Innovating Social Equity and Inclusion Among Dalit Children and Youth: Nurturing the Social Dividend

Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion
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Preface

Social justice has been spoken of much in today’s development sector that provides an equal opportunity for socially excluded groups to become part of mainstream development discourse and unwind their potential to realize their participation in larger society with dignity. The struggle for social justice can be traced to previous movements that continue to hold significance; as such it remains the prime concern of India’s marginalized sections. The Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) – a new organization and latest addition in the struggle of social justice movements – believes that promoting equity and social inclusion from a human rights perspective is another opportunity for socially excluded groups to reassert their inclusion into the development process and policy-making bodies along with redefining the needs of people (excluded and non-excluded) to coexist with dignity, respect and diversity. At one hand, the growing generations – children and youth – among socially excluded groups are exposed to this discriminatory world without being equipped to understand and respond proactively to discriminatory practices. On the other hand, there are no spaces or opportunities, which in turn makes it difficult for non-excluded children and youth to engage with the context and concerns of excluded groups. Exclusionary practices become institutionalized in to people’s behaviors, thought processes or are transformed into culture and societal values. In addition, governmental and non-governmental institutions reproduce these prejudices, values and practices; the consequent effect is the multiplication of the struggles of excluded groups to claim a socially inclusive space with dignity and full participation.

CSEI realized the needs to translate social inclusion in practice and designed a series of interventions that will engage with Dalit children and youth and piloted an inclusive model to promote equity and inclusion in education for these youth in schools in Bihar. In association with Christian Aid, CSEI piloted this model in 50 elementary schools with five Dalit-led Community Organizations (CLOs) in five districts in Bihar. The objective of the project was to design and pilot inclusive practices/programs at schools and the community level. These changes were documented in order to establish linkages between children and youth development as a continuum which provided an opportunity for a comprehensive education advocacy program led by youth leaders of the Dalit community. The design also aimed to develop a capacity building module for CLOs that could further be enhanced and replicated towards making development inclusive in Indian context.

This study is a documentation of all activities undertaken and changes that have been adopted as advocacy in the state of Bihar. The study provides a sketch of a module that could be further enhanced to develop it as several Social Inclusion modules/workshops for larger civil society actors, teachers, activists and students. The evolution of modules such as Khel se Mel, Equity Forum of Children, promoting human rights education in schools through puppetry, Shiksha Samvaad, teacher’s sensitization activities and advocacy on promoting social inclusion in education are some of the interesting mechanisms that could be promoted in education sector. The emergence and expansion of the Bihar Ambedkar Students’ Forum (BASF) is yet another important process that provides a novel way to engage with marginalized youth and evolve a leadership journey of young people from the self to society perspective. The programs undertaken by BASF such as leadership modules, education advocacy campaigns (such as Navodaya Ab Door Nahi, post a letter for education, the Higher Education Link Programme), promoting volunteerism, internship and exposures seem to be new emerging areas which further require enhancement.
We look forward to sharing the innovations and lessons from this pilot project with the Community Led Organizations through the National Equity Forum and the National Youth Equity Forum. We thank Christian Aid for providing us the support and resources for undertaking this pilot in Bihar.

Satyendra Kumar

Director, Bihar State

CSEI
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List of Abbreviations

ASF - Ambedkar Student Forum
BASF - Bihar Ambedkar Student Forum
BDO - Block Education Officer
CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSEI - Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion
DEO - District Education Officer
ERC - Education Resource Center
FDGs - Focused Group Discussions
FYP - Five Year Plan
GER - Gross Enrolment Rate
ICDS - Integrated Child Development Scheme
JNV - Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya
KSM - Khel Se Mel
NCPCR - The National for Commission Protection of Child Rights
NCF - National Curriculum Framework
MDM - Mid-Day Meal
MSJ&E - Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
MHRD - Ministry of Human Resource Development
RTE - Right to Education Act
RTI - Right to Information Act
SCPCR - State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
SC - Schedule Caste
SCSP - Schedule Caste Sub Plan
SC/ST (POA) Act - Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act
ST - Schedule Tribe
SMC - School Management Committee
SSA - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
TSP - Tribal Sub Plan
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context and Background

Dalit communities recognize education as the critical component for promoting dignity, development and socio-economic mobility as is reflected in increasing rate of children’s enrolment in schools. This achievement has emerged through with great struggles over the years. The increased interest in education among the socially excluded communities can be used to turn around; reduced inequalities, enhanced equity and human resource development at the state and national levels. The 11th (2007-12) and 12th (2012-17) Five Year Plans on Inclusive and Sustainable Growth rightly recognize that ‘better levels of health and education are in fact pre-conditions for sustained long term growth’ and that ‘expansion, inclusion and excellence in higher education’ is the path to human resource development. The Plans recognized and acknowledged the rights of children and young people, and some important legislations and provisions have been introduced in education, declining sex ratio, child protection and youth policy. An inherent gap in these plans and schemes is the lack of attention on vulnerabilities faced by specific groups of children and young people. They are formulated on the universal premise of a homogenous group while children and young people belonging to socially excluded and marginalized communities face particular constraints and barriers in accessing the policies and provisions. The focus of the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP) is to ensure retention and improved learning of the children from marginalized communities who are deprived and discriminated while accessing education. These efforts also need to converge with the programs under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJ&E), such as residential schools and pre-matric scholarships running on assistance from the MSJ&E to conform on the RTE norms. The 12th FYP has also addressed greater community involvement in the management and ownership of schools to tackle issues of teacher absenteeism and lack of accountability. New ways need to be found out to incentivize the states for community involvement in school management so that management control shifts to the local community. The 12th FYP has been instrumental in addressing issues of child protection and new education policy concept. The aim has been to consolidate the issues of the 11th FYP along with the 12th FYP in order to ensure that there is continuity in the process and the most recent issues are not viewed in isolation. The vulnerabilities of caste, religion, ethnicity, class, disability, gender status and many others and their complex intersectionalities negotiate their access and benefits. These dimensions need to be consciously included and addressed through legislations, policies and provisions.

According to Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, “The State shall endeavour to provide for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”. Similarly, Article 46 of the Indian Constitution declares that “The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”. However, for children coming from vulnerable backgrounds, survival itself remains the primary and persistent challenge given the high levels of child malnutrition, infant, child mortality and maternal mortality. Moving beyond, they depend upon the state provision in education where the quality, inclusion and equity measures are poorly envisaged and implemented.
The Annual Report 2014, prepared by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) (based on U- DISE report and national census survey reports), says that the enrolment of SC/ST\(^1\) students in primary level has come down in the past three years in the country. The total number of SC students was 2.87 crores during the academic year 2011-12; this number has come down to 2.61 crores in the academic year of 2013-14 at an annual rate of close to three per cent. Similarly, 1.53 crores ST students were enrolled in various schools across India in 2011-12, but during 2013-14 period it was reported to be around 1.45 crores\(^2\). The drop-out rates, both reported and unreported, are also on a rise with a substantive proportion of young people, not accessing education that can spur them to participation, skill enhancement or employment. This is reflected in the sharply decreasing enrolment rates as one progresses further in education. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) for 2011 in primary school for Dalit children was 127.8% for boys and 128.7% for girls; in secondary school it was 37.4% for boys and 33.5% for girls and in higher education it was 13% for boys and 9% for girls\(^3\). Many complex reasons lead to these poor and unequal outcomes.

Practices and traditions like manual scavenging, the devadasi system, bonded labor and child labor take a heavy toll on Dalit children and young people, forcing them out of schools into the labor market or on to the streets. Caste and gender-based discrimination also continue to haunt educational institutions from pre-school to centers of higher education. Inadequate and insensitive implementation of entitlements and provisions hurt the dignity and negatively impact the personal development of Dalit children and youth. Poor infrastructure and unequal state provisions in infrastructure and services to Dalit habitations prevent Dalit children and youth to access education at all levels from pre-school to higher education. Lack of information, guidance and support on available resources and barriers in accessing them also limit their choices and opportunities. Reduced employment opportunities in the government without adding measures to promote their employment in the private sector or entrepreneurship has also become a dampener to families for higher investment in education. One cannot neglect the larger environment of increasing poverty and inequality, reduced employment opportunities and livelihoods of Dalit parents that are prohibitive to invest in the education and development of their children. All combined and despite a claim on the youth population dividend to spur India to global achievements, little is being done to ground the claim for the children and young people from Dalit and other socially excluded communities.

This project worked with the Dalit children and youth in the state of Bihar. The aim of the project was to strengthen the participation of marginalized children in the school and reduce their dropout rates. Also, it aimed to address the constant discrimination faced by the Dalit children in accessing different levels of education. In this process the Dalit youth were also involved and played a very

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\(^1\) Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) are interchangeably used with Dalit and Tribal respectively in the report.


important role in monitoring the implementation of special schemes and provisions for the marginalized communities. Additionally, various capacity building trainings for the youth gave them the platform for strengthening young leadership from the marginalized communities.

### 1.2 Education Levels of Dalit Children in Bihar

According to the Census of India 2001\(^4\) the Schedule Caste (SC) population was 13,048,068 which constituted 15.7% and the Schedule Tribe (ST) was 758,351 and they constituted 0.9% of the total population in the state. 93.3% of the SC population resides in the rural areas. As many as 23 castes constituted the category of Scheduled Castes in Bihar. Prominent SCs in the descending order of population size are Chamar, Dusad, Musahar, Pasi, Dhobi and Bhuinya. The six most populous SCs constitute 93.2% of the total SC population of the state. The overall sex ratio of the SC population in Bihar is 923 girls per 1000 males, which is marginally higher than the sex ratio of Bihar (919 per 1000).

Literacy among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of Bihar is dismally low. In the 2011 census, the overall literacy rate in Bihar was 63.6% (All India 74%), the literacy rate among Scheduled Castes was 48.6% and for Scheduled Tribes was 51.1%. While the gender disaggregated data is not available yet, it can be surmised that the gender gap is considerable within the SC and ST communities and between SC/ST and other dominant communities. In the 2001 census the literacy gap between SC/ST men and overall men was 20% and that between SC/ST women and overall women was about 50% (the literacy rate of SC/ST women was 15% and 33.1% for all women). Within Scheduled Castes, some groups account for extremely low literacy rates. For instance, Musahars have an overall literacy rate of only 9%, while females among Musahars account for a literacy level of only 3.9%. About half a dozen castes included in the Maha Dalit category have a female literacy rate of less than 5%.

The high enrolment rate is certainly an indicator of greater awareness among the community and their concern to educate their children as the means to social and economic mobility and development. However the high rate of drop out due to various reasons is a cause for concern. This is reflected in the decreasing numbers of Dalit children who access higher levels of education. Only 15.1% SC literates are educated up to matric/ secondary/higher secondary and only 3.6% of SCs are able to become graduates and postgraduate studies while only 0.1% are able to achieve non-technical and technical diplomas\(^5\). There are special provisions of residential hostels and scholarships for Dalit Children but these schemes are not implemented properly due to which students have difficulty in continuing their studies. The Schedule Caste Sub Plan is another special provision under which funds are allocated for the development of Dalits, however this money often does not reach the community and is diverted for other infrastructural development. The high dropout pushes Dalit children and adolescents in to despair and helplessness and retains them within the poverty cycle. It negates any opportunity for higher education, skill development or enhancing ones personality.

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\(^4\) We are quoting 2001 Census data because after a lot of searching we could not find the 2011 Census figures for Dalits online.

\(^5\) [http://scstwelfare.bih.nic.in/docs/scst%20report%20of%2016th%20August%20Copy.pdf](http://scstwelfare.bih.nic.in/docs/scst%20report%20of%2016th%20August%20Copy.pdf) As seen on 2/5/2015 at 4.15 pm.
Further, even when they have completed school education with great efforts, there is no equivalent opportunity to access higher education or employment, given the low competency levels they acquire in the government or even low fee-paying private schools and the lack of employment or enterprise opportunities. Walking through the villages, one sees Dalit youth, who have struggled through school education but are not able to move forward or present themselves as ‘role models’ to the children and adolescents in their own villages. Their horizons have been limited without opportunities or social contact, exposure to new knowledge, opportunities for better employment or entrepreneurship.

Given that despite the enrolment of Dalit children into schools and many provisions made for them, they still continue to drop out in large numbers earlier than children from other communities suggests that other issues require attention. The majority of them are first generation learners and do not receive any learning support at home. Issues of caste and gender-based discrimination, humiliation and violence in the schools both from the teachers and other peer groups plays an important role here. They act as major deterrents to Dalit children and youth accessing education. Personal stories, discrimination studies and reports of various committees have highlighted the issue. Studies report the traditional caste mindset among teachers, education administrators and government officials which severely impact Dalit children’s opportunities and benefit from education. While various policies speak of elimination of untouchability and caste-based discrimination, sadly it still continues to be prevalent in the educational institutions.

Due to unequal social division of labor on gender lines, girls are forced to take care of siblings and household work when parents are away. Most of their time is spent undertaking domestic work, disallowing them the opportunity of attending school. Violence against girls is increasing; young girls are trafficked to states including Haryana and Punjab which have a lower sex ratio for forced marriages. The girls who are trafficked mostly belong to the vulnerable communities including Dalits and Adivasis, they are also forced into prostitution and bonded labor. Parents tend to invest lower in girls given the strong gender bias against them. Even as academic achievements are brought about through a combination of complex multiple factors at school, home and community, focused attention on marginalized girls within the education system is still required. The governments at union and states must adequately address social exclusion and ensure dignity and opportunities to all children from socially marginalized backgrounds to enable them grow equitably and ensure their rights to development.

