



BRIDGING THE GAP FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Case Studies from Step Up Centres
Jhabua and Barwani, Madhya Pradesh



HUMANA
PEOPLE TO PEOPLE INDIA

Introduction

Humana People to People India's Step up Centres, working in close cooperation with the state Governments, are playing a key role in achieving the goal of universal primary education in the country by bridging the education gap for out-of-school children (OOSC), while also ensuring their continued retention in the schools. The comprehensive programme model provides a holistic learning and mainstreaming framework for OOSC by gradually building their competencies and social skills in a structured manner before enrolling them into formal schools.

The multifaceted approach of the programme starts with mobilizing identified OOSC in a particular area and nurturing their foundation skills (educational, social and personal) during the course of the programme, till they are comfortably placed in a formal school, in age-appropriate grades. Further, under the holistic approach of the programme, Education Volunteers counsel the parents and community members on the significance of education and motivate them to send their children to schools.

The set of 15 case studies curated here illustrate the manner in which the Step up Centres have touched the lives of various stakeholders in the districts of Jhabua and Barwani in Madhya Pradesh. These case studies cover a diverse set of stakeholders from nine villages in five blocks of the two districts and exemplify the challenges and accomplishments of the programme over the past year.

In the two districts of Madhya Pradesh, the Programme is being implemented at Satya Bharti Learning Centres under the aegis of Bharti Foundation, with Humana People to People India as the implementation partner. The programme implementation commenced in April 2015 in 80 Centres spread across eight blocks in the two districts.



Sunita Baberia's Story

"We wake up before the last twinkling star gets consumed, and quickly brush our teeth. Ablutions over, it's time for breakfast, and then onwards we march to school."

Nine-year-old Sunita Baberia sings these lines in her native Bhili while walking ahead of us, her bare feet playfully producing clouds of dust. She is leading us to her home, situated at a five-minute walk from her school in Piploda Bada village of the Meghnagar block in tribal-dominated Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh.

The school song is a new acquisition. Barely a year back, Sunita was one of the several children of this tribal community who had to drop out of school and accompany her parents to the neighbouring state of Gujarat. For a vast majority of families inhabiting this region, seasonal migration is the only constant in life. Lack of livelihood options, coupled with erratic rain patterns leading to parched fields, repeatedly push these impoverished people to neighbouring states of Gujarat or Maharashtra where they work as unskilled labourers and save enough for a few months. And then the cycle repeats.

Despite a strong inherent urge for education, Sunita's ambitions were beset by her family's chronic poverty that forced her to accompany her migrating parents and kept her from joining a school.

In June 2015, upon her return from Surat in Gujarat, Sunita's family was approached by Education Volunteers (EVs) from Humana People to People India (HPPI). At first, her grandmother, a feisty 60-year-old, was apprehensive of the EVs' persistence of sending Sunita to the nearby Government primary school. She vehemently defended her decision to not send her granddaughter to the school, arguing the latter's function as a productive earning member of the family.

However, sustained efforts by the EVs paid off and today Sunita has been

successfully mainstreamed as a 4th grade student at Government Primary School, Piploda Bada. During the nine months spent at the Step up Centre, Sunita received specially designed content for accelerated learning and individual attention from EVs that filled her academic gaps while providing much needed social conditioning to re-join the mainstream classes at the school.

With a focus on developing overall personality of the children, the programme at the centre lays special emphasis on improving personal hygiene and social habits, while addressing their academic needs.

Sunita's story has inspired many in her village and her elder sister, Sangita, recently enrolled at the centre. Sustained contact by passionate EVs is imperative to change the generations-old mind-set towards significance of education, as proven by their engagement with the families of the region. Sunita's grandmother, today, is a vocal supporter of girls' education in her village and as a village elder has been encouraging more families to send their children to the school.

As for the barefoot girl with a song in her heart, Sunita is on her way to achieve her ambition of being a doctor one day and help people of her village in times of their need, one step at a time.



*Sunita Baberia
Grade: 4*

Village: Piploda Bada, Jhabua

Sarpanch, Village Charoli Pada, Jhabua

Education is the only means through which most residents of village Charoli Pada can achieve a better quality of life. It is only due to lack of sustainable livelihood options here that majority of villagers choose to migrate to other states with their children.

As in the other parts of the country, the Employment Guarantee Scheme is functioning in our village as well, but since the wages are much higher in other states, families choose to migrate there in order to increase their savings. In our village, for example, daily wage for unskilled work is about Rs 160 whereas in the states where the villagers seasonally migrate to, the daily wage for unskilled work is nearly double the rate.

Goods and services are becoming expensive by the day across the country and Jhabua is no exception to this. Even basic everyday needs are becoming increasingly hard to secure for most families. To check the flow of migration, the administration should see to it that the wages are increased in line with the current inflation trend.

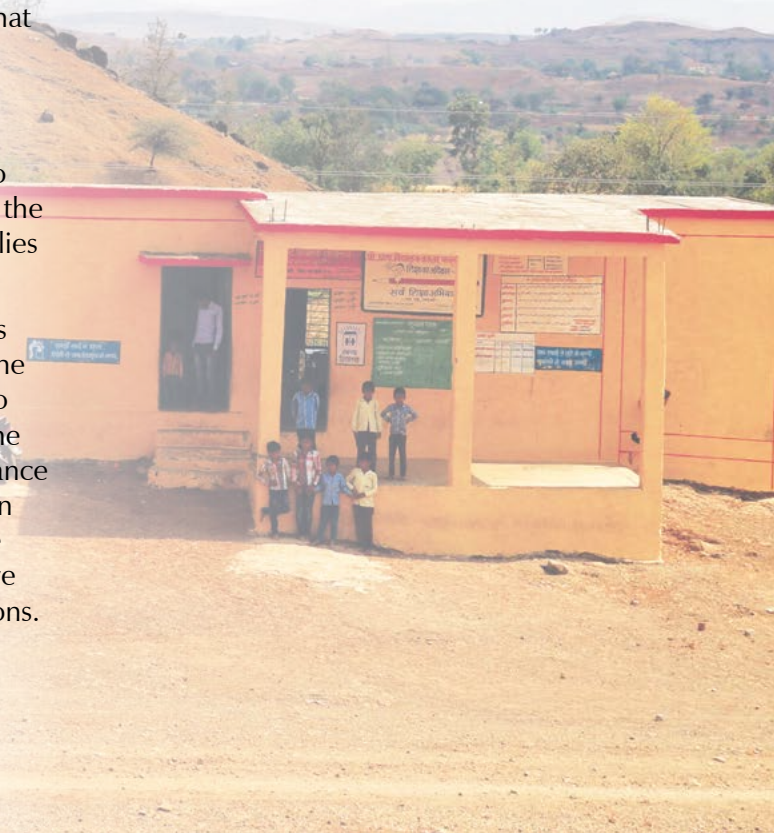
Further, families migrate to Gujarat and other neighbouring states, as working with the private contractors they receive their daily wages immediately, whereas here, wages can take a long time to transfer. There are cases of wages being delayed for months. If the administration ensures timely payment of wages, several families will prefer to work here.

