika (DIET, Gadchiroli) and Fulora (Zilla Parishad, Gadchiroli). Further, teacher capacity-building sessions have been conducted on topics like foundational learning and student engagement; and more than 10,000+ Shikshan Mitras (community-based youth volunteers) have been facilitated to engage with children to ensure the continuation of the learning process, both online and offline. Community participation and engagements to sustain the learning processes of children have been employed through continuous online and offline meetings and workshops. Moreover, to better understand the realities on-ground, a virtual assessment was conducted in collaboration with government officials, and the data obtained from the assessment is now being utilised to create plans for collaborative interventions.

As a result, the Collaborators’ interventions have helped to build a strong relationship with government stakeholders and the community, to ensure the continuation and sustenance of the above-mentioned learning/

education process. The technological skills of government functionaries have been developed to improve their efficiency and ensure the sustainability of programme processes, and the implementing team's capacities and efficiency have been enhanced to increase the programme's impact and manage online and offline modes of operation. Most importantly, the interventions have helped to create an organic model through a collaborative approach that involves the community, the government and the Collaborators team.

Programme Plan for 2020-2021

Keeping the programme objectives intact and levels of intervention the same, the detailed intervention plan is explained below. As mentioned above, the plan ensures a 60:40 percent mix of virtual support and on-field support designed to comply with the COVID-19 guidelines as stipulated by the government.

Intervention level	Intervention Plan
District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District Resource Group meetings were conducted over Zoom calls. Promotion and use of different channels of communication (12 new) as introduced by central government/MHRD, to support and ensure the continuation of school education in the current academic session through digital modes.
Block 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Block Resource Group meetings were conducted over Zoom calls. Capacity-building workshops for Kendra Pramukhs were conducted virtually through Zoom.
Cluster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiation of Virtual Shikshan Parishads that focus on establishing connections between Block Education Officers, KPs, and teachers. Through Virtual platforms such as Zoom app, Google meeting app etc., capacity-building support is provided to cluster heads, master coaches and facilitators, enabling them to further support HMs and teachers.
School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding Kendra Pramukhs, headmasters and teachers on data analysis, and planning through virtual platforms i.e., Email, Zoom calls, etc. Conducting batches of online courses for teachers across selected clusters through the District Resource Team.
Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiation of virtual calls between Kendra Pramukhs, School Management Committee Presidents, and Sarpanches at the cluster level. Utilising the existing 900+ volunteers to create and maintain an environment conducive for education in villages, by ensuring continuous engagement with parents, SMCs, PTAs, etc.

Programme Updates from July 2020 – June 2021

The DTP was initiated in 2018-19, a year that was mostly spent in building the relationship with the Government of Maharashtra. The first year of the programme focused on executing 'scaled up' STP processes across the intervention districts. During the second year i.e., 2019-20, the DTP endeavoured to percolate the changes obtained from the 'scaled up' STP processes across the intervention districts, with a focus on developing ownership of, and accountability for the system. However, in the middle of March 2020, the pandemic began and the nationwide lockdown was imposed, bringing education and schooling to an abrupt halt without a proper end to the academic year.

In 2020-21, to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic, the central and state governments worked towards providing basic education at scale, through a diverse range of mediums. At this stage, the implementing partners worked extensively with government functionaries to ensure the continued learning of children from the Special Focus Districts. During the pandemic, the interventions of the programme were primarily focused on preparing the system to overcome the loss of learning for children through various student engagement activities involving the community, and on imparting foundational learning through online and offline mediums.

The government has taken several different measures to overcome the learning gaps that have arisen due to the pandemic, and the Collaborators programme has acted as a catalyst to maximise the impact of these measures. The following will explain these measures in detail, and highlight the outcomes therefrom.

1) Strengthening the District Resource Group to enable it to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic

The DRG forum is constituted at the district level, chaired by the DIET principal/ DEO and is attended by Extension officers, BEOs, KPs and DIET faculties. In the two years since the commencement of the DTP, the DRG forum has been regularised, formalised, and child-centric discussions have been initiated.