1.3 Main Objectives of the Program: ‘Promoting equity and inclusion for Dalit children and youth in education in Bihar: Nurturing the population dividend among Dalits’

Having previously engaged with issues of exclusion and discrimination in education and other arenas, CSEI was keen to explore opportunities and strategies for promoting inclusion in education. The strategy was to promote social inclusion for all children in schools with particular focus on Dalit and hitherto excluded and discriminated children\(^6\). It aimed at providing experiential education

\(^6\) During this project period, the focused attention was on Dalit children, given the experience and background of the project team even as the overall frame can be adapted with children and young people from other socially excluded communities. CSEI plans to carry forward the lessons and expand its engagement with other
opportunities for all children through fun-learning activities. These activities were oriented to build social justice perspective among all children to build empathetic understanding of disadvantaged children and diversity and promote social inclusion, collaboration and cooperation among all children in the school and classroom environment. The program was initiated in July 2011 and was focused on developing strategies to address social exclusion and discrimination of Dalit, Maha Dalit and other marginalized community children in accessing their rights to education. This was a pilot intervention and was operational in five districts of Bihar – Patna, Rohtas, Begusarai, Bhagalpur and Jamui, in partnership with five community-led organizations (CLOs). Each CLO operated the program in two Panchayats making a total of ten panchayats. The pilot project was aimed towards promoting ‘equitable quality education with social inclusion in Bihar’.

The objectives of the program were:

➢ Dalit girls, boys, educated Dalit youth and adolescents have non-discriminatory and inclusive access to a full course of education up until class X and establish the link between schooling, personality development and higher education.

➢ Facilitate and strengthen the state-level educated Dalit youth platform with a support system and mechanisms for self-development among Dalit youth and support their emergence as “Change Agents” in addressing the issues affecting education of Dalit children and youth.

➢ Strengthening Dalit led Civil Society Organizations in addressing education issues in the community and enhancing deliverable capacity

➢ Pilot and standardize exclusion/inclusion mapping tools and inclusive methodology for equity and inclusion in education

Given that Dalit-led civil society organizations are primarily engaged in addressing the civil and political rights, discrimination and violence issues and are not engaged in education and other socio-economic rights, the project began with identifying partner organizations that showed interest in working on education and with young people. The process moved on to building common understanding and collective visioning among partner CLOs, while also evolving and ironing out operational issues with them. Not having a road map laid out by previous programs, the project evolved from a combination of the commitment to translate the broad vision as it met with emerging realities and changes in the education front, both at the center and the state and also the realities of the partner CLOs and CSEI. This period was important in the education front, laying the foundations for the 12th Five Year Plan, the implementation of the Right to Education Act, the strengthening of Right to Education forum and the Nine is Mine campaigns on education at the national level.

socially excluded children and young people, particularly from Tribal, Muslim and Nomadic/Denotified communities.
1.4 Methodology

The methodology used in the preparation of this booklet is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from the fieldwork done in Bihar during 17th - 23rd April 2015. There were focused group discussions with Dalit Children and with the members of the Ambedkar Students Forum and the Core Committee of the Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum. Individual interviews were done with the Chief Functionaries of the Community Led Organizations, Head Masters of various schools and discussion with the state and national team members who were involved with the implementation of the project. These were structured interviews for which different set of questionnaires were prepared for each category. There were intense discussions with the national and state team members of CSEI to understand the project and its experiences in the implementation. The details of the fieldwork can be seen below in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Dalit Children (Members of Bal Sansad and Equity Forum)</td>
<td>Sakricha Village, Patna District, Ramgarh Village, Sasaram District, Chinari Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused Group Discussions</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Dalit Youth (Members of ASF BASF and Core Commitee)</td>
<td>Patna (Members representing all Five district areas of the project) Chinari Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interview</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Head Masters</td>
<td>Kurum Village and Ramgarh Village, Sasaram District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interview</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Chief Functionary of CLOs</td>
<td>Pratima Kumari, Gaurav Grameen Mahila Vikas Manch, Patna District and Ravindar Kumar, Jan Adhikar Kendra, Rohtas District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Team Members of CSEI</td>
<td>New Delhi and Patna</td>
</tr>
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For secondary sources of the data the project implementation reports, annual reports and case studies of the program were studied. The tools and discrimination studies that were developed by CSEI were studied. Additionally, the 11th and 12th FYP provisions were looked at alongside the official data on education for marginalized communities in Bihar and at the national level (as taken from government sources)
This booklet is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides contextual and background information regarding Dalit children and youth facing difficulties in accessing good quality education in India with a special focus on Bihar. It also highlights the low education levels of Dalit children in Bihar. Further, this chapter sets the main objective of the project that was undertaken by CSEI in Bihar. The second chapter focuses on the conceptual understanding of the key concepts used during the implementation of the project. The third chapter is divided into four different sections and reviews the innovative methods CSEI has used along with partner CLOs to promote equity and inclusion for Dalit children and young people in schools and communities. The first section reviews strategies and actions used for promoting social inclusion in schools. The second reviews strategies and processes engaged in working with young women and men in strengthening Dalit leadership. The third pays attention to the community engagements affirming the community confidence in education as the strategy and mechanisms for socio-economic mobility and inclusion. The fourth section reviews the role and engagement of CLOs in promoting social equity and inclusion in children and youth development. CSEI played a crucial role in anchoring these processes from Bihar and Delhi offices with different stakeholders. The chapter also highlights the linkages in the work with the children, young people and CLOs and therefore does not view the work as isolated but as integrated and interlinked for the sustained development of the community. The fourth chapter highlights the major learnings from the implementation of the project. Further, it identifies sustainable ways to move forward for continuing the work on education by creating spaces and more participation for Dalit children and youth and building new leadership from the Dalit community.

The aim of this handbook is to highlight the innovative methods and techniques used by CSEI in promoting methods of social inclusion in education, connecting with children and youth and strengthening the young Dalit leadership at the grassroots levels. This booklet will focus on the major learning and challenges and the good practices of the program. It will also highlight the engagement of CSEI with different stakeholders. This booklet can be used by activists, students, lawyers, teachers, government officials and persons working with schools, youth and children to understand the need for socially inclusive policies and practices in education for sustained development for the marginalized communities.
Chapter 2
Conceptual Framework on Social Equity and Inclusion in Education

2.1 Important Components Towards Understanding Social Equity and Inclusion
An important task of this program had been to develop an improved conceptual understanding and analysis as well as collective articulation on issues of equity and social inclusion in education. CSEI has developed a deep understanding on the terms below for the better implementation of the program as well as to develop perspectives of partner organizations. These concepts are also carried forward in the work among the young people from socially excluded communities too.

➢ **Social Exclusion:** The denial of equal opportunities imposed by certain sections of society on others which leads to inability of individuals and groups to participate wholly in the political, economic, cultural and social functioning of the society they live in.

➢ **Discrimination:** As per the United Nations definition, discrimination includes any conduct based on a distinction made on grounds of natural or social categories, which have no relation either to individual capacities or merits, or to the concrete behaviour of the individual person. It implies immoral and undemocratic behaviour which undermines the principles of equality.

➢ **Equity in Education:** Equity requires securing every child’s right to education, in education and through education. It not only means providing equal opportunity, but also conditions that allow the socially excluded children to avail the opportunity. It means making institutional changes to allow all children achieve their aspirations and potential in and through education.

➢ **Inclusion in Education:** Requires responding to diverse needs of children by increasing their participation in learning, culture and community. It involves changes in classroom practices, curriculum and teaching methodology that will allow children’s experiences to
become learning resources in education. It involves greater participation of the marginalized communities in education.

➢ **Mainstreaming Social Inclusion**: Process and strategy which takes account of the differential impacts of program interventions on different sections of population groups and integrate these into program interventions with the aim of eliminating disparities. A more effective concept would be Broad Streaming, given the rich diversity of knowledge and practices that are available across social groups.

➢ **Social Justice**: Raises questions when individuals or groups are disadvantaged beyond one’s control. Social justice involves reparation to past injustices. It ensures that individuals and groups enjoy equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.

### 2.2 Evolving Rights Based Frame for Social Inclusion

In locating the project towards development and empowerment of Dalit children, broader frames on education were explored such as the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) and UN Convention on the Rights of Child, The NCF lays emphasis on the pre-amble of the Constitution as the objectives for education: ‘justice – social, economic and political; liberty – of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality – of status and of opportunity and promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation’. It focuses on the Constitutional vision of India as a secular, egalitarian and pluralistic society founded on the values of social justice and equality.

The NCF outlines the broad aims of education as: i) independence of thought and action; ii) sensitivity to others’ well-being and feelings; iii) learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner; iv) predisposition towards participation in democratic processes and v) ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change. Further, the NCF is founded on the five guiding principles of: i) connecting knowledge to life outside the school; ii) ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods; iii) enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond text books; iv) making examinations more flexible and integrating them with class room life and v) nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act expands on these fundamental principles and objectives under Section 29 (2). The academic authority while laying down the curriculum and the evaluation procedure shall take into consideration the following, namely:

- a) Conformity with the values enshrined in the Constitution
- b) All round development of the child
- c) Building up the child’s knowledge, potentiality and talent
- d) Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent
e) Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in child-friendly and child-centered manner

f) Medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in the child’s mother tongue

g) Making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely

h) Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of the child's understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same

In trying to analyse what our children experience in schools and what they learn, it was also important to review globally enunciated goals of education – found in the CRC – 1989 which is also ratified by India.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The CRC spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development and respect for the views of the child. Every right in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education and legal, civil and social services.

By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention (by ratifying or acceding to it), India has committed to protecting and ensuring children's rights and agreed to hold ourselves accountable for this commitment before the international community. State parties to the Convention are obliged to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child.

The UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education is one of the first UN Conventions. Non-discrimination in education has thus been an objective and monitorable indicator in all levels of education. Indicators and standards for its implementation should be included in the routine school reporting formats. Teachers at all levels and administrators must be made aware of norms and standards in non-discrimination, made sensitive and monitored strictly with regard to non-discrimination to Dalit girls and boys.

2.3 Social Equity and Inclusion under Right to Education Act

A review of the Right to Education Act provides us some basic and foundational dimensions to expand and deepen to move forward:

- The Act creates the rights-frame for providing and promoting education for all children with basic norms and provisions makes it possible for reviewing current education system and facilitating Dalit and other marginalized children/communities to demand their rights.

http://www.unicef.org/crc/
• The provision of free and compulsory education places the onus of providing education to all children with the state and also ensuring children do not have economic barriers preventing them from accessing elementary education. It has moved education from the incentive to the rights frame.

• The Act recognizes disadvantaged and economically weaker section children as two categories that need focused attention under the RTE Act. These are further detailed as SC, ST, Muslim, the urban poor, the excluded among the excluded and other vulnerable categories in the SSA revised framework.

• The Act for the first time recognizes discrimination in school education and prohibits the same under sections 8 and 9. It places the responsibility preventing and addressing discrimination on the local authority, School Management Committees and schools. Discrimination is further detailed in the revised framework.

• The Act articulates social issues that need to be addressed (discrimination, poverty, gender issues, children with special needs, migration and child labour) and also sectoral issues (norms on school availability in the neighbourhood, infrastructure and facilities, teacher quality and school/classroom functioning) providing indicators that can be monitored.

• The Act provides for mapping all children at the habitation levels, be they local or migrants, inside or outside schools, working or non-working. The RTE demands child mapping at the habitation levels and requires tracking attendance and completion of elementary education.

• Participants from the community and stakeholders are given a legal framework through the School Management Committees; 75% of committee members to come from among parents, 50% of them being women and the chairperson of the committee to be from the parents with proportionate representation for SC/ST communities.

• The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights are provided as independent oversight and grievance redress bodies, providing an avenue for institutional grievance redress mechanisms in addition to the provisions of legal court procedures.

• The 25% reservation in private schools is yet another step towards promoting equity and social inclusion in education.

In this context, particularly given the enactment of the RTE Act, with its various equity and non-discrimination norms, it becomes vital to incorporate an equity lens into any interventions in the field of education. **Educational equity** means that the necessary policies, budgets, programs and practices are put in place to (i) eliminate barriers in access, retention and completion of education based on factors such as caste, ethnicity, class, gender, disability and geographical location and (ii) to provide equal opportunities and create the conditions that ensure that historically disadvantaged
social groups achieve the good educational performance expected of all children and youth.\(^8\) The inclusion of socially excluded children in education and the eradication of discrimination against them must become core concerns in promoting and fulfilling the right to universal elementary education. This lens has been missing to date from many interventions by civil society organizations in education. At the same time, over the past two decades, there has been growing awareness among socially excluded communities about the need for education as an important means for development. This awareness needs to be supported by a process that can enable monitoring and evaluation of the levels of equity and inclusion within schools and the school education system as a whole.

All the above existing legal frameworks along with the other human rights mechanisms were explored and studied in detail by CSEI to develop equity-inclusion models to strengthen CLO understanding and build stronger perspectives on the issues of social inclusion and equity in education. The main aim of the three year project was to pilot and evolve equity-inclusion methodologies and mechanisms that can be adapted widely. Also, building together ‘equitable quality education with social inclusion in a rights based framework for children and young people from the socially excluded communities’. These mechanisms can further be used for advocacy with the policy makers. The framework and perspectives that were developed was shared while working with the children, youth and CLO’s for a common understanding and having a similar vision and mission in mind when working collectively.