Education Volunteers from Humana People to People India's Step up Programme have been working very efficiently for the past year in motivating families here to send their children to the school. I've observed them being in daily contact with the family members and village elders, driving home the importance of education. I've interacted with the Education Volunteers on several occasions when they briefed me about the programme and how it aims at mainstreaming out-of-school children who've either never attended school or dropped out due to various reasons.

This is a very good initiative to ensure Universal Education in our village and to positively change the perspective of the village residents towards the importance of education for their children.



*Jaam Singh Mandod
Sarpanch, Village Charoli Pada, Jhabua*



Headmaster, Government Primary School, Bedawali, Meghnagar

The Jhabua region of MP is a tribal region with its unique socioeconomic realities that impact the education of children here.

Most villagers here are farmers with miniscule farm holdings, and whatever little land they do own is not very fertile. With extremely limited irrigation facilities, agriculture here is entirely rain-dependent and often fails as a sustainable livelihood option for the residents. So it is common to find them regularly embarking on seasonal migrations to Gujarat, Rajasthan and other neighbouring states, where they work as unskilled labourers in the construction or agriculture sector.

In majority of cases, the entire family has to migrate together as there is no one to look after the younger ones. Older children, of school-going age, are forced to accompany their parents in order to look after the younger ones near the worksites while the parents are busy with work.

In the few cases where children are left behind with their grandparents or other relatives, they spend most of the time doing daily household chores and looking after the grandparents, rather than choosing to come to the school.

For several years, gaps existed in efforts to contact parents and encourage them to influence their perspective on the significance of education. The school administration and Education Volunteers (EVs) of Humana People to People India (HPPI) have been working under the SSA ambit to bring all the out-of-school children to the school. At the HPPI-run Step up Centre, the EVs conduct several activities and keep the children involved with arts, crafts, sports and other extra-curricular activities which motivate them to come to the school regularly. The classroom where the centre is run reflects the vibrancy of the programme with teaching and learning materials and artworks made by the students prominently displayed. This has further improved the learning outcomes in several out-of-school children, enabling them

to join the mainstream classes at an age-appropriate level.

Initially, the EVs conducted extensive surveys to ascertain the number of out-of-school children in the village. As migration remains a major reason for families temporarily abandoning the village, the survey helped locate several out-of-school children who were not accounted for in earlier surveys. A substantial majority of these out-of-school children have now been successfully mainstreamed in the Government primary school after a year in the programme. Today, the EVs regularly engage with the community, motivating them to send their children to the school, which has helped in creating a social environment where education is seen as a vital part of a child's life.

Sustained implementation of such an initiative for a minimum period of three years is essential to have a lasting impact on children's education in tribal regions such as Jhabua. Engagement with the community at such deeper levels is imperative in order to break persisting beliefs about education as an investment of time that yields no returns, and mould new ones highlighting it as a panacea for the repetitive poverty cycle of the residents here.



*Narender Singh Chauhan, Headmaster,
Government Primary School Bedawali,
Meghnagar*

Block Resource Coordinator, Thandla, Jhabua

Education has been a priority for the state and indeed the country since the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. However, the unique socioeconomic situation of the residents of the tribal-dominated regions of Jhabua impacts the education of the children here and requires special attention.

Seasonal migration remains the most crucial factor impacting children's education here. Due to lack of sustainable livelihood options and rain-dependent agriculture, most families here are forced to migrate to neighbouring states such as Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra where they receive better wages working in the construction and agriculture sector.

The state administration and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs have developed several schemes to check that children's education is not compromised due to the repeated migration cycle of their parents. To achieve this, several residential schools for tribal children have been running across the state and the enrolments are constantly increasing.

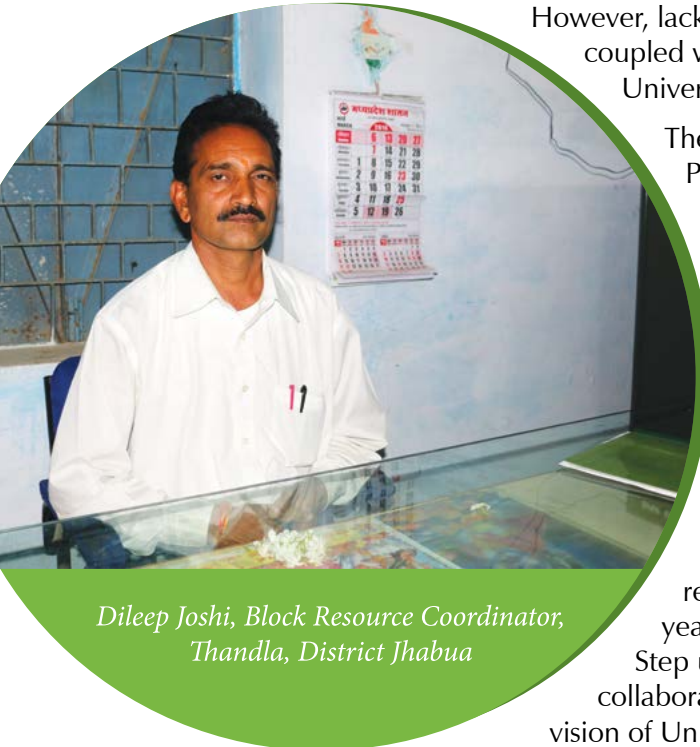
However, lack of understanding among parents regarding the significance of education, coupled with chronic poverty, are constant challenges that we face towards achieving Universal Education.