The pandemic, lockdown and consequent mobility restrictions in the academic year 2020-21, meant that District Resource Group (DRG) meetings had to be conducted virtually, through Zoom or Google Meet. The implementing partners provided technical support to the DRG enabling them to make use of online platforms, and the partners even conducted a discussion to plan for the children's engagement in learning processes, in light of the sudden shut down of schools. The implementing partners and district officials facilitated DRG meetings across all the intervention districts, and the number of meetings conducted was more than what was expected, especially during the period between January 21 and June 21. The implementing partners also organised and facilitated DRG meetings with the DIET principal which focused on streamlining the online processes of Shikshan Parishads (SP) and Cluster Resource Groups (CRG); methods of offline and online engagement of children and teachers; piloting of virtual assessments in Amravati, Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur; and developing an understanding of the availability of digital devices to children. In addition to the above, these meetings also involved discussions on teacher capacity development, and the effective use of online education platforms such as the DIKSHA app, NISHTHA app, LO smart App (created by Regional Academic Authority Amravati), Kruti Patrika (DIET, Gadchiroli initiative), SWADHYAY (State government initiative), Tilli Milli (Central government initiative), Fulora (CEO, ZP, Gadchiroli initiative) etc.

Further, the implementing partners provided support to government functionaries at the district level, to conduct a survey to better understand the level of access to digital devices for children in the focus districts. This survey revealed that a significant number of children are out of digital reach, and therefore cannot access online mediums of education. To overcome these issues, the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) created an activity plan, and with the help of Shikshan Mitras (youth volunteers from the community), disseminated the same to the teachers for execution. Through this process, the implementing partners were able to provide support through community engagement, as well as teacher capacity building at the district level, to initiate momentum. Moreover, in 6 out of the 7 focus districts, the implementing partners also participated and supported government officials to conduct a survey to identify out-of-school children and migrant children.

2) Strengthening Block Resource Groups to enable them to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic, and reach the last mile of delivery

The BRG is a forum constituted to implement academic improvement plans created at the district level. BRG meetings are chaired by the BEO and are attended by KPs, selected teachers and resource persons from the DIET. In the two years since the commencement of the DTP, the BRG has been regularised and has become agenda-based.

In the academic year 2020-21, due to the pandemic and the lockdowns, Block Resource Group (BRG) meetings were conducted virtually, through Zoom or Google Meet. However, these meetings resumed their regular, in-person, functioning from September 2020 onwards, once the first wave of the pandemic had subsided. The BRG meetings focused on the implementation of Dindarshika (Daily Planning Calendar), an initiative to improve planning by the Maharashtra government; as well as planning to maximise the utility of online learning platforms such as the DIKSHA app, NISHTHA app and LO smart App (created by Regional Academic Authority Amravati) in the respective programme blocks and clusters. The implementing partners worked to maximise the impact of the BRG meetings by continuously interacting with the BEOs, and providing assistance to plan and set the agenda for the meetings. The efforts of the implementing partners have enabled the BEOs to conduct approximately 76% of the BRG meetings scheduled for the academic year 2020-21, across all the programme districts. The BRG meetings also focused on the implementation of virtual classes, and the involvement of parents and the community in the learning process, through SMCs and parent meetings. The implementing partners and government functionaries jointly decided to have the BEO, EO, and RPs attend virtual/online classes in their respective clusters, to provide motivation and support to teachers during these strange times. Additionally, the execution of virtual assessments were planned by the BRGs in consultation with the KPs and teachers.

The implementing partners provided further support to the BEOs, in respect of boosting the involvement of parents, SMCs, Gram Panchayats and Shikshan Mitras in enabling easier and wider access to online education for children. Finally, the BRGs (with assistance from the implementing partners) also focused on planning block-level SMCs attended by the Sarpanch, and workshops for PRI members, to educate them about their roles and responsibilities.

3) Individual interactions between the implementing partners and the district, block and cluster-level officials to ensure the last mile delivery of services

At the beginning of this academic year, the implementing partners struggled to effectively coordinate with government functionaries to ensure the progress of the programme, as a majority of persons in government were understandably focused on managing the COVID crisis. Thereafter, to build alignment with the government functionaries and engage them in programme/education-based activities, individual meetings were conducted with the CEOs, DEOs, DIET, BEOs and KPs on a regular basis, to discuss updates, plans and strategies for 2020-21.

The planning for key district-level activities such as DRG meetings, BRG meetings, KP review meetings, online assessment etc., was carried out in consultation with the CEO, DEO, DIET and BEO, individually. During these meetings, implementing partners encouraged government officials to promote and participate in district, block and cluster-level activities such as Shikshan Parishads; SMC/Sarpanch workshops; the Reading Movement programme initiated in the Satara district; Social-Emotional Ethical Learning workshops (conducted by the implementing partners) for Shikshan Mitras in the Amravati and Gadchiroli districts; and online teacher training sessions in the Hingoli and Amravati districts.