Chapter 3

Modules

3.1 - Module 1: Promoting Social Inclusion in Schools

3.1.1 Inclusion through Cooperative Games (Khel Se Mel)

Recognizing that Dalit and other children from socially excluded communities are often discriminated in schools on the basis of their caste and gender, the program was keen to promote their engagement and social inclusion in schools and classrooms. Accordingly the community led organizations identified ten schools each within two panchayats of their working area and tried to dialogue with the teachers. Knowing the difficulties in gaining official permission from the department, the effort was to convince individual schools and teachers for creating conducive school environments and activities to improve the participation and learning among these children. However, teachers did not welcome the initial efforts to engage with the schools who saw them as unnecessary interference into their schools. Various options were explored on how a space could be created to engage with the schools.

The international organization ‘Play for Peace (PfP)’\(^9\) utilizes the use of games in promoting peace in conflict situations; CSEI had discussions with PfP regarding the adaptation of their methodology for the promotion of social inclusion in schools among children from diverse social backgrounds. The team in India was led by Mr. Agyatmitra and Ms. Swati Bhatt who have been using PfP for promoting social inclusion among children affected by communal conflicts in the old city of Hyderabad in collaboration with the Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA). They have further taken the process to many other organizations and regions including Gujarat, Orissa, the Andamans, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra. They have also been part of the international process of healing and community building in conflict-affected countries including Israel, Nepal, Pakistan and South Sudan to offer practitioners a process of inclusion that is active, dynamic and transformative. The focus being to include children from socially excluded communities into the schools and create conducive environment for all children to engage with each other. The initial challenge was to design activities which were interesting for the children and at the same time involved the teachers and were not threatening for the school. ‘Khel Se Mel (KSM)’ was evolved in this process which provided a space to the children in the schools where they can participate in activities through fun and games, without fear. The team’s vast experience of working with children in various difficult situations has added to the rich experience that the children received through these trainings. The PfP team trained the CLO team on KSM (inclusion through games) activities who were then confident to conduct the same in the identified schools. This also provided an entry point for the trainers who now were able to engage confidently with the children in the schools. KSM provided a novel way to engage with children in the schools through energetic games and activities that promoted values of non-discrimination, diversity, equality, empathy and tolerance and cooperation.

Every activity in KSM had a meaning from which Dalit children could easily learn and identify with – these included different issues that affected their everyday lives. Participation in these activities did not only raise their confidence, but also helped them in building better self-images, increased their levels of aspirations and self-esteem and further bound them together as a group, diluting the barriers of caste-class-gender biases and inhibitions.

(i) **Training Facilitators on KSM methodology**

The KSM methodology was used to equip the CLO team members (chief functionaries, block coordinators and animators) from the five districts with skills to engage with children and promote inclusion activities in the schools. Three members in each district (making a total of 15 CLO team members) were trained in the process. Several training modules were designed by keeping the exclusion pattern in consideration. The team was trained through three training modules over a period of 24 months which included 100+ activities and more importantly an approach and perspective towards inclusion and gaming so that participants could innovate and keep increasing their repertoire of activities.

\(^9\) Play for Peace promotes lifelong friendships in children, youth and adults from different cultures and groups in conflict. Through cooperative play, we experience the other/enemy as someone not so different from ourselves and see we can learn together and peace is possible. For more details see

http://www.playforpeace.org/?gclid=CjwKEAjwJy9GqBRCRIIPram97Xk3ESjAd0r7LeyczbB65HAtQTjtuNiKlTuTWvQQtQotp2pgTE7RbtAJoCJ7fw_wcB
The training process oriented them towards "how children learn", "Right and left brain Attributes", "multiple Intelligence", how and why the emotional safety of children affects their inclusion, human rights with special focus on child rights and how to advocate child rights using puppetry. Another consistent focus of training was also on individual growth and evolving team dynamics so that people coming from different districts and CLOs are able to see each other's value and appreciate and learn from each other. The training built confidence among the team members and was well appreciated in all the districts.

(ii) Introducing KSM in 50 Schools across five districts

After the training the animators went back to their schools in each district and explored the possibility of holding KSM activities in the schools. There was more openness among the teachers and the 7th period was identified as a possible time for this activity. The 7th period is the last period in the day and is meant for games and sports for the physical development of the children. However the CLOs observed that sports and games were not conducted in most schools; schools did not have teachers attached to sports and games, teachers did not stay back for the last period and often left the schools leaving the children to play on their own. Further, children did not stay in school for the 7th period. Often there was no serious learning or activity in schools after the mid-day meals (MDM) and the 7th period was virtually non-existent in schools. Many children (and some teachers) did not stay after the MDM. The 7th period came as an opportunity for the animators to become a part of the system and engage with the children regularly. The concern was also to find an institutional way in which KSM can be introduced within the school system. KSM was introduced to 10 schools in each district making a total of 50 schools. It was also an experiment to address the dropping out of children after the mid-day meals.

The schools were welcoming and did not feel KSM was an unnecessary intrusion into their system. They also looked at it as a means to increase the post-MDM attendance of children. The CLO team fixed up schedules with schools to conduct KSM in a weekly manner. Firstly, this methodology tackled the issue of post-MDM drop-out in the selected schools as children began to stay back for the KSM activities. Secondly, the Dalit children participated equally and actively in the KSM activities. Thirdly, it interested the teachers as well and they started getting involved in the activities. This activity has become an important dimension to cut across barriers among children and promote their engagement with each other. In this way, it has diluted the caste and gender biases and differences that existed in the schools, by allowing children to mix freely with each other.
Khel Se Mel

They play non-violent games and activities because their goal is inclusion. If a game has a winner, someone must be the loser; this can breed anger and resentment. While competition certainly has its place, non-competitive play shifts people’s thinking from a zero sum, win-lose mentality to one of collective problem-solving, where we may find creative solutions to our society’s most vexing problems. Non-competitive play is a vehicle to advance the reconciliation and peacemaking process. Through play, we all may experience our common humanity and transcend the artificial distinctions that divide us. When we are playing with someone, we don’t play with their skin, color or cultural identity; we play them as a person.

Through cooperative play, we have a universal, non-threatening platform around which people can gather and learn. Play creates a gateway to moments when differences dissolve, fear melt away and we see what connects us rather than what divides us.

How does Play for Peace process impact children?

Children play games facilitated by facilitators at regular frequency (preferably weekly). The play for Peace process is founded on core values of cooperation, inclusion, absence of judgment, emotional and physical safety and fun. When children enjoy an experience it becomes a memory for them. Attending gaming sessions on a consistent basis strengthens this memory and makes it an emotional reference. This reference includes memories of playing with children who are different from them (children from communities in conflict). This allows children to grow with the experience (and memory) that diversity is fun.

It is expected that when they grow as adults this memory will translate itself in a learning that believes that ‘I enjoy working with different people’ and that ‘people from different community are fun to be with’. In other words, inclusive experiences in childhood create a positive emotional response in the way adults relate to people who are different from them.

On the other hand, this experience of playing games helps in children’s growth.

- Emotionally
- Cognitively
- Reduces inhibition
- Makes them open to new learning

(iii) Observed Changes from the KSM Activity in the Schools

School timings maintained: Ensuring that schools function as per the school schedule is a recognized problem in the state. As noted earlier, children and teachers left school before the 7th period was over. The process of KSM in the 7th period encouraged children and even teachers to stay on in school after the MDM. Thus, the full school timings were being maintained in these schools.
> **Dalit children staying back post-lunch sessions:** There was a huge problem of post MDM drop out of Dalit children in the schools. This activity ensured that children stayed back in school until the 7th (last) period when KSM was to be played. The children started finding the activity very interesting and waited eagerly for the CLO team to come in the 7th period so that they could play games. There was active participation of Dalit children in the activities.

> **Better involvement from the school teachers:** The CLOs had observed that teachers did not stay in the schools until the last period and left school early. Soon teachers also engaged with the KSM process and began to stay back in the schools. They found the process interesting. They also began supporting the animators in facilitating the activities with the children. This can be an institutionalized process within the school system to build inclusion, energy and also ensure that the school timings are maintained as per the schedule. Further, the importance of sports, games and activities for growing children is a recognized need.

> **Mixing up of children:** KSM helped in mixing children irrespective of their caste and gender. Children started coming together to play the games. There was mixing up of boys and girls and in the FGDs children shared that there was a gender segregation when playing games earlier. Girls would play games such as kabbadi, caram board and l-spy, while boys would play games including football and cricket. The Khel Se Mel activities bought both girls and boys together to play common games to break segregation on gender lines. It also promoted increasing interface between dominant community and Dalit children which had not taken place previously.

> **Addressing issues of discrimination:** The KSM activities highlighted various issues of discrimination faced by Dalit children and especially Dalit girls. This was a method through which children could easily express themselves and talk about their issues. In field discussions, the children shared that they learnt about various issues through the Khel Se Mel activities. They did not get bored with the activities and found them very interesting. During FGDs with the children it emerged that many issues were raised in the KSM activities including child marriage, education for girl children, dowry issues, sexual harassment, the drop out of children after 8th Class and the raising of awareness on different forms of discrimination. Children shared that dominant caste children would earlier discriminate the children from the Musahar community and would not eat or play with them. But through various activities of Khel Se Mel, the dominant caste children in the school learnt not to discriminate anyone on the basis of caste and gender. Reena Kumari of the Musahar community (from Sotachak village) did not want to study further after 5th standard as children would tease her and never play or eat with her; even her teachers would behave inappropriately with her. However, following the introduction of KSM activities there was a change in the mindset amongst the children and they began to talk and play with her. The CLO members then assisted in Reena’s admission into the 6th standard in Sakricha school; today she is in class 10th standard and goes to punpun village for school by bicycle.

Initially, the Khel Se Mel activities were designed for children from marginalized communities to reduce the school dropout rates. It was a big achievement that earlier
dominant caste children would discriminate and not eat or play together with the Dalit children. However, they too found the activities very interesting and wanted to be a part of it as well.

3.1.2 Promoting the Participation of Dalit Children in Schools

(i) Bringing Social Justice and Equity into Bal Sansads

As per the guidelines in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), children have the right to be consulted and involved in all matters relating to their lives including education. UNICEF had introduced the concept of Bal Sansad (BS) or Children’s Parliament in schools as a means of incorporating children’s participation and introducing them to democratic ways of functioning. The Bal Sansad is a 12-member body set up in a school; members to the BS are elected by the assembly of students in a school. The positions include Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Further, Ministers and Deputy Ministers are elected for five portfolios: education, health and sanitation, water and agriculture, science and library, and culture and sports. Each Ministry is aided by a council of 10 to 16 students who advise the Ministers and take forward specific agendas. The students in each school are divided into five houses to help the Minister in carrying out various activities. The Student Government meets once a month and reports to the student’s assembly on quarterly basis the activities taken up. The aim of the Bal Sansad is to provide a platform for children to express their views and to also involve them in the developmental activities of the schools. Expectedly, the measures taken would improve the personality of the students in terms of self-awareness, leadership quality, group activities, motivation, decision-making skills and confidence.

It was a matter of concern that Bal Sansads remained by and large on paper and Dalit and other children from the socially excluded communities were not members or leaders therein. There was negligible participation of Dalit children in the Bal Sansad. The school authorities did not ensure Dalit children participated in these bodies, they also failed to orient the members on issues of socially excluded children. Along with that, it was found that these spaces lacked any perspective on social inclusion and equity within them. There was no intervention adopted to promote the rights of marginalized children. After a review of this context, CSEI felt the need to create a space within this institutionalized process for Dalit and other marginalized children. It was also a challenge to see how these bodies can promote social justice and social inclusion with a particular focus on equity and inclusion of children from socially excluded communities.

CSEI recognized this as an important space for children to promote inclusion both in form and content. Spaces within institutionalized processes have the potential to become highly effective tools for children to understand one another and also the lives and issues of child from different communities. In consultations with partner CLOs, CSEI discussed the possibility of expanding the BS with a portfolio of social justice with Ministers and Deputy Social Justice Ministers in the Bal Sansad. These positions would be reserved for a boy and a girl from the Dalit and other socially excluded communities. They would be oriented to lead on social justice issues within the school.

10 The observations in this chapter is based on the FGD’s and Personal Interviews conducted with Children, Facilitators and Youth Leaders during the field visit in Bihar
institutionalization of this space in the school system proved to be a challenge and discussions were accordingly held with the 50 schools in the five districts.

The broad role of this Portfolio includes the following:

- To monitor and bring to notice any child rights violation under the RTE (discrimination, corporal punishment, non-implementation of norms and delay or non-implementation of equity measures).
- To enter into dialogue with schools and school management on how to address issues of exclusion and discrimination faced by any child.
- To promote social equity and inclusion among all children.

Each partner CLO agreed to identify 20 potential social justice Ministers/Deputy Ministers (ten girls and ten boys) from their ten schools in the two panchayats. The field animators started the process of identifying Dalit boys and girls who could be trained and were prepared to take up the new leadership positions. Together 100 Dalit students (50 boys and 50 girls) from 50 schools across five districts were identified to lead the agenda of social justice in Bal Sansad in their schools. The identification of potential leaders among the Dalit children was a difficult process as most Dalit children lacked confidence and tended to shy away from such opportunities. As such, there was some degree of hesitance and resistance among the children. Further discussions were held with the Head teachers on the need and relevance of such posts and the school agreed to the two positions, though not in the formal minutes. After the selection of the two new potential Ministers, they were incorporated informally into the current Bal Sansad, increasing the members from 12 to 14.