The programme at the Step up Centre, being implemented by Humana People to People India, has been instrumental in bridging a vital gap in education for the tribal children here. The programme design and teaching methodology ensure that all the out-of-school children are targeted in a systematic manner, their families counselled and that the students' retention is ensured in the class following mainstreaming.

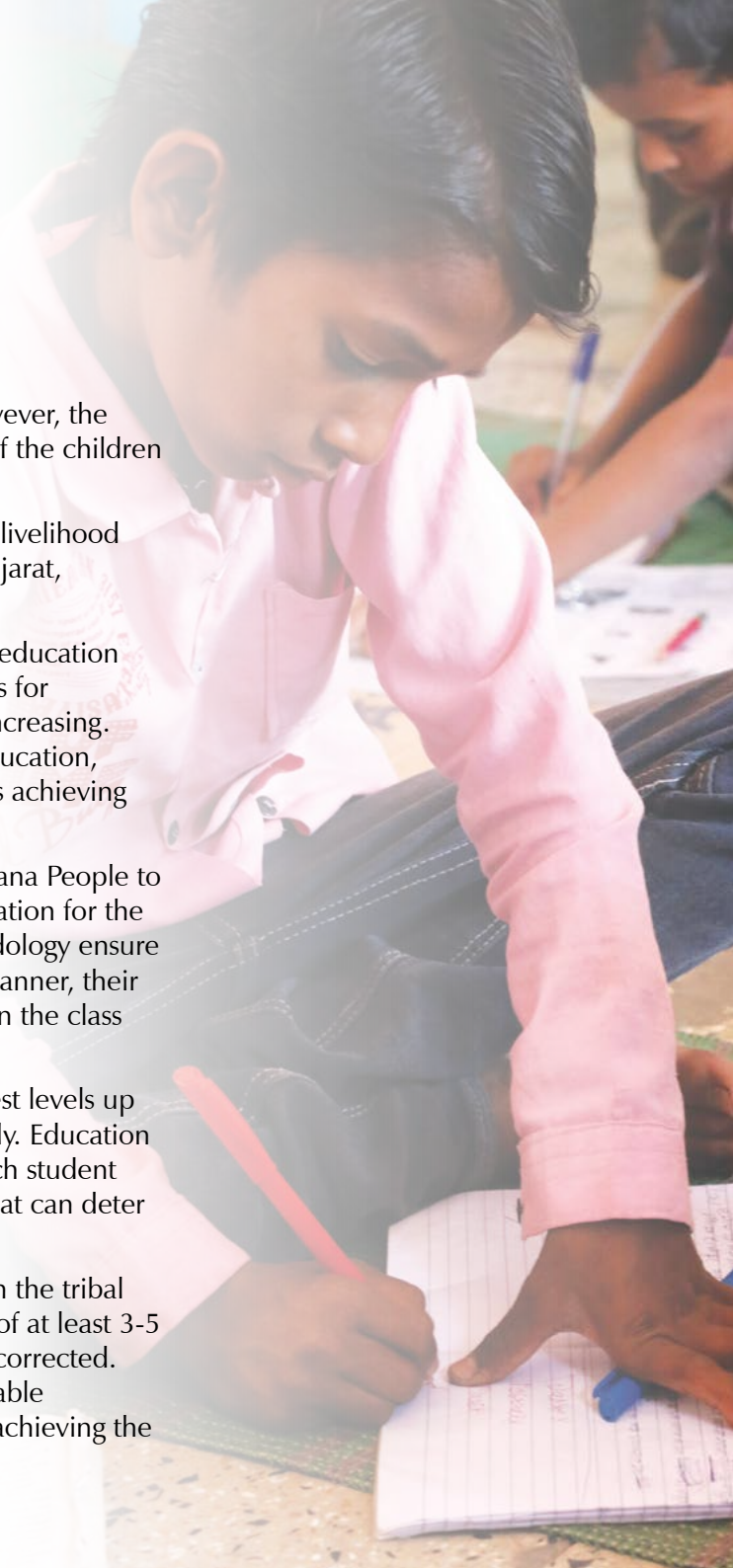
Innovative methods of activity-based teaching help keep interest levels up for the students and ensure that they attend the classes regularly. Education Volunteers are able to provide individual attention towards each student and follow up with their families for any special requirement that can deter a child's progress or continued presence in the school.

In order to achieve sustainable outcomes in the schools located in the tribal regions, such programmes need to be implemented over a period of at least 3-5 years, so that the generations-old views regarding education can be corrected.

Step up Centre is a welcome move in creating a much-needed sustainable collaboration between the State and development organisations towards achieving the vision of Universal Education.



*Dileep Joshi, Block Resource Coordinator,
Thandla, District Jhabua*



Arjun and Gita's Story

"I became unwell each time my parents went away. I think it happens because I miss them when they're not around. So they would send my elder brother, who accompanies them, to get me and I joined them wherever they were."

Eight-year-old Arjun Mandod tells his story while looking at the classroom floor. Asked if he likes coming to the school now, he looks up, beams a bright smile, and proclaims, "No other part of the day is as exciting as the school time."

A year and a half ago, Arjun had to drop out of his school and accompany his parents to the industrial town of Boisar in Maharashtra where they were working as unskilled labourers. "I didn't do much work, just ran around to get tea for my parents whenever they asked me to," he says when asked what he did there.

Arjun's elder sister, Gita, has now been attending school regularly for the past year. Prior to this she dropped out of school for two years as she had to accompany her parents when they migrated to Surat for seasonal work so she could look after young Arjun.

Gita and Arjun's story is not an isolated case, but one shared by most households in the tribal-dominated Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. Acute shortage of sustainable livelihood options force these families to neighbouring states where they work through a network of agents who help them earn a living, working as unskilled labourers.

"We spend anywhere between 7-10 months in other States. Wages in Gujarat and Maharashtra are much better than what we get here," says 40-year-old Suresh Mandod, Arjun and Gita's father.

"Around 15-20 families from our village migrate together to work at the construction sites. The contractors ensure our daily employment and that we receive our wages promptly."

