Practitioner’s Brief

Navigating through COVID-19: Unlocking Solutions for Education Organizations

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Navigating through COVID-19: Unlocking Solutions for Education Organizations

The world is going through unparalleled times due to the coronavirus pandemic. The effects of lockdown on children’s school education is manifold and the education system is now facing a new crisis. Most countries have mandated some form of school closures that has impacted at least 1.5 billion children and youth. We are yet to ascertain the different long term challenges that countries would encounter due to this and what this means for a nation like India. This might have long term devastating effects especially for the marginalized population, and there is a dire need to bring solutions, innovation and technology to re-build the system of education delivery from cities to last mile villages. With poverty at the forefront education might not be a priority anymore, girls dropping out of school, child labour and trafficking issues are slated to increase. Learning and school regularity will exacerbate in the current scenario and holistic learning might become a distant possibility.

Introduction: The webinar was organized by Magic Bus India Foundation in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis to understand the effects of the pandemic on education, especially for the marginalized population and what solutions can organisations bring in to ensure school continuity by adapting to the current situation. This compendium expresses the thoughts of the expert panelists, the questions brought in the discussion during the webinar and also some of the key questions asked by the audience. It also provides insights into the Rapid Assessment Survey conducted by Magic Bus across 39 districts and 23 states to understand the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Childhood and Livelihood in India.

Webinar Panelists & Speakers

Panelists
- Arjun Sanyal, Senior Programme Officer, Aga Khan Foundation
- Kulsoom Khan, Regional Program Director, Asia, Global Fund for Children
- Priya Varadarajan, Lead, Gender Justice and Disabilities, Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives
- Rushda Majeed, India Representative, Bernard Van Leer Foundation
- Thomas Dreesen, Education Manager, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti
- Dip Chakraborty, Head - Programmes Development, Magic Bus

Magic Bus Speakers
- Dhanashri Brahme, Chief of Programme Operations
- Nikhil Pingle, Director – Results Delivery
- Jayant Rastogi, Global CEO

90% children want to go back to school, but around 40% parents say they might not be able to bear the expenses related to education

Source: Magic Bus Survey on ‘Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Childhood & Livelihood in India

Insights into themes emerging from the discussion

Loss of Livelihoods: The pandemic induced economic slowdown has triggered loss of livelihoods for thousands in India. Magic Bus survey shows that the average monthly income of households in marginalized communities has reduced from Rs.10,000 (USD 132) to Rs. 3000 (USD 40). The cascading impact of the new evolving poverty in the country is expected to lead to a number of issues for children in marginalized households resulting in children dropping out of school, increased learning poverty, increased school dropout among girls, early marriage, gender divide and making holistic learning a distant possibility.

“With lost livelihoods it is increasingly becoming difficult for families to prioritize education for children over work. Children are already out of school and school drop outs will rise and irregularity in school would increase. This will exacerbate learning poverty and holistic learning will be a distant possibility.”
**Migration:** Thousands of migrant workers across India are making arduous journeys back home as their livelihoods are derailed. The impact of migration on education among children is again manifold. To understand the causal effects we need to look at the kind of migration and the emerging pattern in the near future – family migration, male migration, period when the migrants return to cities or move to different cities etc. This will have a consequent impact on school continuity post the lockdown period.

In many rural areas migration has led to schools becoming quarantine centers for people returning to villages as they fear these individuals could be carriers of the virus. This presents a subsequent fear among people to keep children away from school post lockdown for a certain period and the anxieties thus associated have to be managed by NGOs, civil society and the government to ensure continuity of education at the earliest.

“In Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh migrant workers are returning to their villages from cities due to loss of livelihoods and are temporarily residing in schools, which are converted to quarantine centres” - Arjun Sanyal, Senior Programme Officer, Aga Khan Foundation

**Gender:** Addressing issues related to gender is critical and the pandemic has aggravated the gender divide. Beyond domestic violence women are also doing excessive work in households, including child care.

Considering that mothers will play an important role in a child’s education and a large number of teachers in India are women their issues should be addressed to ensure children’s education in the country. Organisations redesigning interventions should make decisions with a gender lens and should outline certain non-negotiables.

**Use of multiple platforms for school continuity:** Equitable remote learning and access to different technologies across the digital divide is vital to provide education opportunities for children from marginalized backgrounds. Use of multiple channels to communicate and educate children is needed to ensure more children are reached. According to a survey conducted by UNICEF in 127 countries 68% of the countries use digital and non-digital means in their responses using Television, Radio, SMS and Whatsapp. Around 49% of the countries are doing some kind of paper-based delivery of training material for population who are marginalized especially refugees and migrants. Inequity in technology access needs to be addressed by the government for access to children and large investments in electricity and increase in connectivity is required.

**Engaging with parents, teachers & caregivers:** Other than delivering education related content to ensure school continuity among children, organisations and institutions also need to look at engaging with children’s parents, teachers and care givers. Engaging with them on a frequent basis to check on the adaptability of the new approach to education should be monitored to ensure continuity. It has been observed from previous crisis that even small learning gaps can have massive effects on learning outcomes. Psychosocial support and learning...
should also be provided to care givers, parents and teachers to cope in this crisis and help their children engaged in education related activities and bridge the learning gap. Equipping front line workers like ASHA & Anganwadi worker in India to provide more in kind support to families will also go a long way.