(iii) Issues addressed by the Social Justice Minister in the Bal Sansad

➢ Caste discrimination in MDM and games: Earlier Dalit children would sit separately while eating the MDM and in the classrooms. Dominant caste children would not play with them. The Social Justice Minster tried to ensure that there is no segregation while eating or playing games.

➢ The introduction of the election system: The general practice for building the BS was teachers selecting the ‘bright children’ and assigning those positions to these children accordingly. The CLOs encouraged the process of election and thus increased children’s participation in the process.

➢ Promoting leadership among girls: The girls were generally given lower positions and boys were given higher positions in the Bal Sansad when the teachers were selecting the Ministers. The implementation of the election process gave girls opportunities to participate equally.

➢ Increasing participation of Dalit children: Earlier there was no participation of Dalit children and they were not given the opportunity to become Minsters in Bal Sansad. The
Social Justice Minister ensured there was a voting system in which students voted to appoint all the Ministers and it that this was done in a timely manner.

➢ **Monitoring of the schools systems:** To ensure that the school is running on time and every teacher takes their class according to the periods assigned. Also, to ensure that there is good quality food provided in the Mid-Day Meal and everyone eats on time.\(^\text{11}\)

➢ **Ensuring that students do not drop out:** The Social Justice Ministers tracked children and checked regular attendance. When Dalit children missed school on consecutive days the Ministers would go to their homes to find out the reasons for absence. They would subsequently find possible solutions to the problems faced by Dalit children, in order for them to attend classes.

➢ **The importance of education for girls:** The members of the Bal Sansad ensured that all the girls from their villages were attending school. They also spoke to the families of girls who were hesitant to send the girls to school after the commencement of puberty. They ensured that girls from the Musahar community should not leave school due to discrimination.

➢ **Child marriage:** Awareness on child marriage in their villages was raised. In cases where girls stopped attending school the Bal Sansad and Meena Manch members jointly went to the girl’s houses to convince parents not to get them married owing to its illegality and the young age of their daughters. Further, they spoke to the parents regarding the importance of education for girls. Due to their persistence, they have been able to stop a few child marriages in their villages, most notably in Sakricha village in Patna district.\(^\text{12}\)

(iii) **The Relevance of Bal Sansad for Dalit Children**

➢ **Awareness on different social issues:** Through the medium of Bal Sansad, children were able to raise the social issues of caste and gender discrimination. They emphasized that without the presence of Bal Sansad, they would not have been able to raise these concerns and problems they face in accessing education.

➢ **Confidence building:** The two platforms (of Bal Sansad and FDG) have given opportunities to Dalit children to voice their concerns. Further, they are able to easily speak about the discrimination they face. The children shared in the focused group discussions (FDGs) that they felt safe in this space to talk about their problems and could fight for their rights through this forum. It was an empowering process for the children as they were able to gain clarity on their own issues.

\(^{11}\) As shared by Gunja Kumari studying in Ramgarh Madhaya Vidhalay who was Prime Minister in Bal Sansad that during their tenure they ensured proper monitoring of the school systems

\(^{12}\) As shared by the members of Bal Sansad in the FDG’s conducted in Sakricha Village.
> Leadership building of Dalit children: Through this platform, the Dalit children got an opportunity to participate and take lead roles in activities, as the dominant caste children in the school had been doing. The children shared that forums such as Bal Sansad were very important as they felt that Ministers who monitored the activities in schools and could subsequently raise concerns with school authorities were required.

3.1.3 Capacity Building Processes for Dalit Children

In promoting social inclusion processes through different school-based bodies (KSM, Bal Sansad and Meena Manch), 100 Dalit children were identified from the 50 schools at the district and state levels. Their participation had grown and was visible in the Bal Sansads and Meena Manch.

This group was brought together collectively as the ‘Children’s Equity Forum’ to be specially supported to raise the equity and inclusion agenda. They were oriented on the concepts of human rights and social justice, issues of social exclusion and gender discrimination and the need to consciously promote social inclusion. In this process the children were able to envisage a better society for all children. An added dimension to this process was to encourage Dalit children to lead on the issues of equity and social inclusion. To initiate this process, CSEI organized a three-day training course (Training of Trainers) for animators and some members of the Ambedkar Student Forums in Patna. This training used the medium of puppetry for highlighting human rights issues which could then be performed before the school and community. Further, the teams held four-day training courses in all five districts for the members of the Equity Forum. This training equipped the young students to make puppets, identify child and human rights issues they would like to address, compose stories and present these before a group. This training was huge success as the students took to the project immediately and were effective in identifying the issues and presenting them. Around 100 students were trained through the Equity Forum who can now function as rights facilitators in their schools. All of these are from Dalit communities and the intent was to encourage them to lead the way for promoting rights and justice in their schools.

Children who are exposed to human rights and the rights of children are likely to have lasting impacts on their environments due to the development of a right-based perspective during their formative years. The possibility of such an outcome assists the animators and teachers to engage
with the Bal Sansad and Meena Manch with a specific purpose and aim. Simultaneously, this has the potential to help in developing several IEC materials towards promoting equity and inclusion for Dalit children in schools. We anticipate a more inclusive environment in the schools following this process.

(i) Observed Changes by the Equity Forum

➢ **Raising awareness**: The Equity Forum – through the medium of puppetry – has been able to raise awareness on the various challenges faced by Dalit children with teachers, school authorities, dominant caste children and the wider community. The puppet show helped the children to easily express themselves in raising issues of discrimination.

➢ **Advocacy with District Level Officials**: The Equity Forum members have written letters regarding the condition of their schools to Block Officers, District Officials and other school authorities. They have also demanded that they should be provided with proper facilities and infrastructure as mandated under the RTE Act. Earlier, the children would clean the schools daily – this task was typically allocated to the Dalit children. The children demanded that cleaning staff should be appointed in the schools. Due to pressure from the children along with CLO members, the Sakricha Village got a new building in the school for its students. They complained to the school management committees (SMCs) about the inadequate numbers of teachers in their schools and teachers who would not teach. Due to their complaint, some schools now have additional teaching staff.

➢ **Improved implementation of the Mid-Day Meal program**: The children have ensured that the food provided by the midday meal is of good quality. They shared in the FGDs that due to the pressure they put on the authorities, additional midday meal workers were hired. The schools also have cleaner and better utensils for cooking as well as eating.

➢ **Building perspectives on social inclusion**: The children shared that they were able to properly comprehend the issues of exclusion and discrimination through the Equity Forum trainings. They felt it was very important to have socially inclusive policies in schools to

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**The Attitude of Teachers towards Dalit Students**

Initially, the students involved with the Equity Forum were very scared of raising issues of discrimination to their teachers. After their performance the teachers would scold the students for their performance and claims that issues did not exist and that they were learning strange things. Nevertheless, the Equity Forum members continued to perform as they enjoyed the puppetry. Now, there is an observable change in the behavior of their teachers and they are no longer afraid of them. The teachers now support them in such activities and allow them leave for training, if requested. (without shouting and scolding). Their rapport with their teachers has been much improved.

"Earlier we were very scared of the..."
ensure that Dalit and other children from socially excluded communities are able to access education without discrimination13.

(ii) The Importance of Promoting Social Inclusion in Schools

(a) Creation of leadership: Mechanisms such as Khel Se Mel, Equity Forum, Bal Sansad and Meena Manch created spaces through which the leadership of Dalit children emerged. These were safe spaces where they could articulate and raise issues of discrimination and other challenges they faced. By institutionalizing these methods in the school system there was effective participation and representation of Dalit children.

(b) Advocating for their rights: These different methods lead to an interesting process whereby children promote human rights for themselves and other children. As such, children became the rights facilitators in their schools and the community.

(c) Community awareness on social inclusion: It is interesting to observe that through these processes, an entire community was involved in learning about social inclusion and its impact on marginalized communities. This awareness was created on different issues by cultural programs and puppet shows by the Children’s Equity Forum in the villages.

(d) Change in mindset towards girls: In the last few years there has been a change in the village towards girls because of the awareness created by Children’s Equity Forum, Meena Manch and Bal Sansad. Awareness has been raised on the on education of girls, gender discrimination, child marriage and dowry practices. Khel Se Mel was an important activity through which the boys and girls started to play games in mixed groups. It is very encouraging to observe girls playing all games including football.

(e) Proper implementation of government provisions and entitlements: Through these platforms children were able to ensure that there was proper implementation of the Midday Meal, that students from marginalized communities received their scholarships on time and that the Right to Education Act was being implemented. Children could pressurize the school authorities by raising these issues continuously through the medium of the Equity Forum, Bal Sansad and Meena Manch.

3.1.4 The Importance of Role Models in Developing Positive Identity of the Self and Society

CSEI has been faced with the need for role models from marginalized communities that have the potential to inspire children to move beyond the challenges they experience. Dalit children who face extreme challenges and struggles in accessing fair and decent education require role models with whom they can relate and can be motivated by to progress in life irrespective of the hurdles the face. Often, Dalit children cannot relate to the leaders portrayed in their books as their lives are vastly different from the lives of the children, namely with regards to socio-economic status. Dr.

13 The observations of this section are based on the discussions with CSEI team Members and Interviews with Children, Members of ASF and CLO leaders.
Baba Saheb Ambedkar is an important role model for children from marginalized communities as they can relate to his stories of overcoming discrimination and achieving excellence in life.

In the discussions, all the children expressed their deep admiration for Baba Saheb. The children felt connected to him as he was from the Dalit community and had experienced being treated as an untouchable. They could relate to his stories of discrimination which acted as barrier to his education and his subsequent determination to study through the hardships he faced. They felt extremely proud that Baba Saheb – a member from their own community – wrote the Indian Constitution which entitled “us” (Dalits) a number of significant rights. Baba Saheb is their role model and they all wished to emulate him by continuing to persevere with their studies despite the challenges. The children desired to have a casteless society where there was no discrimination and everyone was treated equally irrespective of their caste and gender. They desired to become educated so that they may live with dignity. It is very important that these role models are included in the school curriculum to allow children to learn about them. At present, the histories of marginalized communities are missing in school textbooks.

3.1.5 Challenges

There were some challenges while working with the children from the schools. Animators and block coordinators visited every school and spent time observing the various activities and interacting with children and teachers. They spent time to understand how the school functioned, became familiar with the teachers and the Head teachers. Identifying patterns of discrimination and social exclusion were also on the radar. Given the resistance of the teachers and schools to have outsiders observe or engage with the school, the animators faced many barriers in their engagements and employed various strategies to engage with the school. They tried to work with the school to solve any long-standing problems faced by the school and engaging the community. This improved the situation in a few schools, but the Khel Se Mel activities provided better spaces for engagement, as previously mentioned. It was observed that issues related to behavior were mostly sorted after the complaints, however the infrastructural issues that the children faced in the schools are still pending. They are taking a longer time to rectify because of the lack of will power of the authorities to take them up more seriously.

3.2 Module 2: Ambedkar Student Forum: Harnessing the Youth Social Dividend

3.2.1 Formation of Ambedkar Student Forum

The Ambedkar Students Forum (ASF) has been initiated to create a platform for Dalit youth to enhance their leadership. In working for the development of marginalized children and youth, CSEI feels it is important to recognize the link between the development of the former and latter together. This continuity is very important for sustainable development. The ASF can enhance the inclusion of Dalit educated youth in the developmental process by encouraging them to take the lead in taking the education agenda forward. The forum also equips Dalit youth for the continuation of their education by way of providing support and guidance for entrance into higher education. The CLOs in the five districts took the initiative to identify the Dalit youth and conducted discussions in

14 This section is written from the personal sharing and admiration of Children for Dr. Ambedkar in the FDG’s.
their tolas with the youth. Initially, around 300 students (studying in schools and at college level) were mobilized by the CLOs at the panchayat level.

Members of ASF range from the 8th standard to those at PhD level. At present, 14 ASFs are functioning across 7 districts in Bihar, comprising more than 1000 members studying in high schools, college and university. These ASFs came together at the state level to initiate its state body – the Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum (BASF) – in the year 2012. BASF’s core committee is comprised of representatives from the different panchayat level ASFs. They frequently meet and envisage to develop this unique and first ever platform of Dalit and Adivasi students in the state with an aim to organize and create support mechanisms for Dalit and Adivasi girls and boys, educated Dalit and Adivasi youth, and adolescents towards a full course of non-discriminatory, equitable, quality and inclusive education and establish the link between schooling, personality development and higher education.¹⁵

The process of initiating the ASF at the panchayat has proceeded following the group showing an interest in building ASF; they are then given four weeks to undertake following steps alongside their studies:

- Meet every Sunday with one clear agenda (the agenda is largely designed during the visioning process)
- Identify spaces (community hall, donated space) which can be shaped into an Education Resource Center and can serve as a learning place for ASF.
- List out all barriers being faced by the members in the educational institutions they are attending and look for solutions locally in consultation with BASF
- Create a list of support groups and mentors who are available in the panchayat and willing to be part of support and mentor groups for each ASF
- All of these processes are documented and shared in each meeting with every member for follow up and to be connected with BASF

Initially, the main function of the ASF members was to establish their forums in each panchayat where they could collectively meet to read, learn new things and gather information for their higher education. The most significant outcome of this program has been the emergence of ASF at the panchayat level which has given shape to a new form of education advocacy by young second line leaders from Dalit community (i.e. Dalit youth studying in colleges and university). This process has facilitated direct linkages with school-going children and also the community. These young leaders are committed in improving the education system by making it more socially inclusive for their communities. At present, there are more than 1000 students who are members of the ASF and are ready to take up activities to help facilitate change to the education system. These young leaders certainly have the potential to be agents of change and can be expected to have a long-term impact on the development of the community. Past experience suggests that they are often able to find community spaces to hold the ASF meetings. Ideas of cooperative learning, career guidance

¹⁵ The findings of this module are based on the series of interview conducted with the ASF & BASF members. Also, the information provided in this chapter is based on the intense discussion with the Bihar state team members. Most of the information here is gathered from the field work in Bihar.
materials, children’s books, reading and writing materials and quizzes are able to mobilize enough support at panchayat level. In fact, community halls have been entirely taken over by the ASF in some of the panchayats.