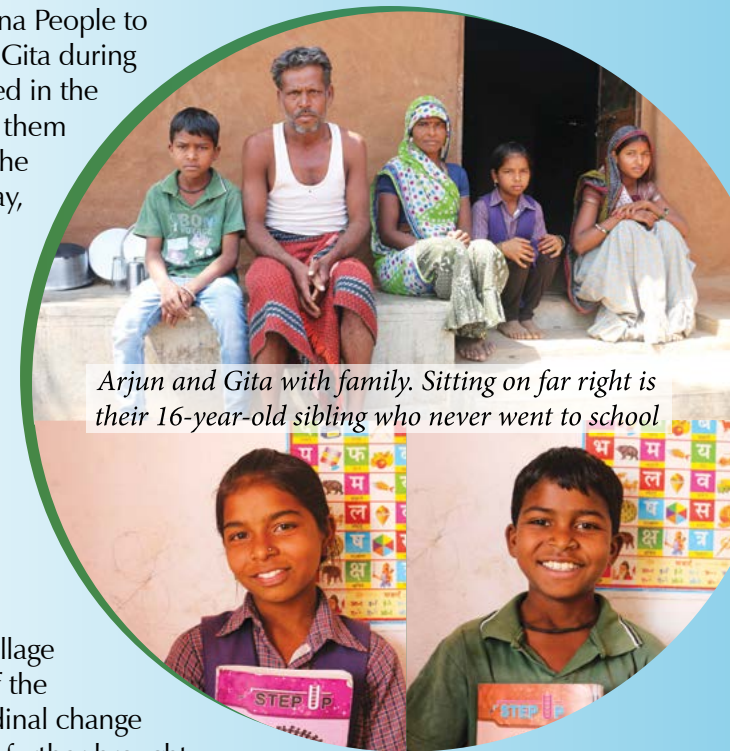
Education Volunteers from Humana People to People India identified Arjun and Gita during the out-of-school survey conducted in the village in early 2015 and enrolled them in the Step up Centre running at the Government primary school. Today, Arjun has been mainstreamed as a grade 3 student while Gita attends the same school as a grade 4 student.

"Activities and games conducted at the Centre are the most exciting part of the day. It makes learning fun and I'm enjoying learning counting and multiplications," says an excited Arjun.

The launch of the Centre in the village and regular visits to the families of the students has led to tangible attitudinal change among the village residents. It has further brought to relief the fact that given a choice, most of them would want their children to go to school and not accompany them to the worksite.

"I understand that it is vital that I educate my kids. I'd like them to study further, go to college and get good employment. This is the only way they can get us out of this poverty cycle," admits Suresh.

"I've decided to leave them with their grandparents in the village when we go to other states to work so their studies don't lag in any manner."



Arjun and Gita with family. Sitting on far right is their 16-year-old sibling who never went to school

Assistant Teacher, Government Primary School, Piploda Bada, Meghnagar

74 students are enrolled in our school. Of these, we get no more than 50 regular students. Most parents choose to keep their children at home as they believe the children can be better looked after at home under their supervision. Some children help their families by doing household chores like taking the cattle into the forest for grazing etc.

My fellow teachers and I constantly try to motivate parents to send their children to the school by informing them about the importance of education and various government-sponsored schemes through which they can benefit. But the majority of parents have never attended schools themselves and hence fail to see how education is the only means through which they can emerge out of this generations-old cycle of poverty.

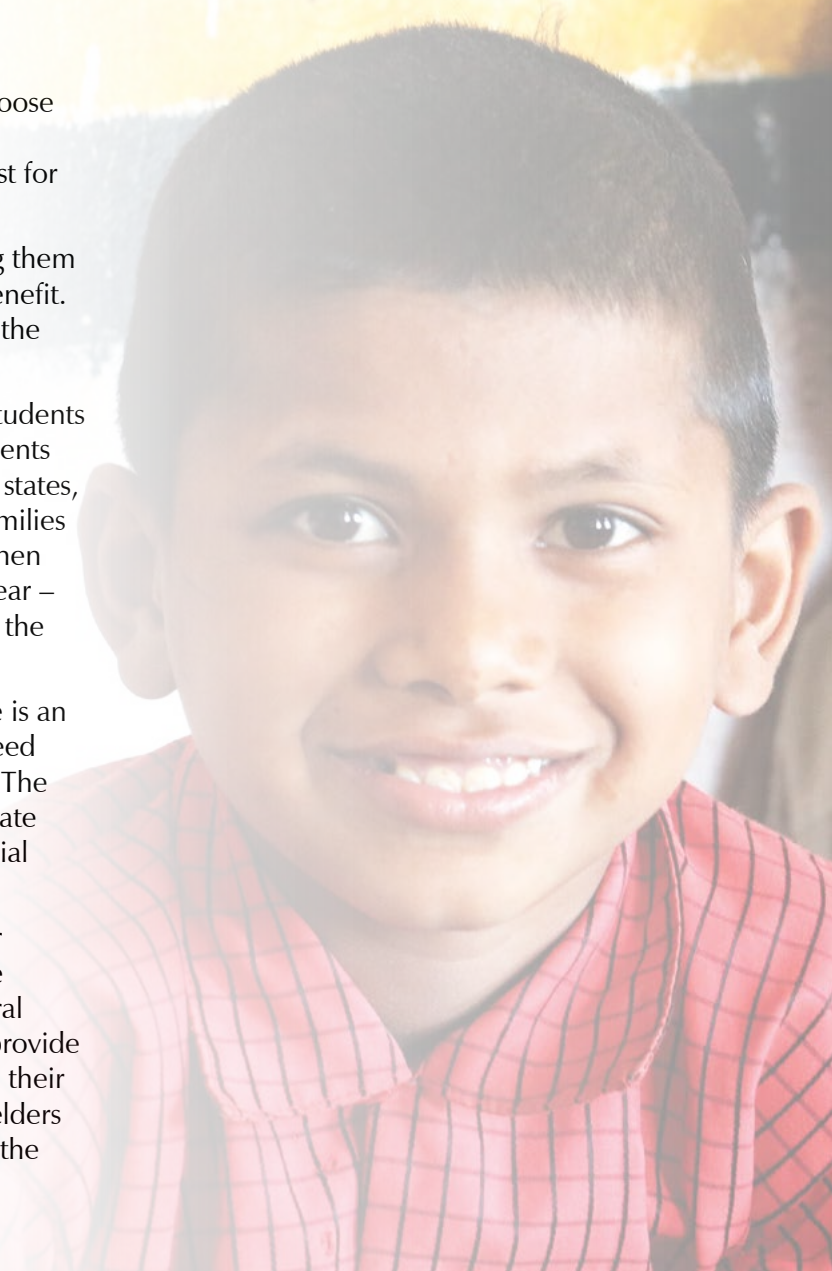
Seasonal migration is another big factor impacting children's education here. Students get enrolled in the school around July, but stop coming soon after as parents take their children along with them to Gujarat, Rajasthan and other states, either to work alongside or to look after younger siblings. The families then return around February, in time for the Holi festival. By then it's time for the final exams in which the students don't appear – in spite of being enrolled – as they have missed studies for the entire year.

