

Project Review: Shikshalaya Prakalpa, Calcutta, India.

1) Basic Data

Project Title: Shikshalaya Prakalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta's Children.
Country: Calcutta, India.
Initiators of the project: The National Core Group and West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of Deprived Urban Children (WBSRGEDUC).

Project focus:

Focus areas	emphasis		
	low	—————▶	high
Situation Analysis			•
Child and Youth Participation		•	
Cross-Sectoral Approaches	•		
Strategic Partnerships		•	
Attention to Disadvant. Groups		•	
Linkages with CFC Networks	•		
Advocacy Strategies	•		
Resource Mobilisation	•		
Institutional and Legal Reforms	•		
Capacity Building		•	
Monitoring & Evaluation	•		

Target group: Deprived, non-school attending, urban children between 5 and 9 years old of the city of Calcutta (44,646 children).

Starting and ending date: January, 1999 – this is an ongoing activity.

2) Background

The situation of the target group

With a total of 14 million inhabitants, Calcutta is the most populous city of East India. Overpopulation and uncontrolled urbanisation have applied great pressure on the city's infrastructure. Many families are forced to live in poor settlements or are homeless. The situation has been aggravated by government policies of clearing and relocating slums which were seen as necessary for the implementation of expensive infrastructure schemes. Poor living conditions have many negative impacts on the children of these families: on their health, well-being and opportunities. One of the main results is that the children have no, or limited, access to basic services of acceptable quality, such as education. It has been difficult to target these children because their living areas have often not been considered in surveys conducted in the city. As a result, they have remained 'invisible' and were excluded from programmes. There are also a large number of families and children living on the streets (estimated at over one hundred thousand in Calcutta) and many children are forced to work.

Political context

In 1995, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) launched the City-Level Programme of Action (CLPOA)¹ to target deprived urban children. This programme is the result of a city-wide Plan of Action for Children and is a joint effort by both government and non-government agencies to coordinate programmes which favour poor children and promote child-rights oriented policies. The programme assists NGOs in increasing their capacity to handle child development programmes in a more systematic way, and at the same time it tries to mobilize resources from various governmental departments, international agencies, private sectors, etc. CLPOA also builds partnerships with other issue-based networking bodies all over the state and throughout the country. The CLPOA operates through a network of six zonal committees and is coordinated by a central body whose membership includes the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, the sectoral government departments of the West Bengal State Government (Health, Education, Social Welfare, Labour, etc.), Police, the Human Rights Commission, the Juvenile Welfare Board, UNICEF, the British Council, the Indian Medical Association, and as many as 50 NGOs. Joint city-level and zonal workplans are developed annually to identify activities for implementation and to provide a framework for area-based monitoring. Many initiatives have been started under the umbrella of the CLPOA, e.g. child-rights sensitisation training for police officers, the establishment of health awareness programmes for children, public awareness of child labour and child trafficking, etc.

The Shikshalaya Prakaalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta' s Children Initiative is one of the core activities of the CLPOA, addressing a most important right of all children: the right to education. The initiative started as a result of a regional workshop that was part of a plan for the City of Calcutta and other urban areas in West Bengal. At the same time, the West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of Deprived Urban Children (WBSRGEDUC) was created as a coordinating committee for the initiative, uniting all stakeholders participating in the initiative. Local level Shikshalaya Committees have been set up to ensure community involvement. These committees meet regularly to monitor the activities of the programme within the communities.

Justification of the initiative

The Shikshalaya Prakaalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta' s Children Initiative is unique in that it aims to provide good quality education to all the children of Calcutta within a limited time-frame (a little more than a year). Prior to the initiative, this goal was considered unrealistic. However, the initiative showed that it is realisable through close cooperation between government agencies and NGOs; this type of cooperation mobilises all sectors of society, encourages the involvement of communities and incorporates innovative, community and NGO-managed, educational solutions. Besides fulfilling the right to education for all children, it functions as a safety net and constitutes a system by which to identify children at risk.

3) Description of the Initiative

Main goal of the initiative

Shikshalaya Prakaalpa aims to provide quality primary education to all out-of-school children in Calcutta. It therefore strives to establish a city-wide coordination mechanism through which unreached urban children will be reached, and to transform the entire education system of the city.