At the state level, BASF aims to build an independent and sustainable platform of Dalit and Adivasi students where they will continuously strive to access education, take up higher education and become socially, legally and politically aware to fight against the exclusion and discrimination based on caste and gender in order to live a life with respect and dignity. The BASF is thus an institutional structure that can promote the concerned citizens (children and youth) themselves to own and drive the agenda of social change and educational mobility in a campaign mode. Several school and college going students are being mobilized by the district/panchayat level CLOs and educated youth under the banner of BASF.

The name ‘Ambedkar Students Forum’ was finalized after intense discussion and debate among its members. There was concern regarding how comfortable students from other socially excluded communities would feel in the name of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. However, all members agreed that the best identity for a socially inclusive process is that of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Those who believe in the values of Baba Saheb Ambedkar or are from a marginalized community can become a member of ASF.

Youth are a very important group for the development of any country or community. This is doubly important for Dalit communities, as the young leaders are first generation learners and are emerging to generate change for their community. This is the generation which draws its inspiration from Baba Saheb Ambedkar and truly believes in the principles to educate, agitate and organize.

3.2.2 The Role and Responsibilities of ASF members: The Journey of Me to We

The role of ASF members is to understand self, society and to develop a rights-based perspective and equity approach. The ASF structure at the panchayat level has focal youth who are its office bearers. These youth leaders then reach out to their communities and youth as role models and address issues affecting the education of children and other issues affecting the community. Their responsibilities are two-fold towards the children and as well as the community. Some of the key roles of its members are as follows:

1. **Raising awareness in the community**: Members of the ASF raise awareness on issues affecting their communities on the issues of caste, untouchability, discrimination, gender discrimination, child marriage and dowry, among others. They also share information about government provisions and entitlements for Dalits such as reservations policies, scholarships, funds under Schedule Caste Sub Plan and Tribal Sub Plan, provisions under Right to Education Act and Right to Information Act and legal information on Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. The ASF members also have a cultural team that conducts plays on RTE and RTI Act.

2. **Ensuring that students do not drop-out**: The ASF members ensure that there are no drop-out students in their village. When a child leaves school to support her/his parents, (as most
Dalit children come from economically very poor families, they convince the parents to continue sending their child to school emphasizing value of education to move economically forward. If the child drops out due to discrimination in school, ASF members go and speak to the school authorities and notify them that they will file a complaint under the SC/ST (PoA) Act if such practices continue.

3. Monitoring schools under RTE Act: The ASF members regularly monitor the schools in their villages to ensure that the RTE Act is being properly implemented. Accordingly, they file regular complainants if the Act is not implemented. They communicate on the status of the schools to the district officials. The members also ensure that scholarships are paid on time to the Dalit children. Furthermore, they hold awareness programs on the RTE Act in the schools.

4. Regular meetings with its members: The ASF members meet every Sunday in the Education Resource Center where they discuss various issues and share information regarding the work they have done. It is a safe space where the members can share their feelings and talk about their issues. The members regularly have discussions on social issues and learn from each other’s knowledge.

5. Strengthening of the Forum: The ASF members want to strengthen the Forum by collectively working together and realizing their responsibility towards it. Earlier the boys and girls would not interact with each other but now there is no hesitation and they work together. They feel this Forum is very important as it has given them the space through which they can raise their issues; it also gives them the opportunity to learn new things and gives them exposure to the various options of pursuing higher education. Many other young people are also coming forward to become members of the Forum and to strengthen it.

6. Supporting Dalit students in accessing higher education: The ASF members support Dalit students by helping them complete school and college forms. They also teach Dalit children from the 6th to 12th standard in the Education Resource Centers who have difficulty in some subjects. ASF members also focus to ensure and support students to study well and continue on to higher education. They also take the students to participate in different programs and trainings at the state level, for exposure.

7. Self-development: The main objective in initially setting up the ASF was to promote the self-development of the individual. The focus was to make members aware on various Acts, government schemes and policies, to guide them on different higher education and different career options and to help these members became more aware of their rights.

3.2.3 Engagement of ASF members with Dalit Children in the Schools
➢ **Raising awareness and organizing training sessions for children:** Members of the ASF share information and raise awareness on RTE Act with the children who are involved in Bal Sansad and Meena Manch. The ASF members coordinated the puppetry training along with partner CLOs.

➢ **Advocacy for Social Justice Ministers:** The ASF members and the CLO partners were involved in the advocacy with the schools for the creation of two new positions within Bal Sansad (the Social Justice Minister and the Deputy Social Justice Minister). They also make sure that there is one Dalit boy and a girl for these posts. Thus, the ASF members ensured that there was representation and participation of Dalit children and other marginalized children in the Bal Sansad.

➢ **Trainers for Khel Se Mel:** The ASF members were trained in Khel Se Mel activities and used to go to the school in the last period for these activities. They ensured that there was participation of all children in the games. The trainers shared that in the beginning there was hesitation between boys and girls to play together and dominant caste children would never play with Dalit children, however Khel Se Mel helped to break these barriers of caste and gender discrimination. As the ASF members were engaged with the schools and the community, they were familiar with children and also made sure that there were no drop-outs after the mid-day meal from the school.

### 3.2.4 Education Resource Centers (ERCs)

The Education Resource Center is a learning space where Dalit children and youth can come to read, write, study, discuss, and plan activities. The purpose behind setting up the resource center was to create a space for the youth to study and develop themselves. The establishment of the ERC is a process towards creating an institutional space in the community for ASF members to hold weekly meetings, organize discussions on project-related activities and create supportive environments for Dalit students to study after school or whenever they are in the villages. Earlier, it was observed that Dalit students used to roam around villages, however the ERC as a learning center is being promoted as a place where ASF members may come any time and study with the help of books provided in the library.

The ERC currently has books published by Eklavya, science kits and competition-related books and materials that are for daily use. Membership registers, attendance registers with minutes of every meeting, identity cards (for members and office bearers), library book lists with book issue register, a book shelf, a steel trunk, some sports materials and sitting mats etc. are already available in the ERC for its smooth functioning. This space has made a lot of impact on the youth and the community. During FGDs, the ASF members shared that the ERC provides them with things that are not available at home, such as books, newspapers and games. The ASF members had a meeting with the panchayat members to have ERCs in the community center of the Panchayat Bhavan; in some places where the panchayat did not allow this, members hold the meetings in their own homes. The rationale behind having the ERC in a government space was also to institutionalize this space for the Dalit community in the long run.

*Some of the activities done in the ERC:*
Dalit youth learn new things and gain knowledge by reading books and newspapers. Children and youth can come to the ERC to study for their exams. ASF members teach school children every day. Short trainings of ASF members are held here. ASF members have regular discussions on social issues. Every Sunday there is a meeting of the ASF members. A register is maintained for minutes. Members plan weekly activities. ASF Core committee members share information regarding higher education opportunities and other development and exposure information with other members.

These are the few activities that are done in the ERC on a regular basis. The Dalit youth consider this space very important for their personal development. It has provided them with a sense of belonging and a place of their own where they can go and meet their friends and talk about their problems or issues. It is also an intellectual space where the youth are critically thinking about their issues and changes to be made for the development of their community.

**3.2.5 Signature Programs: Building Capacities of ASF Members and Exploring Significant Ways for Engagement with Schools and Community**

Dalit students often lack information and knowledge on education pathways for building a bright career and hence often lack the aspiration to do so. As these young students are the first generation learners in their families it is very important to support them in their access to higher education. Some programs were launched to build the capacities of the ASF members to support them in their own personal development. The ASF members were very enthusiastic about these programs as it was benefitting and giving them exposure on different aspects of education. The approach was ‘Me to We’ with the concept that the individual gets informed and he/she is in a better position to help others from the community. CSEI and partner CLOs involved the youth in various ways during their vacations and free time, which facilitated them to develop perspectives on various issues and think critically.

(a) **Meri Sameeksha:** Often Dalit youth and youth from other socially excluded communities have no clear career or development goals. They do not have guidance to review their interests or skills and often drop out or accept whatever is offered to them. These choices are constrained by various personal and contextual conditionalities. One of the basic processes that the ASF members engage with is ‘Meri Sameeksha’ (self-assessment). A pre-designed format is given to members to fill out what they think are their strengths, barriers and aspirations. They were asked to make realistic goals and ambitions for themselves. Often, when asked how they planned to achieve their ambitions the only possible solution was to study hard; other than this, none of them knew how to pursue their aspiration. This process helped in self-assessment in acknowledging one’s interests, talents and to review possible and practical options before them. Based on this information, various options for education and careers were shared with them, this included information on colleges, the fee
structure and scholarship schemes. The career guidance program made the youth aware of the different career options based on their skills and higher education available in India.

(b) **Higher Education Link Programme (HELP):** HELP was initiated to streamline information dissemination and career guidance workshops for Dalit students studying in school, college and university. It is envisaged as a program to support the ASF members in deciding their future education and career choices based on informed knowledge. Information is collated on various colleges, courses, fee structures, scholarships and hostel facilities. Workshops were organized in each district for the ASF members. ASF organized the HELP program in each district. CSEI recognizes the need to make this program more systemic and expand it to larger groups of children in the state. During the pilot phase, around ten students appeared for TISS and one got selected for a Master’s in social work (from Sadokhar village in Chenari block of Rohtas). A few gained entrance into engineering and B.Pharma courses. Unfortunately, some of the students discontinued the course owing to the systematic nature of discrimination in higher education.

(c) **Navodaya Ab Door Nahin:** The aim of this campaign was to make Dalit students and community aware about special schools run by central and state government such as Navodaya schools. The ASF members (with the help of the CLO partners) conducted awareness programs in the villages on the provision of the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) schools in each district. They helped children fill up the Navodaya forms and in some places also started coaching Dalit students to prepare for the exams. In the first year, 213 students underwent the orientation and some did the coaching. An interface of the partner CLOs was held with the Navodaya Samiti in Patna which provided the application forms.

When several problems and cases of discrimination were shared with commissioner of the Navodaya Samiti, he agreed to enhance proper information dissemination and institutional support to Dalit students in applying for JNV. In the second year, almost 1000 students appeared for entrance examination but no one passed the test. This raised major concerns; given that there is reservation for Dalit and Tribal students in the Navodaya schools it was questioned: who was accessing these admissions? The quality of education imparted in government schools was not facilitating children’s to access JNV schools. Children who studied in private schools were gaining admission into JNV which was prohibited. An observation of the JNV students also revealed that they came from higher socio-economic backgrounds, even among Dalits. Hence, there are concerns that the JNV admissions are not transparent; they are supposed to admit 70% of students from rural and poor backgrounds and those studying in government or government-aided schools – not private schools.

(d) **Post a Letter Campaign:** This campaign was aimed at monitoring the Right to Education Act. Each ASF unit had developed an interesting Grievance Redressal Mechanism by formally writing letters to all the concerned officials about status of their schools, or about particular problems in their school. All infrastructural (such as no drinking water and no toilets) and other complaints (such as of scholarships and uniform) were sent through registered post to the Block Education Officer, District Education Officer, State Principal Secretary of the Education Department, SCPCR and NCPCR. These letters were posted by the ASF members on their letter heads. The SCPCR organized Jan Adalat and Jan Sunwai in the Rohtas district and brought together the schools, the education administration and the community. This led
to some positive impact – in some schools infrastructure improvements were made. Head Masters called the ASF member at the time of distribution of scholarship. This process was aimed at adopting a strategy for sustained advocacy for the proper implementation of the RTE Act.

(e) ‘Zero Out of School’ Campaign (Namankan Abhiyan): Promoting inclusion in schools has two dimensions – bringing back drop-out children into schools and eliminating exclusionary practices and discrimination within schools. To address the first problem, the ASF mapped out all school age children in their habitations. They then began an awareness and motivation campaign called ‘Namankan Abhiyan’ (Enrolment Campaign) in 80 tolas, aiming at a 100% enrollment rate of students belonging to SC/ST communities in these tolas. The ASF is currently following up on the enrollment and would like to turn round the situation by promoting the enrollment and retention of all children in their tolas. ASF gained recognition at the community level and motivated the members to take up the issue more seriously.