Humana People to People India's (HPPI) Step up Centre is an important intervention in this region as children here need special and constant motivation to come to the school. The programme design helps students achieve age-appropriate competencies while also gradually building up their social skills, including hygiene and personality development.

Presence of Education Volunteers (EVs) from HPPI in our schools has also resulted in additional interaction with the parents which is very important to bring about a behavioural change in their outlook towards education. EVs are able to provide much-needed individual attention to the students and counsel their families, and it is becoming increasingly common to find village elders and Panchayat members joining in the voice to send the children to the school.



*Dipesh Ninama, Assistant Teacher,
Government Primary School, Piploda
Bada, Meghnagar, Jhabua*



Kiran Benajia's story

13-year-old Kiran Benajia is a speck of red at the far end of a golden, freshly harvested wheat field. No sooner she eyes us approaching, she takes to her heels and disappears behind the boundary hedge. A group of her friends accompanying us joyfully run after her and manage to persuade her into meeting us.

Kiran's apprehension emerges from a combination of personal and economic factors, and the way she experienced life at her school in village Budi, located in Pati Block of Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh.

Kiran's father passed away when she was very young. Working hard in the fields, her mother, Surmi Bai, brought up four daughters against several odds. The eldest daughter never attended school and Kiran dropped out in year 2014 after finishing 4th grade at the village Government primary school.

"My mother and elder sister have been tilling our fields since as long as I can remember. Going to the school does not put bread on our plates but working hard in the fields does," she says with a poignant earnestness far beyond her age.

When asked about her experience at the school, Kiran is equally forthcoming. "The teacher hardly came to the class and when he did, we were too scared to ask questions. Most learning occurred at home where we learned through self-study from the books we were provided."

In mid-2015, Humana People to People India's (HPPI) Step up Centre was launched in this village. Owing to lack of space at the school premises, the centre is being run at a village residence where out-of-school children congregate every day and attend classes aimed at mainstreaming them in age-appropriate classes in formal school.

At the launch of the programme, Kiran was recognised as an out-of-school child and brought to the Centre following a counselling session

with her mother. Initially she was very active at the Centre and attended classes regularly. However, after a few weeks, it became evident that household chores and her presence in the fields demanded much of her time and Kiran's presence at the Centre gradually decreased.

"I understand that it is only through education that we can get out of this cycle of poverty. I'd like to ensure that Kiran attends school regularly, but she follows me and her elder sister to the fields every day," says Surmi Bai.

Kiran's story is not a solitary case in this impoverished tribal region where endemic poverty and lack of sustainable livelihood options have resulted in several children dropping out of schools. They either accompany their parents to neighbouring states or work their fields and rear their cattle trying to make ends meet.

HPPI's Education Volunteers continue to counsel such children and their families, while implementing a multipronged effort that includes the school administration, the Block Resource Coordinators, members of the village Panchayat and village elders in order to bring these students back to school.



*Kiran (second from right), with her mother Surmi Bai and two siblings
Village: Budi, Barwani*

Nirmala Meda's story

10-years-old Nirmala Meda walks ahead of us, her bare feet effortlessly treading over pebbles and twigs alike. She's leading us to her home in village Charoli Pada, in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, located about a kilometre from her school.

At the school, Nirmala is one of the brightest students. Vocal about important issues of the village and equally proficient in academics and sports, she has been a motivational force for several children in her village to attend school. A year back, however, this was not the case.

Nirmala's father, Dhemu, earns a living working as a brick kiln labourer. At times, when work is not locally available, he migrates to neighbouring states of Gujarat or Maharashtra to work in the brick kilns there. Owing to the nature of the work, he's mostly away from home and is not able to provide requisite attention to the studies of his four children.

"I do understand the importance of education. Unlike me, my children will grow up to get a proper job if they continue to go to school. It is due to the nature of my work that I fail to support them," says Dhemu.