Further, during the individual meetings, monthly update documents were prepared by the implementing partners and submitted to the CEO, DEO, BEOs and DIET. These monthly updates enabled the efficient implementation of online operations across the intervention districts, and allowed for the generation of interest amongst cluster and block-level authorities, to plan and review learning activities and take necessary measures to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

4) Capacity building for Kendra Pramukhs to ensure effective learning management in the face of the pandemic

Kendra Pramukhs (KPs) are the cluster heads responsible for governing and supporting teachers in the programme districts. To address the learning gaps experienced by children due to the pandemic, continuous discussions with the KPs were necessary, to facilitate the planning of student engagements through both offline and online learning mechanisms. The KPs required the support of the implementing partners to overcome the challenges on-ground.

The KP collective is a forum organised and managed by the BEOs, for the purpose of developing cluster development plans and solving cluster-level issues. Since the last four years, this forum has also been used as a capacity-building platform for the KPs, and is led by BEOs and supported by the implementing partners. Similar to the DRG and BRG, during the academic year 2020-21, the KP collective meetings were shifted to online platforms and conducted virtually through Zoom or Google Meet. Moreover, these meetings were convened at the block level across the intervention districts, by the BEO, with the support of the implementing partners. To bring the focus back to children's learning, regular interactions were organised by the implementing partners with the BEOs, during which, agendas were created for the BRG meetings. These agendas were then circulated by the BEOs before the BRG meetings were conducted.

KP collective meetings were organised specifically to discuss the requirements of study groups, methods of participation for Shikshan Mitras, online and offline learning methodologies, virtual Shikshan Parishad plans, the convening of SMC meetings to improve community participation in the learning process, and the compiling of innovative practices conducted by teachers. The discussion topics and guidance for the KP collective meetings were provided by the BEOs, and were focused on developing the KPs' skills as regards addressing various issues at the cluster level, in light of the pandemic. Additionally, during these meetings, updates, reviews, monthly plans and agendas were prepared for the BRG meetings.

Across all the intervention districts, approximately 62% of the KPs were trained to address cluster-level challenges through the KP collective meetings by the implementing partners. Further, in Nandurbar district, the agendas of the KP collective meetings were shared through government circulars, reflecting a sense of ownership in the programme and an intention to address the challenges on-ground, by government functionaries.

5) With the support of the implementing partners, the CRG redesigned the Shikshan Parishads to support online and offline teaching mechanisms

The CRG plays a significant role in cluster planning, while Shikshan Parishads are one of the platforms that contribute to cluster transformation. Further, it is during the Shikshan Parishads that CRG teachers provide support to the KPs, and enable other teachers in the cluster to improve teaching mechanisms. The implementing partners assisted the KPs to organise and conduct Shikshan Parishads, as well as to identify motivated teachers who could become part of CRGs. These teachers used CRG meetings to plan out the Shikshan Parishads in their cluster, distribute the responsibilities among themselves and thus maximise the utility of the SPs. These cluster-wise action plans were then developed and shared with all the teachers from the cluster, as well as with block officials at the block level. These CRG meetings have been regularised by the DIET. Further, in the two years since the commencement of the DTP, the CRG teachers have added tremendous value to the Shikshan Parishads, thereby creating an effective peer learning platform.

The academic year 2020-21 saw CRG meetings shift to online platforms due to the pandemic. The implementing partners provided technical support and guidance to teachers in respect of the organising, planning and agenda setting of CRG meetings. These meetings focused on the planning and implementation of virtual classes, use of the DIKSHA app, Dinadarshika and SWADHYAY (a State Govt. initiative), strategies to support students/teachers through home visits, and school visits by KPs and CRG members. Further, these meetings plan for the creation of resource material and worksheets, through which the Shikshan Mitras provide academic support to children. Around 26% of teachers across the intervention districts have received support from CRG teachers, enabling them to overcome academic challenges faced due to COVID-19.

In Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur, with the support of the implementing partners, the CRGs created competency-based assessment questionnaires for the purpose of conducting virtual assessments to better understand the realities on-ground. In February 2021, to enhance the understanding and knowledge of CRG teachers, subject-wise CRG workshops were organised by the implementing partners in collaboration with the DIET, in Satara. These workshops were aimed at strengthening the subject expertise of CRG teachers, and enhancing engagements with children using Teaching-Learning Material (TLM), Worksheets, Academic calendar and the DIKSHA App, resulting in the improvement of learning outcomes for children.