However, engaging with parents might be a challenge as relooking at livelihoods might be their primary concern in these tough circumstances. Sensitization of communities might also be required in certain locations to ensure children return to school post the lockdown period.

“After the Ebola outbreak crisis in Sierra Leone UNICEF conducted sensitization in communities to bring back girls in schools. Approximately 14000 girls became pregnant and provision had to be made in schools to enroll them.” – Thomas Dreesen, Education Manager, UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti

Concerns among children and building resilience: The uncertainty brought by the lockdown has caused a number of concerns among children and building their resilience in these times is a necessity for them to cope and adapt to the current situation. The fear of infection of course looms on the surface of children’s minds but their parent’s loss of livelihood is a major area of concern among most children. The fear of discontinuing school and college also prevails quite strongly. Other than looking at solutions for reaching out to children socio emotional concerns that children have that may further destabilize education.

Source: Magic Bus Survey on ‘Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Childhood & Livelihood in India

E-Learning: School systems around the world are moving to e-learning platforms, however virtual learning will not be possible for most of the children in India, especially in Government Schools. According to the Magic Bus survey almost half of the children have access to mobile phones, but only 55% use them. 48% students reported knowing schools having introduced some form of online learning (through TV, Whatsapp, etc.), which means the other half are unaware. Access to study resources in the current crisis for most children who were surveyed is still through books.

“While we hear anecdotally that schools are moving to online learning seamlessly that doesn’t hold true for children from marginalized communities and online learning might not be easy for them” – Dip Chakraborty, Head of Programmes Development, Magic Bus

Philanthropy is reorienting itself: Most institutional grant makers are now accepting changes and adapting to the current situation by giving more flexibility to their NGO partners. Grant makers are constantly learning from partners about the situation on the ground and the various and new ways of implementing programmes in a lockdown setting. The emerging needs of the communities and the need to control the spread of the disease has driven grant makers and Corporate CSR to respond to the crisis on a war footing and address present challenges, that were not a key focus area earlier. They are stepping in not only to address healthcare issues but are also providing grants for research, conduct assessment surveys to inform policy makers. Grant makers, Philanthropies and CSR teams are now willing to take risks and are agile in their approach to support innovations and bring in ideas and best practices from around the world.

“APPI is listening closely to the needs of its implementing partner in the current crisis. There are areas of focus that have emerged and some of the areas where the philanthropy did not work directly earlier for example livelihoods, and we feel we need to respond to this issue much more in a proactive and thought out way. We did not focus much earlier on healthcare but through Covid relief work APPI has now started working with hospitals and healthcare providers.” – Priya Varadarajan, Gender Justice & Disabilities lead

“This is a new situation for everyone. Our partners are having to predict what philanthropic funding and CSR will look like in coming months and whether existing

Concerns among children due to Uncertainty because of Covid-19 and lockdown

- Fear of discontinuing school or college
- Fear of not getting the opportunity to play with friends
- Fear of not getting family support for my educational aspiration
- Fear of not getting family support for my livelihood aspiration
- Loss of job in the family
- Loss of regular pay in the family
- Decrease of income in the family
- Fear of getting married early
- Fear of having to work for the family/income
- Fear of any sort of violence
- Fear of infection
- Fear of unknown

Source: Magic Bus Survey on ‘Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Childhood & Livelihood in India
donors can take NGOs through these difficult times” – Kulsoom Khan, Regional Program Director, Asia, Global Fund for Children

**Government Partnerships:** NGOs and civil societies partnering with the Government is also crucial considering there are long term impacts of this crisis on various areas of development including education. Moreover, the Government’s reach will allow to scale viable solutions across the country and have a unified response.

“For true impact and scale we must collaborate and partner with the Government. This is critical especially during times of crisis considering the Government’s capacity, the scale of its response and the long term view that is needed to emerge from the current situation” - Rushda Majeed, India Representative, Bernard Van Leer Foundation

**Key messages:**

- Although the Covid-19 crisis has disrupted the normal functioning of most NGOs and are responding to the current crisis in terms of relief, however there is a need to continue programming in critical areas such as addressing child marriage, sexual reproductive health, child care etc. and not completely divert focus.
- Enforcing good laws and messaging of the same especially regarding child marriage
- With reduced learning hours in education for children, experts should look at integrating education topics or subjects and not treat them silos
- Building resilience through key life skills especially among children is crucial in these uncertain times that will allow them to cope and adapt

**Key Questions:**

1. Will the loss of livelihood mean loss of childhood?
2. How do we bridge the inequity in technology with embedded gender divide to ensure effectiveness of e-learning options?
3. What are the patterns of migration among people and how do we ensure school continuity amongst the migrant population?

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i Chief of Programme Operations, Magic Bus
ii Global Head of Partnerships, Magic Bus
iii Deputy General Manager, International Partnerships