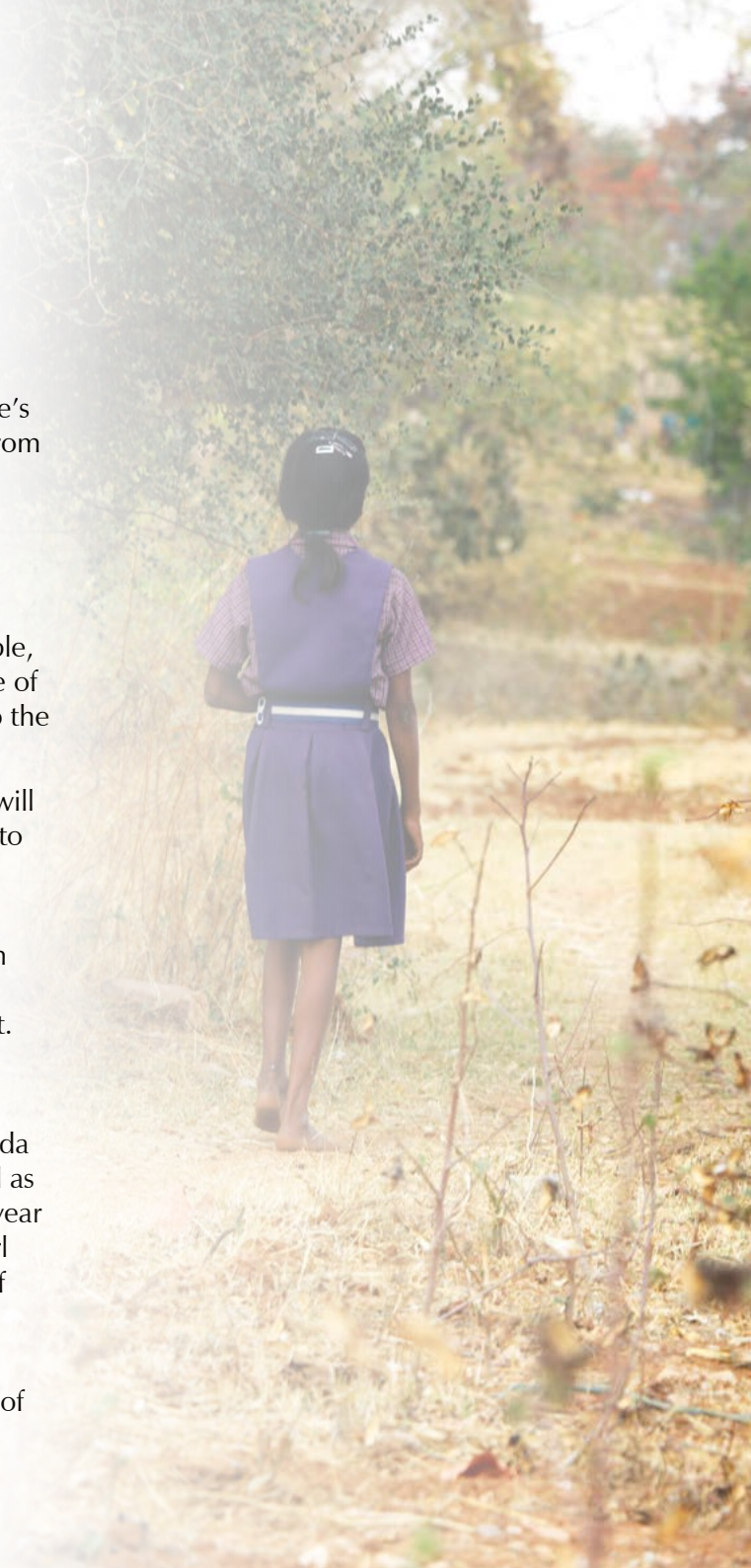
Two years back, Dhemu was away for work and could not open a bank account for Nirmala, due to which the funds for uniform (Rs 400) and scholarship (Rs 150) – as provided by the state Government – could not be transferred into her bank account. Consequently, she was forced to drop out of the school.

Following a survey – conducted in early 2015 with active cooperation between Government primary school Charoli Pada and Humana People to People India – Nirmala was identified as an out-of-school child and enrolled in the Step up Centre. A year at the Centre restored the thirst for education for the young girl and saved another child from slipping into a downward spiral of dependency that is all too common in this region.

Today, Nirmala has been successfully mainstreamed as a student of grade 5 at Government primary school Charoli Pada, and is a beacon of hope for several other children of her village.



*Nirmala with her parents
Village: Charoli Pada, Jhabua*



Praveen Mandod's story

Praveen Madod's excitement is contagious. The grade 3 student at the Step up Centre in Government primary school Charoli Pada, located in Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh, is a perceptible force of energy in the classroom. His presence can be felt in all the activities conducted at the Centre and fellow students can't help but join in all the excitement.

"I enjoy coming to the Centre as there are so many games involved. We're even learning mathematics through games," says the animated nine-year-old.

Praveen's exuberance, however, was not always as palpable as it is today. The sensitive child's emotional nature which soars high and motivates his peers to get enrolled in the school today, would cause him to become unwell when his parents left him and migrated to other states in search of livelihood options.

"He would fall sick very often, so we decided to keep him out of school and take him with us when we migrated to the neighbouring states to work. Every child, after all, wants to live with the parents, and grows unwell in their absence," says Kalu, Praveen's father.

Praveen was forced to drop out of the school when his parents temporarily migrated to Gujarat two years ago. "I work as a labourer in the textile industry and as a coal feeder in the factory boilers. When here, I work in the brick kilns around town and in the construction sector. Due to his continuing ill-health, we had to take him with us," says Kalu.

By the time the family returned in February 2015, Praveen had lost interest in studies and would often accompany his friends to the nearby forests for cattle grazing. The very next month, Praveen was identified as an out-of-school child in a survey conducted by the Education Volunteers (EVs) of Humana People to People India.

"It was easy to see that he's a very bright child and that the right place for him was the classroom and not home," says EV, Dileep Bariya.

The dynamic and activity-based learning environment prevalent at the Centre helped rekindle Praveen's interest in education.

It took no time for the highly spirited boy to lead the entire class and motivate those around his home to start coming to the school. Even the village elders are now able to see the impact of education on the confidence levels of the school-going children.

"The teachers at the Centre create a very conducive environment for holding children's attention. That is the reason why most children from our village enjoy going to the school now," says Kalu.

"Such a learning environment puts all the parents of the village to rest, knowing well that the child is being looked after and won't grow sick in our absence."

After one year at the Centre, Praveen is now well on his way to join the mainstream batch at the Government primary school as a student of 4th grade, while his irrepressible excitement continues to motivate students, teachers and everyone else around him, alike.



*Praveen Mandod
Village: Charoli Pada, Jhabua*

Kanchan's story

"Without education, I would have no aim in life," says 11-year-old Kanchan staring at the thatched roof of her house located in Budi village in the tribal district of Barwani, Madhya Pradesh. The realisation emerges out of her experiences of dropping out of school for two years while working in cotton fields of Gujarat.

"The teacher hardly came to the school and consequently she lost interest in studies," says Chhakan Singh, Kanchan's father. "She would loiter around with her friends all day long. So we decided to send her to work with my relatives. At least she'd be financially supportive that way."

Options are not many for out-of-school children of this region. Kanchan lost two vital years of her education when her father sent her away with his elder brother to the neighbouring state of Gujarat. It was during this period, while conducting an out-of-school students' survey, that Education Volunteers (EVs) from Humana People to People India (HPPI) identified Kanchan as one such student. Subsequently, the family members were regularly counselled and upon her return, Kanchan joined the HPPI-run Step up Centre.