6) Capacity building of teachers

During the pandemic, teachers were forced to adopt new and diverse methodologies to provide academic support to children. With the help of the Shikshan Mitras, the physical classroom method shifted to virtual classrooms and offline community classes. This shift proved to be a wholly new experience for the teachers, as they encountered a completely different set of challenges. Reports from the field revealed that approximately 45%² of children from the focus districts had no access to any devices i.e., phones, mobiles, tablets etc. Though the data reflected that 32%³ have smartphones, in reality these smartphones were not available when required, and were in the possession of the children's parents. Moreover, the Shikshan Mitras are youth volunteers, not teachers. They require the support and guidance of teachers to disseminate the relevant academic/educational content to the children. To deal with these challenges, teacher capacity building sessions were conducted through direct training and through the Shikshan Parishad. The mechanisms are explained below:

A. Teacher capacity building through direct training

The implementing partners in collaboration with the DIET and government officials, organised and conducted teacher capacity-building workshops across all the 7 districts. The capacity-building sessions addressed on-ground gaps such as the technical skills of teachers in relation to hosting online classroom sessions, and the creation of various kinds of study material i.e., both physical worksheets and virtual learning material. The sessions also provided conceptual training in Math and Language pedagogy, for the purpose of overcoming learning gaps experienced by children. Additionally, teachers were trained to support and guide Shikshan Mitras in disseminating academic content through community classes. Due to the pandemic, teacher training sessions were conducted online and around 26% of the teachers were trained across all the 7 districts.

The implementing partners from Amravati district carried out teacher-needs assessments for more than 400 teachers. These assessments focused on teachers who had voluntarily initiated attempts to continue the learning process for children during the pandemic. The teacher-needs assessments provided insights regarding the mindset, subject knowledge and classroom management skills of teachers, particularly in respect of subjects like Marathi and Mathematics. Content packages were designed as per the needs of the teachers, and were distributed with the intention of leveraging their skills. In Amravati and Gadchiroli, the implementing partners in collaboration with the DIET, trained teachers to use government online platforms such as DIKSHA, NISHTHA, E- PTHSHALA, SWADHYAY (a State Govt. initiative), Tilli Milli (a Central Govt. Initiative) etc.

In Hingoli district, online teacher training was provided by the implementing partners to teachers in charge of the 1st and 2nd standards, to help them develop a sound understanding of foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Approximately 4 of these sessions were conducted – 2 sessions on Language and 2 sessions on Math – and were followed by practice sessions. Both the KPs and BEOs from their respective clusters and blocks participated in the training with the teachers. The Language training focused on two major components i.e., early literacy education and early writing skills, while the Math training focused on foundational numeracy and arithmetic instruction. Approximately 170 teachers teaching the 1st and 2nd standards were selected from 2 schools in every block. The teacher training conducted online in Hingoli district has been well appreciated by the government. Similarly, approximately 60 teachers from Nandurbar district received online courses in foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

^{2,3} Data obtained from the field

Most teachers across districts have been engaged with children through online and offline platforms. To encourage teachers to engage with children more effectively, and to ensure the continuation of the education process during the lockdown, in Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur districts, block-wise teacher motivational workshops/ programmes were initiated by the implementing partners in collaboration with the DIET. The focus of the training was to facilitate the effective imparting of academic content both online and offline, to encourage collaboration with the Shikshan Mitras and SMCs for the purpose of disseminating educational content on-ground, and to build 21st-century skills. The training for 1st and 2nd standard teachers was especially useful and innovative, as it trained teachers to provide the required care and guidance to younger students, who are newer to the education system and are likely to be more affected by sudden change of learning platforms (from physical to virtual), due to the pandemic. The training has guided teachers in engaging with the children in the absence of a physical classroom.

B. Capacity building of teachers through Shikshan Parishads

The Shikshan Parishad is a cluster forum meeting for teachers that is led by KPs and supported by CRG teachers. The objective of the forum is to provide academic support and guidance to teachers, and to create a peer learning platform. Via this platform, teachers share good practices and even provide support to other teachers, enabling them to overcome teaching challenges. In the two years since the commencement of the DTP, Shikshan Parishads were conducted regularly every month. These Shikshan Parishads impacted teachers and improved their efficiency in classroom management.

In the academic year 2020-21, Shikshan Parishads were shifted to online platforms such as Google Meet or Zoom, due to the pandemic. The focus of Shikshan Parishads was to discuss the challenges and solutions in relation to disseminating academic content online and offline. Initially, it proved to be a challenge to conduct Shikshan Parishads online as most of the teachers and the KPs were not habituated to the use of technology. However, the implementing partners provided technical support and assisted the KPs to organise these meetings online.

The implementing partners provided support to the KPs in respect of guiding teachers to collaborate with the SMCs and provide support to Shikshan Mitras. Moreover, with the help of the Shikshan Mitras, the implementing partners oriented teachers on how to make use of virtual content available through different mediums, and guided them on how to make the best use of this material. Around 34% of the clusters conducted regular Shikshan Parishads in the academic year 2020-21. However, teachers were also involved in trainings conducted by the Government of Maharashtra and State Council for Educational Research and Training between July 2020 and December 2020. Further, most of the KPs and teachers were involved in COVID relief work, during both the first wave and the second wave. Districts like Gadchiroli also suffer from severe network issues as they are remotely located and in view of the same, online Shikshan Parishads in these districts were not successful.