The positive developments from these programs included the encouragement of many students applying for higher education, even in cases where there was a five-year break in between studies. Students who were confused what subjects to study gained clarity. The program gave them information on Central Universities and the different options available for studying. The ASF members further shared the information with other youth in their villages. After engaging with this process, Amarjeet – one of the members of BASF – experienced a positive impact on his life.

Today, Amarjeet is among the core-group of the Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum (BASF) in Bihar and is actively engaged. He is from Rohtas district of Bihar. In 2011, Amarjeet was student of class 9 when Ravinder from Jan Adhikar Kendra (JAK) 16 in Rohtas visited their school and conducted a session regarding students’ issues in education. An important dimension to this session was the problems faced by Dalit students. The JAK team visited his village and identified the SMC members and discussed the idea of having a children and youth group in the village to promote education. The SMC members suggested Amarjeet as he was active in the community.

CSEI organized a three-day leadership training course through Khel Se Mel (KSM) for about 30 young women and men from five districts in Bihar, where the five Community-Led Partners worked. This was the first training Amarjeet attended and it helped build his confidence and skills. He also built relationships with the young people who came from across the state.

Amarjeet’s activities have included the following:

Promoting ASF in the panchayat: Back in his district, Amarjeet began to be actively engaged in building the ASF in their panchayat. He, along with two more friends, would cycle to about 12 Dalit habitations in the panchayat and meet with students and encourage them to join the ASF. They had

16 Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) partnered with Jan Adhikar Kendra (JAK) from 2011 to 2014 to promote social equity and inclusion in education. The process included building JAK perspectives on social exclusion – equity-inclusion in education, building skills in working with children and young people, taking up various children-youth and community related interventions to promote equitable quality education among Dalit and other marginalised children in Bihar.
difficulty in convincing parents to allow their daughters to join the ASF; they eventually convinced a number of parents and thus a number of girls joined the ASF. Parents also became confident to send them to Patna and other training programs with them.

**Promoting equity in education:** Amarjeet and his friends identified many issues faced by children in their schooling. A dominant community Principal would not release scholarships to Dalit children if their parents did not work in his fields. Further, teachers often spoke tenderly to dominant caste children while they were rude to Dalit children. Amarjeet and his friends raised these issue when the Education Minister came to their village. This led to enquiry by the DEO and the teacher was suspended for six months. This was a great lesson and confidence builder to the ASF team.

His teachers were not happy with his engagement and complained to his parents. However, realizing his good intentions, his family did not object to his engagement. They only cautioned him to be careful and be safe as going against teachers and dominant community can be unsafe and dangerous, particularly as he travelled by cycle across the villages.

**Puppetry training:** CSEI organized a puppetry training for the ASF members and this helped build another skill and interest for the young people. They took this medium to their schools to address various education issues in their school. Children enjoyed enacting themes through puppetry and teachers also did not feel threatened. This helped build the confidence and self esteem of Dalit children and also address some of the education issues in the schools.

**Video Volunteers:** In July 2013, Poor Areas Civil Society (PACS) Program of DFID collaborated with Video Volunteers to identify and train young people in video-journalism to raise their community and development issues. CSEI referred Amarjeet to this program and he was selected for the same. He underwent 15 days of training to handle the camera and building cases and issues. He thus became a journalist and he was soon needed to exercise this skill. On the 15th August and as the Dalit community celebrated Independence Day near the Ravidas statue, they were attacked by the dominant community. Amarjeet captured these events on his camera and this became the basis for taking up the case. He further interviewed senior officials including the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police, Chairperson of the Scheduled Caste Commission and the Home Secretary in making a video of this event. He recognized the potential in videos of raising the issues of his community – whose voices are not usually heard. This video was selected by the Video Volunteers and he received Rs.2500.

**Continued education:** Amarjeet completed class 10 and class 11. While he studied commerce in class 12, he opted for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) at graduation. Even though he was eligible to do commerce in graduation, he hesitated as that would mean he had to have extra coaching which is costly and he would have to attend college regularly and he did not have resources for both. Now he goes to college about once in ten days and continues with his ASF and video journalism work.

**Building the Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum (BASF):** He is active in the BASF and member of the core committee. He spends time planning BASF building at the state level and travels to guide other BASF bodies in the district. He develops videos on different community issues and makes some income through this with the Video Volunteers. His video is on You Tube and has been selected for the Doordarshan program.
3.2.6 Relevance of Ambedkar Student Forum: Strengthening of Youth and Second Line Leadership

CSEI concerns itself in promoting leadership qualities among the youth through i) formal leadership training programs; ii) exposure and participation opportunities; iii) self and collective reading or discussion processes and iv) taking up programs with the community. A brief of this process is described below:

➢ Leadership training of ASF members (April 2012): Several rounds of short-term and long-term leadership training with members of ASF was organized by CSEI. The President, Secretary and Treasurer of each of the ASFs were given leadership training by professional trainers. A total of 38 students and youth from the ten federations participated in this training. It was activity-based training, with various activities to help the ASF members analyze their capacities and realize their potential and talents as leaders. Reading exercises were built into the process to strengthen their reading habits and also build theoretical awareness on issues of their concern. Social analysis was also a part of the process. Many group exercises were also carried out to give them an understanding of the qualities of a good leader. The training helped the youth leaders to enhance their skills and capacities. Khel Se Mel training was also organized for the ASF members in which two members per ASF were selected as Master Trainers. ASF members have also attended trainings on legal mechanisms such as on Right to Education Act, Right to Information Act and on budget allocations within SCSP and TSP.

➢ Exposure trips and ASF member participation in different forums: The ASF members were taken on an exposure trip to Udaipur where they took part in the National Youth Convention organized by JOSH and other groups in the October 2012. It served as the platform for the ASF members to learn and interact with youth belonging to different castes and classes from many states. Further, it also enabled them to observe and understand national-level gathering, networking and collaborative efforts. Participation in such national platforms gave them a chance to interact with student bodies that have come from different parts of the country and share their experiences, issues, ideas to build a better future. The ASF members actively participated in the protest caravan on violence against Dalit women in Haryana for 10 days. They volunteered for a week, organizing team members for a national rally on amendments in the SC/ST Atrocity Act (organized by NCDHR in November 2012). Further, members also participated in the National Dalit and Adivasi Women’s Congress in Mumbai in February 2013, thus giving them an exposure to larger movement groups. They participated in the ‘International Youth for Peace Forum’ held in Chandigarh, the national week long campaign in Delhi to legislate the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan and Tribal Sub Plan. Some of the ASF members, children groups and CLO members had their first exposure outside the country attending the People’s South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (PSAAR) events in Kathmandu November 2014. Many of these opportunities were the first time for the ASF members; be it going to Chandigarh, Delhi, Udaipur or Kathmandu or participating in a rally, protest or campaign.

➢ Strengthening learning at the community level through ERC: Setting up libraries in the ERCs was proposed as a strategy to promote learning for ASF members in the panchayats. The state team reviewed the proposal and arranged for books for setting up the library in each
district in coordination with the CLO partners and the ASF members. As the funds were not sufficient, ASF and CLO partners decided to raise local resources from the community (ASF members also made contributions). ASF members are responsible for the daily maintenance of the library. BASF office bearers were oriented on library management and how to institutionalize this space as study center for Dalit students and utilize their spare time when they are in their habitations. The ASF members plan to regularize the membership fees which will further enhance the ERC as model learning centers and attract commitment from other Dalit intellectuals, professionals and government employees to support its functioning.

ASF members shared that the trainings and workshops organized by CSEI has supported them in learning new things and given them huge exposure. It has also helped them to become confident and not be shy. We also learnt to be more articulate in expressing our thoughts. It has developed our skills. Moreover, it has united the marginalized communities and given shape to lead the movement to move forward.

3.2.7 Baba Saheb Ambedkar as a Role Model for the Emerging Dalit Leadership

We get our discriminated identity with birth. We need to challenge the discrimination and exclusion practiced against us. Rather than being ashamed of our identity, we need to confidently assert ourselves. Baba Saheb is our role model in this. We do not want our future generations to suffer and struggle as we do. ASF is a very good forum for us (Dalit youth) as it gives us an opportunity to dream, grow and develop our personality. We, as ASF members, want to work hard to take forward the dreams of Baba Saheb Ambedkar of ending caste-based discrimination. We see Baba Saheb as our Guru. He wrote the constitution which guarantees us many rights which are denied to us on daily basis. When we feel disheartened we draw inspiration from the stories of Dr. Ambedkar who after many hardships and struggles worked so hard to study and also enormously contributed in the development for the community. We aim to annihilate caste and have a caste-free society without discrimination and untouchability. Education is very important for the development of our community. Dalit children need to get educated and move ahead, as only through education we can liberate our community. Education is important for economically strengthening our communities. Dalit students drop out from schools due to various reasons but no one acknowledges this. We want these children to go back to schools and study so that they may be at the same level as other dominant caste students. Today we can speak for our rights because Ambedkar stood up for us and now it is our responsibility to take his dream forward. He taught us to fight for our rights and we want our community to be aware of their rights. We have to struggle collectively for our rights that it can develop our community. We have learnt a lot from the teachings of Ambedkar and we strategize for the future changes by reading his work. We want to take the teachings of Ambedkar to everyone rich, poor, women and disabled. Our country cannot develop till the Dalit community gets educated and is treated equally and there is justice in this society.

From the discussions with ASF members in Bihar

3.2.8 Challenges of Working with the Youth
There are some challenges that the ASF members face while working with the community at the field level. In the interviews, they shared that initially their guardians were very worried about what they were doing in the ERC; they also thought that these young people are just wasting their time. The girls were constantly questioned by their parents regarding their attendance to the ERC. Sometimes, when they would get slightly late after the trainings the parents would shout at them and often threaten that they would not be allowed to go next time. Initially, many girls left due to societal pressures. The families were concerned about the safety of the girls. It is a big challenge for most female members of the ASF as they have to balance their time between studies and housework and the social pressure to be members of the ASF.

People from the dominant community would demotivate the ASF members by constantly taunting and harassing them. They try very hard to break the confidence of the new emerging leadership. They would often report to the parents of ASF members that they were wasting their time by doing useless things and that such activities had no future for them. As most of the Dalit youth are from economically very poor families they were regularly asked by their parents to focus on their studies and not to waste time in such activities. It took some time to convince the parents and the community people that the work they are doing is to bring a challenge for their community so that the coming generation does not have to face discrimination and violence.

3.3 Module 3: Affirming Community Confidence in Education

3.3.1 Introduction

The outreach in 50 schools and in around 80 Dalit habitations have covered about 4500 families and engaged the community in this project. However, CSEI has been concerned about the growing disillusion on education among the community. There is much evidence to suggest that the community is concerned with educating their children, including many families trying to provide their children private school education. However, the inability of gaining quality education, be it in the government or the private, the difficulties of accessing skills and attributes that can gain an employment, the shrinking employment spaces with the government and the inability to access private sector employment have undermined community confidence in education. In more recent times, there has been increased concern regarding the decreasing numbers of Dalit children enrolling in schools. In this context, it is important to re-affirm the confidence of the community in education and its relevance. Hence the interventions of the project have made it a point to involve the community in all possible spaces. An important dimension has been to have visible spaces and programs involving the community in education. Thus, Khel Se Mel, Ambedkar Students Forum, Education Resource Centres, Vyaktitva Vikas Kendra, Shiksha Samvads and Shiksha Samman Divas are all located within the community. Efforts are also made to raise the community issues that are barriers to the education of both girls and boys; the students and the youth forums are encouraged to articulate them in the community and in the schools. Recognized members of the community to the community are brought in public spaces and interface to re-affirm the confidence in education. It is encouraging that some members of the community have also come forward to support different education initiatives too. A brief on these follows:

3.3.2 Community Engagement in Education
➢ **Shiksha Samman Divas:** By and large Dalit children attend local government schools. The Shiksha Samman Divas (Education Dignity Day) is an award ceremony to encourage Dalit children who have been working hard. All students who did anything important in education are recognized and felicitated; it does not matter whether they are successful or not – whether they appeared for class 10 or class 12, took the entrance examination for JNV, completed any level of education or appeared for a new level or those who are involved in the Bal Sansad and Meena Manch. It is a means to encourage Dalit children and appreciate them for their efforts. The purpose is to encourage students to take such efforts in their forthcoming educational life and for the community to feel proud of their children (by respecting educated Dalit youth as role models in their villages). The community is present to witness the felicitation as it is held in the midst of the community. In addition, community members who have supported or felicitated education in any way are also publicly felicitated. This may be a parent who agreed to send their child back to school, who agreed to postpone the marriage of their daughter and send her back to school, who agreed to let girls come to the ASF, who allowed girls to be part of exposure programs, who provided space and support to the ASF and in other ways.

➢ **Vyaktitva Vikas Kendra:** Vyaktitva Vikas Kendra (VVK) is an innovation BASF directed towards changing the stark realities of education for Dalit Youth in Bihar. The innovation combines the intentions of promoting education and creating viable spaces for them to access opportunities. The concern to continue education and access opportunities is seen from the fact that all the young people, including girls, go to privately-run tuition centers with the intention to be able to do their best. They hope to improve their knowledge and opportunities, given that they do not have access to quality education or information. However, these are costly and often the private institutions do not do justice to the efforts or the costs these children invest; they are primarily profit-making centers and thrive on the poor quality of government schools and colleges. The Vyaktitva Vikas Kendras are more than ‘tuition centres’ and they are not for profit – they are an alternative space. It is different from tuition centers in providing access to the alternative pedagogy of Experiential Education (EE) to build on their life skills and not just rote learning. These VVKs also function as an organizing and engaging tool for BASF leaders situated at the block level. At present, BASF has recently initiated three VVKs as a space for the ASF members to come together at the block level and introduce skills like computer education, social awareness and critical information.