Objectives of the initiative

The main objectives of the Shikshalaya Prakalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta' s Children Initiative, are to:

- Reach all children who do not attend school and to provide accurate information on the location of such children in order to plan and locate new facilities more effectively, and to identify wards which require help on a priority basis.
- Investigate the reasons why children do not attend school and to see how the problems identified might be resolved. Special efforts are being made to get working children to school.
- Assess the existing educational accommodation available for each age group and the needs for additional facilities.
- Establish new schools that will respond more effectively to the needs of communities, that will be located closer to them, that will provide better quality education, etc.
- Build up strong, community support and create an 'all-children-at-school movement' to bring awareness to all levels of society.

Roles played by stakeholders

The roles played by the various stakeholders are as follows:

The National Core Group is responsible for the coordination at a national level of programmes for deprived, urban children and is the main instigator of the initiative.

West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of Deprived Urban Children (WBSRGEDUC) is the steering committee for the initiative and has members drawn from all partners. The Group also aims to replicate the methodology piloted in Calcutta in all urban areas of the State of West Bengal.

West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (W.B. DPEP) has been set up to provide resource support for the initiative.

NGOs are the main implementers of the initiative: they undertook a city-wide survey to locate gaps in the education system; they have set up, and manage, the community schools and monitor the activities of the initiative.

Time-frame and planning cycles

The first phase of the initiative: a city-wide survey to assess the situation was completed in April, 1999. The goal, the provision of educational facilities for all children in the Calcutta Municipal Area, was set to be achieved by June, 2000. There is a proposal to expand the initiative to other urban areas in the State of West Bengal.

4) Strategies

Situation Analysis

A city-wide surveyⁱⁱ to identify what was needed was carried out as a first step in implementing the initiative. The survey covered all 141 wards of the city, totalling almost half a million people. The survey was a joint effort of 50 NGOs and used a systematic approach following a standard format. Each ward was surveyed by an NGO that was already working in the area and had, therefore, established contacts. The survey included interviews with families, visits to schools, etc., and made use of detailed maps and a computerised database.

The following information was gathered for each ward:

- The number of children not attending school and their location, disaggregated by age group and gender.
- The reasons for children not attending school.
- A survey of existing educational facilities for each age group in the ward.
- An evaluation of the existing basic infrastructure of the ward.

The results of the surveys for each ward were brought together in a report called Calcutta's Deprived Urban Children, a Survey, 1999. This report presents an overview of the whole city, including a series of maps which show the number of children who do not attend school in each area and the locations of schools.

Children's and youth's participation

Participation at all levels is encouraged and communities take part in decision-making. Children and youth participate directly in the implementation of the initiative; for example, a child-to-child approach has been instigated by training and employing youths as, so called, "bare-foot" teachers for the community schools; middle class school pupils have assisted in the search for child workers working and living in the middle income areas.

Cross-sectoral approaches

The Shikshalaya Prakalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta's Children Initiative is part of the City-Level Programme of Action (CLPOA), a holistic programme covering all sectors. The steering committee, the West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of Deprived Urban Children (WBSRGEDUC), represents all the different departments concerned and seeks to ensure a cross-sectoral approach.

Strategic partnerships

The backbone of the initiative is a partnership formed by the major stakeholders in the areas of education, child protection and urban governance. Those stakeholders are the Education Ministry in the National Government, the Education Departments in the state and city governments, the state-level Urban Affairs, Labour, Social Welfare, and Mass Education Departments, Police, school agencies, technical agencies, UNICEF, the British Council and Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce and the private sector. The partnership also enlists and relies heavily upon a large, well-organised network of about 50 NGOs. The organisation of this partnership is independently administered from the municipal offices. This structure allows the municipal government to make use of the extensive network, contacts and knowledge of the NGOs.

Linkages with CFC networks

This initiative and other activities generated by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation under the umbrella of the Calcutta Plan of Action for Children, have resulted from the efforts of the Indian 'Mayors as Defenders of Children' Movement.

Special attention to disadvantaged groups

Special efforts are being made to target 'hidden child labourers'; particularly those employed as domestic labourers in middle-income areas. A separate survey is being conducted to identify these children because they are not included in the survey of the low-income areas. Middle-class, school-going pupils have participated in the "search" for these "hidden" child workers.

Advocacy and awareness-raising strategies

The initiative is supported by a city-wide campaign to raise awareness within society of the presence of deprived, urban children. A brochure entitled: '44,646, for some it's just a number, for us it's a challenge'ⁱⁱⁱ, has been prepared. It outlines the principles of the initiative, and it is hoped that the brochure will generate private funding.

Institutional and legal reforms

Policies and municipal laws have been adapted to allow for the integration of informal solutions into the regular education system, such as schools managed by NGOs and communities.