7) Strengthening community engagement in the student learning process

The community forms an integral part of the learning environment for children. The academic year 2020-21 saw parents, SMCs, Gram Panchayats (GP), Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members along with implementing partners, provide remarkable levels of support in the intervention districts to ensure continuity in the learning process. In view of the pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns, technology has become the only viable means to disseminate content, personalise content to suit different needs and augment relationships with teachers. Further, most children rely on school not only as a space for learning, but also as a safe environment and a source of regular meals. However, the switch to digital modes of learning has resulted in children without devices or reliable internet connections being completely cut off from the learning process. Tremendous effort and innovation was required to effectively strategise the remote learning process, and thereby enable access to quality learning opportunities for children across the nation.

The following points will explain the community interventions conducted to engage students in the remote learning process:

- **Block-level workshops for SMCs/Sarpanches and PRI members to educate them on their roles and responsibilities.**

It was quickly discovered that the continuation of education during the pandemic would only be possible with the help of parents, SMCs, GP members and PRI members. However, most SMCs, Sarpanches and PRI members did not have an appropriate understanding about their roles and responsibilities, how they can contribute to the learning process, or support teachers and parents to engage children in the learning process. Hence, block-level educational workshops were organised for HMs, SMC Presidents, Sarpanches and PRI members to enhance their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and promote their involvement in the education process. The workshops were conducted across 19 blocks of 4 intervention districts i.e., Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur. The BEO has led the way in this regard, and has received collaborative support from the implementing partners.

- **Block-level preparation workshops to prepare the School Development Plan and have the same connected with the Village Development Plan.**

Block-level School Development Plan (SDP) workshops were initiated to prepare the SDP, and connect the same with the Village Development Plan. For holistic school development, the schools were required to submit the SDP to the Gram Panchayat, so that the same could be included in the Village Development Plan. The SDP is particularly important for the educational and infrastructural development of schools, and the HM and SMC members are responsible for preparing the SDP for their respective schools. BEOs with the support of the implementing partners, conducted the SDP preparation workshops and equipped the HMs and SMC members.

The workshops were conducted in 18 blocks of Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur, and as a result, around 31% of the SMCs in these districts created their school development plans under the guidance of HMs and the SMC President. In Amravati, with the support of the implementing partners and the KP leadership, around 41% of SMCs created a school development plan. In Gadchiroli, the SDP preparation process was adversely impacted due to the pandemic and lockdown, as most of the blocks in the district are located at great distances from each other, and so were unable to organize workshops and follow up with SMCs for plan development. In Hingoli, the programme commenced in the middle of the pandemic, and so the implementing partners focused on building a relationship with the government. Accordingly, they plan to begin with the community interventions from the next academic year.

- **SMCs' engagement in the learning process of children, to ensure continuity of education in the face of the pandemic.**

Due to the pandemic, conducting SMC meetings proved to be a challenge, and the implementing partners were forced to connect virtually with the SMC members and organise virtual meetings whenever possible. Those parents who did not possess smartphones, were assisted by the HM and given access to the school's virtual classrooms for the meetings. Through monthly SMC meetings, efforts were made to encourage the SMC members to support children, parents and teachers while schools remained closed.

The SMC meetings focused on the following:

- Enrolment of new children from the 1st standard and above.
- Opening of schools or village libraries and distribution of books for reading.
- Planning of online and offline education processes with parents.
- Planning parents' meetings to discuss the progress/ status of their child's education during the lockdown.
- The involvement of the School Alumni in supporting the education of children.

To encourage the involvement and contribution of SMC and PRI members in online/ offline education processes, and to enhance their support to teachers and parents, teachers along with the SMC members recruited Shikshan Mitras from the community to disseminate academic content in the programme districts. Through community engagement, 70% of the children are now engaged in the learning process.