"The teaching method at the Centre is very interesting. Everything from Mathematics to Hindi is taught through creative exercises," says Kanchan.

The accelerated learning model employed at the Centre ensures that students achieve age-appropriate competencies within the span of a year, while also gathering much needed social skills that ensure their retention in the school.

Today Kanchan is a successfully mainstreamed student of grade 6 at the Government middle school.

"It is evident that sustained efforts are important to change the outlook of people. The EVs were here every day motivating us to send her to the school," says Chhakan.

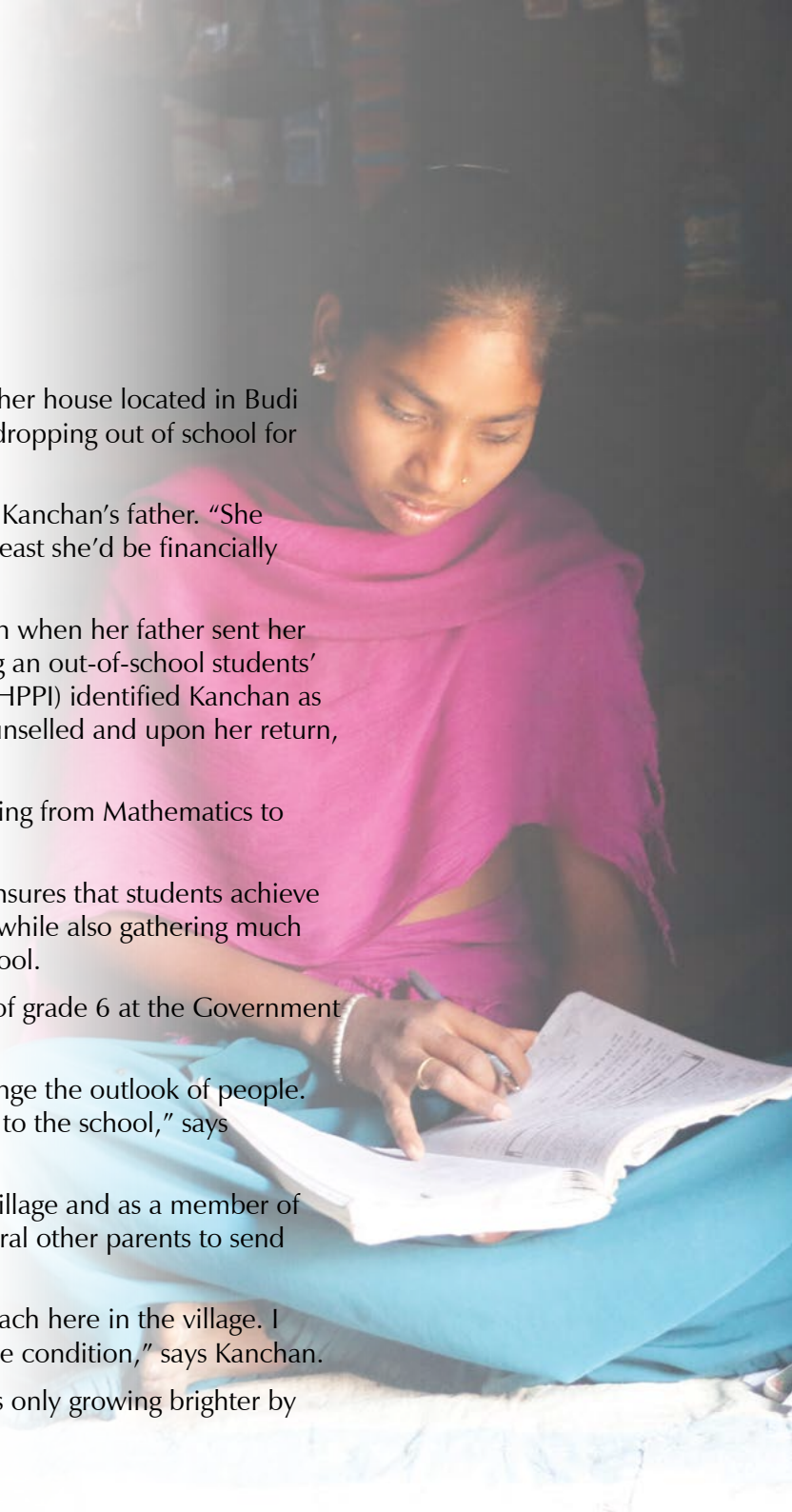
Today, Kanchan's parents are a progressive voice in the village and as a member of the panchayat, Chhakan has been able to encourage several other parents to send their children to the school.

"After finishing my studies I'd like to become a teacher and teach here in the village. I think education is the only means by which we can get out of the condition," says Kanchan.

With resolves like these, it is clear to see that this beacon of change is only growing brighter by the day.



*Kanchan (second from left), with her parents and two younger siblings
Village: Budi, Barwani*



Headmaster, Government Primary School, Bamen Semalia, Jhabua

Humana People to People India's Step up Centre has had a very good impact on the students here. Education Volunteers (EVs) visit houses of individual students, counsel their parents and motivate them to send their children to the school regularly. The impact is palpable. Several students who were out-of-school or did not attend the school regularly have started coming to the school daily since the programme started here.

A number of families don't send their children to schools even though they're in the villages. It is imperative that parents and other family members motivate children to come to school. This motivation is lacking in most parents and family members. Due to this, the cycle of illiteracy continues in most families here.

Further, in this region, seasonal migration remains the biggest issue that deters children from continuing their education. Most residents from this part migrate to Gujarat and find employment in the construction or agriculture sector as the wages are higher in other states when compared to this region.

There are several cases of enrolled students dropping out of school as they need to accompany their parents in order to look after the younger siblings while the parents are at work. Most parents are uncertain if their children will be looked after properly if left behind. Further, most village families here are quite large and live as joint families. In such a situation, few elders become responsible for looking after several youngsters of the family. In order to avoid such a situation, most parents choose to take all their children with them when they migrate.