➢ **Community Sponsored Scholarship Scheme:** The Community Sponsored Scholarship Scheme (CSSS) is an innovation that emerged in consultation with some recognized members of the community. It is similar to the concept of child sponsorship where each child has one sponsor/individual who supports the child in some way or the other. This scheme is designed to promote community participation in supporting and promoting higher education among Dalit and other marginalized groups. Prominent successful individuals from different walks of the society who want to give back to society are identified and approached by the organization to become sponsors. Similarly, students from poor and underprivileged families who have completed graduation and need help for higher education are identified. The CLO connects the student to its sponsor and monitor the
student’s progress for the sponsor. The sponsor can decide to what extent he/she wants to support the student. The sponsor can decide to provide financial help covering the holistic expenses or provide support to specific expenses like college fee, study materials, books, hostel fee and emergency medical fee, among others. Bank accounts would be opened in the name of the student and the sponsors can directly deposit money to the student monthly/quarterly/half-yearly/annually and support the student’s education. The sponsor would receive regular letters from the student, photos and progress report would be shared so as to develop the relationship and give the sense of attachment and pride.

3.3.3 Challenges

Re-affirming the confidence of the community in education has many challenges, education being complex and the fruits not immediately evident. However, the community also recognizes that there are not many other opportunities for socio-economic mobility and are willing to invest in education, however difficult it may be. Both students and their families have to address many barriers in the process. An important issue is the poor quality of and poor information access they have to education. There are not adequate systems and mechanisms to address these barriers and the processes in this project are only small initiatives and need further sharpening and scaling up. The poor economic conditions of the family further become dampeners to the process. Hence, the need for state support mechanisms to create equity measures that can support every child that wishes to access skills, education and opportunities becomes apparent. These equity measures necessarily need to go beyond the family disabilities. Strengthening girls’ participation and access is an important dimension that has to be continuously strategized. The project has put in mechanisms – promoting 25-30% members of girls in ASF, ensuring 50% girls leadership in the ASF committees and specific focus on barriers of girls to education and mobility – that need to be constantly supported and monitored. The idea of community sponsorship is new and needs to be taken a long way ahead.

3.4 Module 4: Making Growth Just and Inclusive- Strengthening CLOs from Marginalized Communities

3.4.1 CSEI Partnership with Community Led Organizations

CSEI recognizes the potential of working with community led organizations for several reasons - firstly, to strengthen the leadership from the marginalized communities such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims at the grassroots level; secondly, these CLO’s understand the specific issues of the community people and can relate to it as they are from the same community; thirdly, community people have a sense of confidence and trust in them through their previous involvement in the work; fourthly, these organizations are very important to make spaces on the issues of marginalized communities in the larger civil society movements and further, to ensure sustainability of work at the grassroots level.

The criterion that CSEI used in the selection of these CLOs was that the leadership and decision-making should be from the Dalit community, as Dalits are the focus group of this project. The organizations should have some basic understanding on issues of education and social exclusion and also be keen in promoting activities related to education in addition to their work on the civil and political rights of Dalits. The final selection of the CLO partners were also influenced by their current involvement in education, the nature of work they have taken up so far, their field presence and
their human resource capacity in terms of volunteers involved with the organization. Visits to different organizations were made by team members in order to understand the interests and capacity of possible partner organizations. After exploring various options on the ground, the program identified five organizations working in five blocks in five districts to partner and implement the program collectively and in collaboration with CSEI.

**Partner Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Organization Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Chief Functionary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan Adhikaar Kendra</td>
<td>Rohtas</td>
<td>Santosh Kumar/Ravinder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gaurav Gram Shakti</td>
<td>Bhagalpur</td>
<td>Ghanshyam Deenbandhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sant Kabir Seva Samiti</td>
<td>Begusarai</td>
<td>Hans Kumar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Paramount Global Welfare Society</td>
<td>Jamui</td>
<td>Bishnudev Manjhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikha Manch</td>
<td>Patna</td>
<td>Pratima Kumari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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After their selection a detailed discussion was done with the chief functionaries on every aspect of the project which resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding on roles and responsibilities, tasks and outputs, budget provisions, monitoring and accountability systems. Each partner CLO, along with CSEI (through field reviews and visits), identified two panchayats for the piloting of the program. The program thus directly covered ten panchayats in five blocks of five different districts.

Partners further identified one block coordinator and two youth facilitators to implement the program in the field. The chief functionaries from two out of the five partners decided to fully engage themselves with the program by taking responsibilities as block coordinators. In the case of the three other partners, the chief functionaries appointed block coordinators and facilitated the process. Thus, a total of 15 persons were identified for the field to work in the ten panchayats. Given that there has not been much work by Dalit CLOs in education development work, familiarity and concern on education issues was an important dimension in the selection of the CLO partners. The coordination and facilitation team at the state level included a state director, two program coordinators (program and advocacy) and an accounts person. The CSEI office was set up for better coordination and proper implementation of the program in Patna in July 2011.

**3.4.2 Building Collective Understanding on Education**

The current interventions of the CLOs were primarily concerned with land rights, NREGA, monitoring atrocities on Dalits, monitoring violence against Dalit women, mobilizing for education and promoting government entitlements for the community. Initially, the project aim was to bring the team in common frame of mind to work on education.
An orientation program was organized for the partner CLOs that focused on building an understanding of RTE and looking at it from an equity-inclusion lens. This workshop had different sessions which developed an understanding on the history of education in India, national and international civil society movements related to educational policies, the framework for inclusive education and an understanding the sections of the RTE Act with a special focus on sections 8 and 9 on non-discrimination and the role of civil society in policy advocacy. The collective processes were further strengthened by monthly reviews and planning in the first week of every month. There were written reports that were submitted every month by the partner CLOs and these were discussed in monthly meetings with all the partners for opportunities of cross-learning from the different districts and for team building.

3.4.3 Capacity Building of the Community Led Organizations

1. Perspective Building Training on Human Rights

The program provided the opportunity for the five CLO partners to build their capacities and credibility on the issues of education and equity. A perspective building training on human rights was organized by CSEI, so that CLOs could have a thorough understanding and strong perspective before starting the program. The animators were oriented on human rights issues and their skills were developed to use puppetry as a medium to identify and raise child rights and human rights issues with children, their communities and schools. Children and young people were trained in making and using puppetry to articulate these issues. In addition, the CLO partners also gained their knowledge and skills in Khel Se Mel and various other innovative interventions.

2. Anchoring Campaigns and Visibility for Partner CLOs

The CLOs played a key role in organizing the programs along with ASF members, including Shiksha Samvads, Shiksha Samman Divas, Shiksha Ka Haq Abhiyan and the setting up of the ERCs, among others. All these programs have enhanced the skills of the CLOs in implementing campaigns, training and workshops. In addition, they have also been able to make visible themselves and their organizations in working on education and social inclusion with the school authorities, community people and district level government officials. They are not looked upon as organizations merely raising issues but are working to find solutions; these interventions have been acknowledged as being quite innovative and relevant to address issues of exclusion and to promote social inclusion. One big achievement has been the recognition of partner CLOs among Dalit government officials, intellectuals and leaders at the district and state level.

3. Engagement of CLOs with Constitutional Bodies: NCPCR

The REPA (Right to Education Protection Authorities) representatives of NCPCR held a series of district-level consultations with different categories of social groups on the implementation of the Right to Education Act. CSEI anchored the consultations with Dalit and Adivasi CLOs in the different districts. Following this, NCPCR requested that cases of child rights violations and violations of RTE norms be presented in a public hearing organized by them on the 30th and 31st January 2013 in Patna. NCPCR provided the complaint formats and also oriented the CLO partners on how to file the cases and complaints. The final selection of cases in the state was
done by NCPCR in Delhi including three of the cases from the partner CLOs (one from Bhagalpur and two from Rohtas). The concerned government officials from the District and the state were invited for the hearing. Around 200 cases were deposed before an eminent jury comprised of Professor Shanta Sinha (Chairperson of NCPCR), Deepa Dixit (member of NCPCR), Amarjeet Sinha, (Principal Secretary at HRD), Dr. Dheer Jhingran and a retired Supreme Court Judge; recommendations were given on different cases for actions to be taken immediately.

4. Organization-Building of the CLOs

All the partner organizations (through the support of this program) have been able to put in place basic organizational structure such as office and functional equipment to smoothly carry on their work. The partners have also developed their skills in documentation processes. This process over two years has enhanced the visibility and credibility of the CLO partners as well as built their capacities to engage in issues of education as well as with other rights-based campaigns.

5. Planning and Monitoring

CSEI (working with its partner CLOs) had a key role in the planning and execution of each activity in keeping its vision and values in mind. Each idea in this project is an outcome of intense brainstorming with all the team members. Monthly planning and field monitoring/communication has been an important part in the execution of activities with its core values and in keeping its expected outcome intact during the implementation of the program. All partners met every month regularly to review the field situation and discuss the implementation of the planned activities, assess the outputs and its outcome and plan for next level of activities. Further, these plans were again discussed in the weekly planning by the CLO partners along with their chief functionaries in the field. The Bihar state team members made regular visits to the district for support and to monitor the process.

3.4.4 Relevance of the Technical Processes in Strengthening the CLO’s

> Perspective Building on Social Inclusion and Equity: The trainings on human rights built a strong perspective of the CLOs in addressing these issues with the different stake holders. Through this process, their understanding was built on the concepts of social inclusion and equity. These were two new terms on which there was no clarity earlier. Through the CSEI intensive trainings, a common understanding was built on the process of social inclusion and equity. It was linked interchangeably with exclusion – i.e. whenever there is social exclusion we need to talk about social inclusion and equity. This training helped the partner CLOs to gain an in-depth understanding on social inclusion. CSEI also organized trainings for partner organizations on the Right to Education Act, the Right to Information Act and the SC/ST POA Act. The purpose of these trainings was to ensure that CLOs became aware of the legal mechanisms that are available and could thereafter use them efficiently in their work.
> **Skill Development and Networking:** The various trainings and workshop programs organized by CSEI supported the CLO members in building their skills and capacities. The CLO members were exposed to different areas and their participation in other trainings and programs at the State and National levels also helped the CLO members in gaining visibility and confidence to speak up and raise the issues of marginalization. In addition, CSEI also facilitated an alternate space for the CLOs to raise equity-inclusion education issues through the National Equity Forum.

> **Strengthening Organizational Activities and Community Mobilization:** The partner CLOs also improved in their planning, documenting, reporting and organizational capacities. They also built up basic office equipment and functioning. The ASF created a strong support base among the youth in the communities. In addition, the ERC and the VVK are also innovative spaces that can sustain the visibility and engagement of the CLOs. The CLOs have been able to organize various community programs on the issues of education at the block, district and state level. They have been able to mobilize the community and youth together for the programs.

The process of partnering CLOs has highlighted that there is a necessity that mid-level organizations such as CSEI exist in order to strengthen CLOs from the marginalized communities by providing them with organizational and financial support. Such organizations also create a space for the leadership from the marginalized communities to emerge and strengthen themselves. The members of the CLOs shared that initially they were just eager to work with the community at the grassroots level but did not have the requisite knowledge to run an organization. Further, these organizations had known about social inclusion but were not aware how to implement it while working. The engagement of the CLOs and CSEI has been very crucial in strengthening strong leadership from the Dalit community. It has also been important that CLOs from marginalized communities gain visibility to allow them to raise issues of marginalization and exclusion in other forums and rights-based campaigns.

**3.4.5 Major Learning’s from the Engagement with the CLO’s**

> **Emergence of Young Dalit Leadership:** The engagement of CSEI with CLO partners and youth has led to the emergence of a strong Dalit leadership at the grassroots level. This young, second-line leadership has become very crucial at the district level in raising awareness on the rights of the community. Also, the community through various awareness programs has become very aware of its rights and entitlements. The community people are continuously and collectively struggling for their rights now.

> **Presence of ASF:** There is now a presence of strong youth groups who are very motivated to work for the development of their communities. They volunteer with the CLO partners to
organize community awareness programs, trainings and workshops. ASF is an important manpower for the CLOs as most do not have enough staff members due to financial constraints. They work together to mobilize the community. CLO members have become mentors to the ASF members and guide them regularly in their personal development.

> **Recognition of the CLOs:** The CLOs are today recognized by everyone at the district level. The school authorities have also started engaging with the members on various issues. Earlier, the bigger CLOs would not come for the programs but have now started coming and want to be associated with the work we are doing on education. When the programs are organized by other CSOs and government departments on the issues of education, RTE and RTI, our CLOs are also invited and seek support and guidance from us while preparing for the programs.

### 3.4.6 Challenges

**i) Grassroots Level:** The CLO members shared that they faced a lot of difficulty in getting field staff for the program. Many did not come forward to work with a Dalit-led CLO; the ASF volunteers are a big support in this process. While many CSOs worked on education and with schools they did not focus on the socially excluded children and their problems in the school. Further, children from dominant communities dominated the school environment. There was also the presence of a mindset that questioned the effectiveness of CLOs. In other words, if big organizations could not bring change how would a small CLO do it? Initially, the teachers and the government officials did not accept the need to raise issues of exclusion within schools. There was a lot of debate and argument with the school authorities. The Jamui and Rohtas districts have a history of radical left group presence and it was difficult to build the Ambedkar ideology among the community and team there. Bringing new activities such as KSM and puppetry helped build acceptance in the schools.