Resource mobilisation

Funds have been mobilised through the West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of Deprived Urban Children (WBSRGEDUC). Almost the entire budgetary requirement for the project (Indian Rupees one million - equivalent to about US\$3 million) has been met by the Government of India. UNICEF contributes about 10% of the cost and the remainder is expected to be met through vigorous fundraising, especially from the private sector.

Capacity building activities and methods

Capacity building is an important component of the initiative. The people who comprise the NGOs undertaking the survey received three days of training on the methodologies to be used: understanding and working with maps, using standardised formats, interview techniques, etc.

The teachers of the newly set-up community schools are trained in classroom management, education methodologies and daily, weekly and monthly planning. The training is given through the Loreto Day School Sealdah, a private training institute that has offered quality education in the city for decades and that has extensive experience in working with the most deprived children. This institute also has overall responsibility for the quality of education provided, and curriculum development, within the initiative.

It should be noted that arrangements have been made to ensure that the courses held in such centres are fully recognised by the government system.

Monitoring and evaluation

A city-wide network of 10 Resource Centres, managed by NGOs, has been set up to supervise and monitor the programme. Each centre has a coordinator and three resource teachers who will deliver on-site support to the shikshalayas - community schools. A computerised data base system has been developed to keep track of the progress of each centre.

5) Activities and Tools

The following activities have been undertaken to provide education to all Calcutta's deprived urban children:

A programme to facilitate direct admission to formal schools

Children from 5-6 years old living in areas where a school already exists (approx. 2,500 children) will be admitted directly, facilitated by parental counselling and community mobilisation.

Children from 7-9 years old living in areas where a school exists (approx. 7,500 children) will receive a 'bridging course' which will prepare them for admission to formal schools.

The establishment of approximately 600 Shikshalayas

NGO-managed primary education centres have been set up for children from 5 to 9 years old in communities where no formal schools exist, or when these schools do not have sufficient capacity. These schools hold a maximum of 50 children and are supervised by two 'shiksha sevaks/sevikas', especially trained youth teachers. Besides the regular primary education, the Shikshalayas provide other important services; they care for the children's mental and physical health. They organise community activities, such as health camps, parental counselling programmes, etc. This extended curriculum is intended to motivate children to attend school with parental encouragement.

Shishu Shiksha Kendra

These community-managed primary education centres for children from 5 to 9 years old have been set up as part of a programme run by the State Government. Already in existence, this programme has been integrated into the Shikshalaya Prakalpa, Education for ALL Calcutta' s Children Initiative.

6) Conclusions

Highlighting of good practices and opportunities for replicability

- The establishment of a network of 50 NGOs has fostered understanding and cooperation between these organisations, and strengthened their links with government agencies. This means that opportunities to undertake activities in other sectors, particularly concerning the needs and rights of urban poor children, are more forthcoming.
- The results of this survey provide an interesting and effective tool through which to reach deprived urban children; this method could be fruitfully shared with other municipalities willing to carry out a city-wide mobilisation to involve all out-of-school children.
- The community-based schools, the Shikshalayas and Shishu Shiksha Kendra, are an innovative solution to the problem of providing tailor-made education to young children in poor communities, and offer a means through which communities can organise themselves to provide improved care for their children. The resource centres set up to support the schools offer the opportunity to exchange experiences between the different schools and communities.

Future challenges and problems

- Despite the fact that the newly-established community schools are a good solution, there is always the risk that they may be seen as temporary emergency provisions. Efforts should be made to integrate these schools into the formal education system, e.g. through exchange with the 'official schools' run by the city and state government.

7) Consulted Documentation

Calcutta's Deprived Urban Children, a Survey, 1999. West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of the Deprived Urban Child, Calcutta, 1999.

'44,646, for some it's just a number, for us it's a challenge'. Brochure published by the West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of the Deprived Urban Child, and the Loreto Day School, Calcutta, 1999.

Partnerships with Local Governments, Review of the Issues and Selected UNICEF Experiences, Working Paper Series, UNICEF, New York, November, 2001.

March 2003

International Child Friendly Cities Secretariat
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
P.za SS. Annunziata, 12
50122 Florence - Italy
Tel: +39 055 20330 - Fax: + 39 055 244 817
E-mail: florencecfcsecr@unicef.org
Web site: <http://www.childfriendlycities.org>

ⁱ Website <http://www.clpoa.org>

ⁱⁱ *Calcutta's Deprived Urban Children, a Survey, 1999.* West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of the Deprived Urban Child, Calcutta 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ '44,646, for some it's just a number, for us it's a challenge' . Brochure published by the West Bengal State Resource Group for Education of the Deprived Urban Child and the Loreto Day School, Calcutta, 1999.