Overall Achievements of the Programme

- Zilla Parishad School, Kallikhetpada, Nandurbar district was selected in a cohort comprising 100 successful schools across the world, to showcase their work in the T4 World Education Week. The theme of the event was centred around the topic of a children's parliament initiative, with the panel discussion being attended by 4,000 attendees across the world.
- Extensive collaboration with the government using technology – the DRG, BRG and Shikshan Parishad meetings were initiated via Zoom and Google Meet.
- The Satara and Solapur districts, with the continuous assistance of the implementing partners, planned a DRG meeting in the first week of every month, the BRG meeting at the block level in the second week of every month, regular CRG meetings, the SP in the third week of every month, and SMC meetings in the fourth week of every month.
- With the support of government functionaries and CRG teachers, approximately 39,066 children across 6 districts were assessed for the purpose of developing a better understanding about the learning gap caused due to the pandemic.
- In Amravati, teachers voluntarily registered for training in digital content creation and E-learning methodologies. Approximately 11,337 learning resources were provided by the implementing partners.
- A Shikshan Parishad Quality Monitoring Tool was introduced by the implementing partners in the Solapur and Satara districts. The tool has been used by government officials, and the data extracted therefrom has been shared in DRG and BRG meetings to elicit discussions and further planning.
- More than 10,000 Shikshan Mitras were involved in the dissemination of content on-ground, to ensure the continuation of the learning process across the 7 districts.
- In Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur, an Education Steering Committee was formed to design and conduct a survey to identify out-of-school children and migrant children. The implementing partners have now been invited by district officials to be part of the committee, and provide support to the officials for conducting the survey.
- In Amravati and Gadchiroli, Social-Emotional Ethical Learning workshops were conducted for Shikshan Mitras. This workshop focused on mindfulness using art therapy, which could help to overcome stressful situations caused by the pandemic.
- Two virtual Education Gram Sabha were conducted to discuss online and offline learning opportunities for the children in Amravati district with the assistance of the CEO, DIET, KPs, SMCs and PRI members. The Gram Sabhas were participated in by more than 100 stakeholders.
- In Nandurbar, Parbhani, Satara and Solapur, the implementing partners in collaboration with government officials introduced a newsletter. The newsletter contains articles by selected teachers describing their best practices and is a medium to share best practices across the districts.
- A System Strengthening Matrix has been developed to measure the impact of the institutionalisation of district, block and cluster-level processes.

Case Study 1: 'The First Step'- Nisha Aanjane (Shikshan Mitra, Amravati)



The COVID-19 pandemic caused the closure of schools for an extended period of time, and this adversely affected educational interventions throughout the focus districts. In this regard, the implementing partners collected data from the district and observed that only 38% of students had access to online learning. The remaining 62% did not have appropriate access to devices or internet connectivity. In this context, the Shikshan Mitras (Community Volunteers) became the sole solution to bridging the digital divide in the state. The Shikshan Mitra initiative was introduced by the CEO, DIET, Amravati in collaboration with KEF (implementing partner). Through the initiative, the CEO and KEF worked together to reach children who did not have access to online learning. Their contribution during this difficult time has been inspirational and must be appreciated. Although schools were closed, learning was able to continue as the CEO, Amravati along with the Shikshan Mitras took the initiative to ensure the same.

Nisha Aanjane of Palshya village, was one of the people who volunteered to be a Shikshan Mitra. She decided to start teaching children in her tribal community, and this motivated other members from the community to contribute as well. The Melghat area (in Amravati) where Nisha resides is a very underdeveloped area, especially in respect of education and health. Initially, the Shikshan Mitra initiative was not accepted by the community due to a general lack of awareness, as well as a lack of awareness about COVID-19. However, the first successes from the initiative were observed, only because Nisha took the first step to effect change.

Nisha is a married woman who has completed her Bachelor's in Arts, and is equipped with essential soft skills. She became a part of the initiative as she wanted to contribute to her community, and is now a Shikshan Mitra from Palshya School, located in the Chikhaldara block. Nisha first came into contact with KEF (implementing partner), when she obtained their VFS toll-free number from another organisation called Karuna Fellows. Once she was made aware of the assistance she could avail of through the VFS toll-free number, Nisha began to call in regularly to request support in the form of educational content and activities. Her dedication and relentless engagement with the initiative made her commitment to transforming the learning processes in her village, all the more evident.

On the 2nd of October, 2020, Nisha called the VFS toll-free number to request material and guidance to conduct extra-curricular activities that could be executed remotely, to celebrate Gandhi Jayanti. After developing an understanding of the kind of activities that Nisha wanted to conduct, KEF and the Karuna Fellows provided her with materials and ideas for an activity that all the children in her community could participate in from their homes. Nisha then went to every child's house, shared information and material for the activity, and conducted a beautiful and seamless Gandhi Jayanti event from her home with the support of SMC members, as well as teachers and friends. All the parents from the community showed tremendous appreciation for Nisha's work and dedication towards their children's education. Further, the teachers shared information about her activity on every WhatsApp group in Chikhaldara, and many government stakeholders also took note and appreciated Nisha's efforts, as well as KEF's support towards restoring normalcy amidst the pandemic. While sharing her experience as a Shikshan Mitra with the Karuna Fellows, Nisha said, "It was a cheerful educational experience for me, and enhanced my speaking and interaction skills while also increasing my confidence. The children are very happy, and they now feel comfortable learning with me. I used to tell them stories and then ask them questions which they were all able to answer well, over time. Soon, they even started creating their own stories! I was appreciated by their parents a lot, and this made me feel very proud of myself. I am delighted to be a part of such an initiative. Thank you."