**ii) Block and District Level:** At the block and the district levels, the government officials would neglect the issues of Dalits and would not give any importance to their complaints. When CLOs invited the government officials they would not accept the invitations. There was a lot of resistance from them to accept the presence of Dalit issues and the emergence of this new leadership.

**iii) State Level:** Initially, the CLOs did not have any recognition within the CSOs and networks. It was a big challenge to find space within these networks to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. Indeed, even the CSOs working with children and schools rarely considered caste an important factor in social exclusion. There was also a difficulty of engaging with different rights-based campaigns because they do not recognize the linkages of caste with issues such as gender, health, education and land rights etc. Further, these CSO’s were very well set up and functioned in large areas. It was a big challenge to locate a space for engagement.

> “Our determination to work comes from the Ambedkarite ideology, where we are committed to work for the annihilation of caste. Irrespective of any challenges, we will move forward to struggle for equal rights, freedom from slavery and dignity”

Ravindar Kumar, Founder Member, Jan Adhikar Manch.
3.4.7 Sustainability of the Work

The CLO members shared that one of their strong bases for sustaining their work has been the pool of volunteers that have been identified by ASF. The formation of ASF supported the CLOs through volunteer work in organizing programs. The ASF also helped in raising local issues with the schools in their areas and ensures that there is no discrimination against Dalit children and drop out from schools. The ASF has been very crucial in working with the community and mobilizing them for various campaigns and protest. Also, through engagement with CSEI and its other partner organizations, CLOs have gained opportunities to engage with the programs of other CSOs in Bihar and at the national level. CLOs participated in campaigns organized by NCDHR on Sau Mein Pachees Haq Hamara (25% is Our Right) for the proper allocation of money under Schedule Caste Sub Plan and its implementation and Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra organized by AIDMAM for rising issues of violence against Dalit women and state impunity. The CLO base has broadened with its networking in different organizations at the state and national levels. Some of the CLOs have built linkages and also funding linkages. They are now invited for programs and take and engage the youth volunteers and cultural teams. The CLOs also expressed that the entire program engagement has helped to build organizational transparency and team building. There is also greater gender sensitivity and conscious efforts being made to build girl’s and women’s leadership and participation.
Chapter 4

Learning and the Way Forward

The Way Forward

Since its inception, CSEI, in its attempt to ground social inclusion in practice has continuously engaged in designing inclusive activities and processes that can be structurally placed into schools for the promotion of equity and inclusion in education. The idea was envisaged within the context of the RTE Act – and its specific sections 8 and 9 – where it is clearly mentioned that no child should be denied or “pushed out of schools” due to their social identity, economic status, psychological or mental harassment/exclusion within the education system. Several agencies and policy makers have considered this Act as a tool to reinvent the ongoing discussions and actions towards making schools inclusive and improve quality of education. It is needless to mention here that education is a key priority for the state since independence and a prime agenda for many CSOs. Multiple experiments, innovations and policy interventions have been taken up to improve quality of education, enhancing pedagogy, improving teacher training, making school gender friendly and addressing infrastructural barriers within schools system. Community mobilization, monitoring and participation have also been on agenda of SSA and previous interventions by state and civil societies.

When the RTE came into existence, CSEI attempted to understand the participation of SC, ST and Muslim communities in schools from various disaggregated data and on ground research studies. Previous studies and work of Dalit rights campaign had already brought many specific concerns of SC and ST children in education and have been rallying to highlight multiple forms of exclusion being faced by Dalit children and youth in education process. The RTE act provided a ground for CSEI to advocate for these concerns and bring these understanding at the policy level by initiating a nationwide campaign for making our schools “discrimination free zone”. CSEI served as member in the National Advisory Council (NAC) for the RTE Act, MoHRD and chaired the Task Force on Equity and Inclusion constituted within the NAC. CSEI has taken up the concerns of SC/ST and Muslim children with NCPCR and other educationists, campaigns, academicians and CSOs at various levels. It has contributed to the thinking on “nondiscrimination in schools”.

In this context, CSEI formulated its intervention to pilot “social inclusion models and practices” within the schools of Bihar for SC children and youth to make the campaign proactive in its approach towards policy advocacy. The intervention in 50 schools has built considerable knowledge on what constitute a “socially inclusive school” and how excluded children and youth can experience what inclusion means for them, equally at personal level as well as social levels.

An equitable and socially inclusive education process need not to only focus on making education accessible to all, rather it goes beyond enrollment and poses a challenge to seek reasons for high drop outs and low retentions of SC, ST and Muslim children in schools. It is not that these communities do not want to study, it is that their social-psychological needs are not met in school systems or not understood by teachers due to lack of understanding/skills on promoting diversity in classrooms. As other struggles are on to address infrastructural gaps, budget provisions, making
teachers available and push for quality education, CSEI believes that education system can not ignore the social-psychological need of excluded children who equally deserve to be respected and enter into a “dignified teaching – learning environment”.

These pilot interventions have provided knowledge, methodology and skills for engaging with schools to address specific concerns of socially excluded children, to recognize and evolve a way forward to overcome systemic barriers obstructing participation, to strengthen leadership of socially excluded children and to facilitate a intermingling of all students in schools. It has also multiplied our curiosity to enter into the vast and complex education sector to fill this “deficit of perspective” in the goals of education. Following are some of the ways to move forward:

1. **To enhance and validate knowledge, skills and perspective on social inclusion and to partner with Community Led Organizations in replicating and adapting these across states**

   Reasons for high drop-out and poor learning are complex and multi-dimensional; discrimination, humiliation, non-participation and corporal punishment still emerge as critical reasons for children from socially excluded communities getting pushed out. One would agree that there has been little attention to acknowledging or addressing them in schools. Welcome initiatives in ending discrimination in education are the advisory from the MoHRD in October 2012 and the recommendations of the NAC in January 2013. Needless to say, they remain in files and papers with little effort to disseminate them or put them into practice. An important pathway to ending discrimination in schools is to promote “equity-inclusion actions” in schools by engaging the National Equity Forum (NEF). The Forum has evolved strategies such as “Khel se Mel” for social inclusion among children within schools, “Social Justice Ministers, Deputy Social Justice Ministers” in the Bal Sansads to ensure adequate attention to equality and social justice agenda within the school, Identity-based Inclusion index, human rights and child rights education through puppetry, among other interventions. In our experience, these interventions need to be grounded in schools to create an environment where ALL children, particularly those from socially excluded communities can participate and develop through the schooling process.

2. **Exploring additional dimensions of “equitable quality education” from the experiences of excluded children to synchronize curriculum and social justice in schooling system**

   Schools are increasingly emerging as the most diverse institutions in society which bring children every day under one roof across diverse caste, class, gender, religion, ethnic identities and disabilities with a common goal to engage in the education process. Even with education as the prime focus for this exercise, it must be acknowledged that the meaning and purpose of education is perceived differently by children from diverse social backgrounds. Some children may perceive education as a tool to bring change in their personal lives, some may perceive it as a medium to bring change in society and others may look to education to provide necessary skills and values to ensure material comfort and security. Field experiences also indicate communities from diverse social groups may have varying expectations from schools in addition to imparting reading-writing skills to children. CSEI’s initiative to study the curriculum from the perspective of children from socially excluded communities, design modules to connect learning to their experiences, teacher training manual to promote equity and social inclusion and bring social justice perspective
on the basis of National Curriculum Framework 2005 are important initiatives that have emerged from the Bihar work and will be pursued.

3. **Strengthening and expanding the Ambedkar Students Forum (ASF) - “Self to Society” – a journey of excluded youth to emerge as leaders of social change**

Organizing Youth for Socially Inclusive Society (OYASIS) is an initiative to promote young people from socially excluded communities to lead social change. The ASF initiative in Bihar provides knowledge and skills to build creative spaces for young people to collaborate and build leadership for promoting social change. ASF is emerging as a platform based on Ambedkar’s thoughts – to Educate, Agitate and Organize – and has facilitated the much needed conscientization process with the young population. Imparting skills and knowledge is beneficial for their self development and providing space and exposure where they can contribute back to society and emerge as role model and leaders in various fields. A similar initiative is the Youth Tech Hub (YTH) in the urban context of Delhi. The formation of the ASF in a rural area and the YTH in urban area can also be taken forward with other CLOs across states to strengthen youth development work in a meaningful way.

4. **Skill/perspective enhancement of CLOs on developing “Education Interventions Program” focusing on children and youth of SC, ST and Muslim communities**

Through this pilot intervention in Bihar, CSEI designed several methods and modules to handhold five Dalit-led organizations to make education their core thematic area. These organizations have been recognized for their work on the SC/ST Act and other human rights issues. The pilot facilitated these organizations to engage with children and young people and document their journey as organizations focused on children and youth as a core constituency. Despite several up and downs throughout the intervention period, three out of the five have emerged as community led organizations with focused approach and work with children and youth, one of them Dalit woman-led. This journey of collaboration with CLOs will immensely contribute and give insights for future work with other CLOs in various states as well as assisting us in defining the meaning and indicators of capacity building for organizations led by Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim community leaders.

5. **Reaffirming community confidence in education and social change**

Working with communities to reaffirm the role of education and the relevance of children and youth working for social change has also been piloted across various initiatives. The Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in Bihar and the Education Resource Centres (ERCs) in Delhi, the ASF and the YTH units are located within the community. Communities have also been engaged in celebrating role models and important days. The Shiksha Samman Divas is celebrated by the BASF to recognize children/youth and community leaders that have contributed to education, children and youth. The Community Scholarship Scheme (CSS) is a further initiative to create spaces for the community leaders to engage and contribute to education of the children and youth. Reaffirming the confidence of the community in education and social change also needs a fresh thrust within the community.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

‘Promoting Equity and Inclusion for Dalit Children and Youth in Education in Bihar: Nurturing the population dividend among Dalits’ (as facilitated during July 2011-June 2014), has been an innovative engagement for CSEI and has several good practices in social inclusion of Dalit children and youth in education. The most interesting experience and a significant outcome of the program has been emergence of Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum (BASF) where education advocacy has been relooked from new generation of Dalit community i.e. Dalit youth studying in colleges and university. It has facilitated and streamlined direct linkages with school going children and enhanced commitment of Dalit youth towards improving the education system for their younger generation. The parents have seen this linkage as a vital step to galvanize aspirations and efforts of Dalit youth and children together to demand an equitable and inclusive education. At present, more than 1000 students are mobilized and organized under this state-level students forum led by several Dalit youth leaders.

Another interesting aspect is the emergence of a new path of education advocacy to CLOs from Dalit and other socially excluded communities. While there is a consensus on the need to promote diversity, inclusion and non-discrimination as important elements in quality education, there is little knowledge on how this can be done. The program has gone a step ahead in creating an innovative path in evolving strategies and mechanisms; the CLOs are trained in the same and can become an important area for their intervention. Other organizations have now recognized this and appreciate these innovations.

Significantly, the three years of engagement has succeeded in promoting new areas of engagement, new leadership and new stakeholders to promote social equity and inclusion in education. The knowledge and skills developed provides the opportunity to pursue and scale up these initiatives with multiple stakeholders across the education and leadership building among children and young people from the socially excluded communities.
We would like to acknowledge the greatly appreciated participation of our collaborative Community-Led Organization partners, who have been with us on this journey throughout and without whom this study would not have been possible.

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Chief Functionary: Ghanshyam Deenbandhu

Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Samiti, Patna
Chief Functionary: Pratima Kumari

Jan Adhikar Kendra, Rohtas
Chief Functionary: Santhosh Kumar, Ravinder Kumar, Munna Kumar

Paramount Global Welfare Society, Jamui
Chief Functionary: Vishnudev Manjhi

Sant Kabir Sewa Sansthan, Begusarai
Chief Functionary: Hansraj
Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) is engaged in deepening democracy and development in our body politic by enhancing the stake-hold of excluded and marginalised communities in social, economic and cultural rights within the ambit of wider human rights. Given the continuing exclusion and discrimination against Dalits, Adivasis and other Minority communities, particularly their children, youth and women, ‘Equity-Inclusion’ are our watchwords, in focusing on their right to education, employment and governance. Recognising the potential of community-led organisations to promote sustainable development, CSEI promotes and partners with Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim-led civil society organisations in different states to strategically work in the arena of education and youth empowerment in their communities. The Centre also seeks to expand the spaces for such organisations to raise their voices and contribute to their rights agenda through the National Equity Forum (NEF). It takes up policy advocacy-oriented research to deepen understanding on the multiple and intersectional dimensions of social exclusion and discrimination in education, employment and governance and links these to policy recommendations. In promoting social equity and inclusion, CSEI is involved in developing concrete norms and standards for equity and inclusion actions. The Bihar state office works on the ground to support local organisations to actively engage with schools in promoting inclusion activities, to organise Dalit and Adivasi students into forums to voice their issues and interests in education, and to engage in advocacy and lobbying work with the state government in order to ensure marginalised children enjoys their rights to, in and through education. At the same time, given the link between education and employment, CSEI in Delhi works to promote information hubs among marginalised communities where access to information on higher education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities can be shared, and youth supported to access such opportunities.

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