Case Study 2: School at Home

When schools remained closed throughout the year due to the lockdown, Mr. Sanjay Kharat, a teacher from Zilla Parishad Primary School Wadgaon, located in the Man block of Satara district, introduced schooling in every household to ensure the continued education of his students. Mr. Kharat's efforts captured people's attention across Maharashtra, and is now being adopted by several teachers in the Satara district. This is the story of how Mr. Kharat turned students' houses in a backward village, into joyful centres of learning.

The COVID-19 outbreak brought the education of children in India and across the world to an abrupt halt, as all schools were shut down due to the lockdown imposed by governments. The learning process for children was eventually resumed with the help of online/ virtual platforms. However, in India, a majority of teachers and school staff had little to no idea about how these platforms functioned. Moreover, several parents did not have access to the smartphones or computers required for online learning, and even the ones that did, struggled with network issues or unavailability of internet services, especially in remote and rural areas. The situation in Man block was no different.

Wadgaon village and Wadgaon School where Mr. Kharat worked as a teacher, also faced similar challenges. As Wadgaon village's layout was such that all its residents were scattered into small communities and/or clusters, the sudden mobility restrictions and lockdowns proved to be even more of a significant problem. Further, several parents from the village were daily wage labourers, and had only recently enrolled their children into the 1st standard of the school, when the lockdown was imposed. As mentioned above, most parents had no access to smartphones or devices, while others were concerned about the harmful effects of the extensive use of mobile phones on their children. With this in mind, Mr. Kharat decided to initiate an offline mode of education for the children from his school, so as to avoid learning losses and the excessive use of mobile phones. To ensure the continuation of learning for children from the first standard, Mr. Kharat created various educational tools and materials based on components of the syllabus. Further, to avoid the risk of COVID-19 infections, each student was given a separate set of educational tools/ materials. Mr. Kharat then visited the homes of his students and used the aforementioned material to teach them. He also advised the children's parents to ensure that the children continued to practice the lessons, using the tools/ materials he gave them.

The materials and tools that Mr. Kharat prepared contained a set of attractive alphabet cards and cut-outs of vowels for teaching Language, Maths & English subjects to first-standard students. To store this educational material, he even provided plastic boxes to the students. In addition to the above, the students were also provided with alphabetical scroll panels, corrugated Language and Maths educational materials, word cards, word sets, syntax sets, transcript sets, attractive project files to store papers/ charts with students' photos attached, number card sets,



attractive glass stacks etc. Significantly, all these materials were provided to the students over the course of several lessons and as different topics in the syllabus were taken up, instead of all at once. After achieving proficiency in one component, the education material of the next component was given to the students as a prize. Students were also able to carry the scroll panels and corrugated sheet materials given to them wherever they went. As a result, students were provided an impetus to dive into new subjects with greater enthusiasm, speed and interest.

Mr. Kharat began the education of the 1st standard students with an introduction to letters/ alphabets. For this purpose, in addition to attractive alphabet cards, he used household items as well as examples of people from the household in interesting and unique ways. After introducing letters/ alphabets and numbers to the students, he also painted the inside and outside walls of students' houses, the floors in their courtyards and their playgrounds, with letters/ alphabets, numbers, etc., in addition to the other educational materials.



Due to the 'House-to-House School' initiative by Mr. Kharat, all the 15 students from the 1st standard were able to continue with their education at home, without the use of online platforms. Out of the 15 students from the 1st standard, 14 students can now accurately read sentences, paragraphs and stories. Along with Language subjects, students also learnt addition, subtraction and number reading. The students have also acquired the required competencies in English.

Students, parents and government officials praised Mr. Kharat's initiative. Two students from the school (Riddhi & Siddhi) said that their levels of learning and studying had increased because of Mr. Kharat's 'House-to-House School' initiative, and because Mr. Kharat gave them prizes when they studied well. One of the parents, Mr. Avinash Nagargoje, said that the house-to-house school initiative helped students to continue their education, and that all students had started reading accurately, practicing Maths on their own, and had made significant progress in their lessons for English. The Block Development Officer (BDO) of the Man block, Mr. Sarjerao Patil, also visited the village and observed Mr. Kharat's dedication and efforts. Mr. Patil stated that initiatives such as these were vital to ensuring the continued education of children.

District Transformation Programme Indicator Progress

The interventions in the programme have a set of indicators against which their performance is evaluated. The following table provides progress against set targets between July 2020 and June 2021. It is pertinent to note that because of COVID-19, several of the programme processes have been impacted, and accordingly targets have been set conservatively.

Sr. No	Indicator Level	Indicator	Target	Progress	% Progress
1	Process	Percentage of District level review meetings (DRG) conducted for planning and review regularly	85%	151%	178%
2	Output	Percentage of of District level review meetings (DRG) conducted using student learning data	59%	65%	110%
3	Process	Percentage of block level planning and review meetings (BRG) conducted regularly	79%	76%	96%
4	Output	Percentage of Block level planning and review meeting (BRG) conducted using student learning data	54%	67%	124%
5	Output	Percentage of KPs trained on understanding student assessment and reviewing child wise action plans	92%	62%	67%
6	Process	Percentage of Clusters where Shikshan Parishads are conducted regularly	62%	34%	55%
7	Output	Percentage of teachers trained on understanding Student assessment data and creating child wise action plan	53%	26%	49%
8	Outcome	Percentage of Teachers using student assessment data for creating child wise action plan	44%	35%	80%
9	Output	Percentage of Government functionaries (DEO/ BEO/Extension officers/DIECPD) oriented/updated/ trained about various aspects of the programme	97%	96%	99%
10	Process	Percentage of Gram Panchayats where education Gram Sabhas is initiated	11%	3%	27%
11	Process	Percentage of SMCs reconstituted as per RTE guideline	9%	4%	44%
12	Output	Percentage of SMCs discussing reviewing child learning	18%	14%	78%
13	Outcome	Percentage of SMCs participating in School Development Plan	16%	23%	144%

Conclusion

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Collaborators programme has been able to contribute to the learning process by engaging with the children, with the assistance and support of the community and education system. All our 3 implementing partners have taken the best and most appropriate measures to ensure minimum disruptions to the progress of the programme interventions. The programme intervention strategy has been redesigned to focus on on-ground needs and challenges, while keeping the objectives of the programme intact and the levels of intervention the same. Capacity building of the government functionaries acted as a stimulus for government forums like the DRG, BRG, CRG and SP. Further, keeping the new normal in mind, virtual assessments were conducted in collaboration with the government to understand on-ground needs for planning purposes. As the schools re-open, the interventions will focus on bringing a majority of children back to schools and on reducing dropout rates. Awareness must be created in the community as regards COVID-19 hygiene guidelines, vaccination drives and making schools a safe space for children. Finally, collaboration with SMC and PRI members has created a supportive environment for all the stakeholders, enabling the smooth functioning of the programme.

The Way Forward in 2021-2022

As the situation continues to be critical in 2021-22, the programme will continue to focus on the processes from last year's interventions that were able produced results. The implementing partners will adopt the 'new normal' mode of intervention - involving 60% virtual and 40% on-field interventions, which will be modified depending on the situation. This new mode of operation recognises the complications and uncertainties of the present situation, while ensuring that there is no change in the objectives or the levels of intervention of the programme. The programme will continue to work towards better learning outcomes for children at the district, block and cluster-level, in alignment with the government.

For 2021-22, the plan is to rebuild the system and processes to enable contributions that can capably tackle the issue of loss of learning for children, by focusing on three approaches:

- Revisiting teaching approaches while schools are closed to ensure that teachers master the online/offline/hybrid classroom.
- Providing remedial support with a focus on foundational learning, and in alignment with the government's roadmap, as soon as schools reopen.
- Ensuring enrolment and retention by mapping and mainstreaming children in schools, through the joint efforts of teachers, SMCs and PRIs.

In the event that the situation improves, from mid-year, the Collaborators team will initiate conversation with the government regarding the implementation of the State Transformation intervention, aimed at impacting school education across Maharashtra. This process will begin with a baseline study.

Image Gallery



The BEO of Khatav block presenting a slide show during the DRG meeting held at the ZP in Satara, Maharashtra on the 10th of February, 2021.



Updates being provided on Saksham Bitiya Abhiyaan during the Blocking Meeting in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.



Block-level SDP workshop in progress in Jaoli, Maharashtra.



A BRG meeting in progress in Navapur, Maharashtra.



A Coaching Needs Assessment Tool being displayed during the CNAT workshop in Aheri, Maharashtra on the 5th of the March, 2020.



A meeting conducted with Mr. Sontakke, EO.



A meeting conducted with government officers/ functionaries virtually, via Zoom.



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