Since the launch of the Step up Centre here, there is perceptible change in the number of students attending the classes on a regular basis. Education Volunteers (EVs) of Humana People to People India are very active in maintaining regular contact with the parents and this

has had a very positive impact on the attitude of the entire village. Coordination between the school administration and the EVs is very efficient as whenever we point out irregular students, the EVs promptly follow up, counsel the parents and ensure that the children start attending the school.

There are 73 enrolled students in this school of which about 55 students attend classes regularly. The Centre mainly functions with students who are in the village and haven't migrated with their parents. I believe it is important to run the programme in phases so as to ensure that all the enrolled students attend classes regularly.

Before the programme launched here, 15-20 students would come to the school regularly. Now this figure has gone up to 50-55. The EVs keep the students engaged through activity-based teaching methods and ensure that learning is fun. There's no other way to keep these children interested in coming to the school.

Since the launch of the programme, learning levels have improved substantially among the school students. The EVs are able to provide individual attention to each student, and this has had a positive impact on their learning levels.



Sanjay Chauhan, Headmaster, Government Primary School, Bamen Semalia, Jhabua

Headmaster, Government Primary School, Upla, Rajpur, Barwani

Seasonal migration remains the most common reason for children dropping out of school in this village. Village residents here are mostly small land holders and with lack of water being a persistent issue, irrigational facilities are non-existent and they depend entirely on rain. This results in a meagre yield.

Owing to these reasons, for several generations, seasonal migration has become somewhat of a norm for the families here. Most families go to Gujarat or Maharashtra for 6-7 months every year and work in cotton fields, construction sector, or in the brick kilns. They're able to generate relatively larger savings in these states due to higher daily wages. In some cases, children are left behind with their grandparents to look after the cattle and to perform other daily household chores.

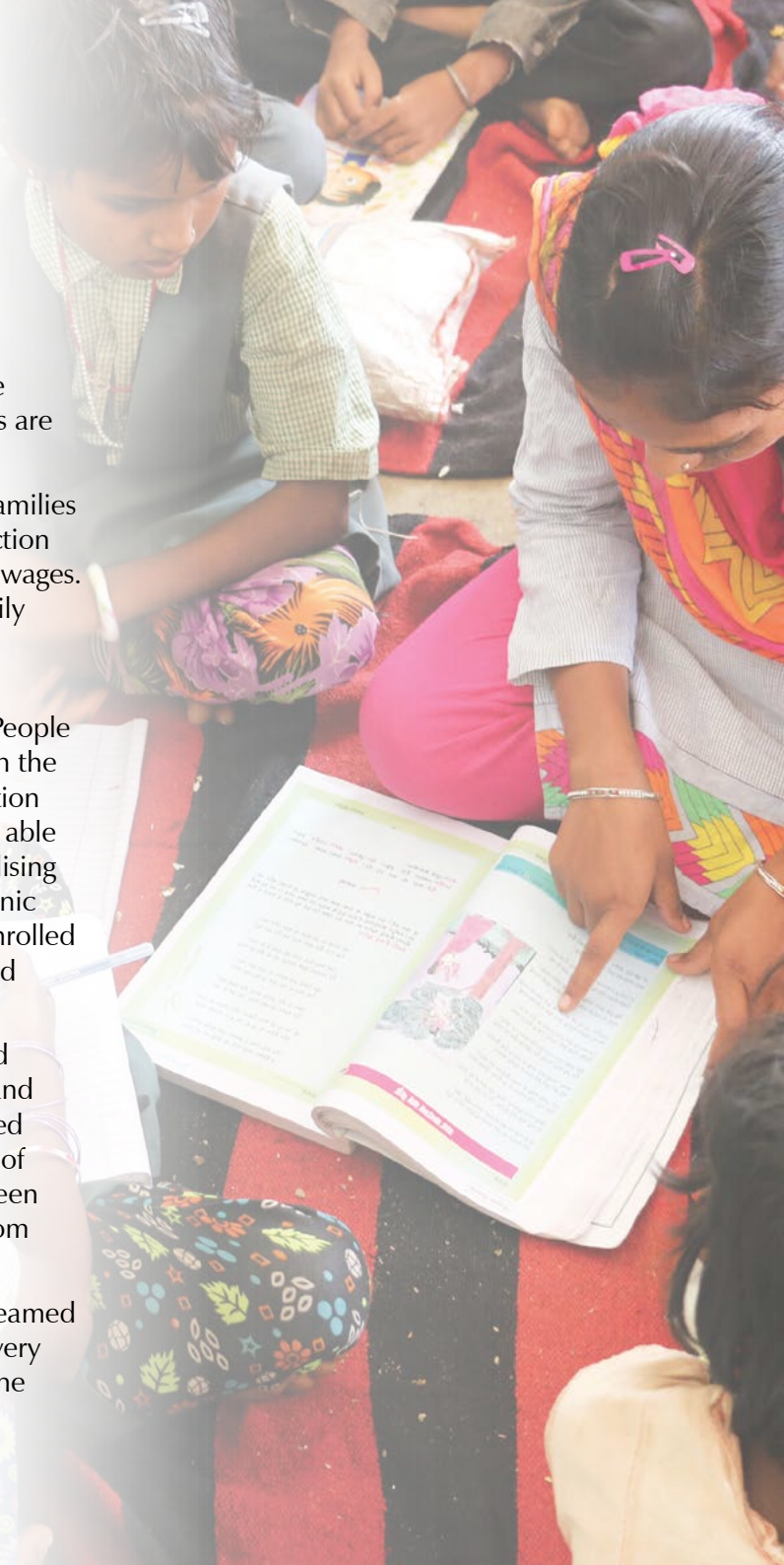
Education was always perceived as a bad investment of time here as its results are not immediately clear and become evident only after a few years. Since the launch of Humana People to People India's (HPPI) Step up Centre in the village, there is a marked difference in the attitude of the residents towards education. Due to their daily interaction with the village residents, Education Volunteers of HPPI have been able to successfully counsel and motivate majority of parents into realising the significance of education as a catalyst for ending their chronic poverty. As a result several children who were either never enrolled or who dropped out due to various reasons have now started coming to the school regularly.

Activity-based methods and use of interactive teaching and learning materials help to retain the attention of students and keeps them coming back to the school. While activity-based teaching has been employed in almost all primary schools of the state for past few years now, HPPI's involvement has been able to project the role of teacher in enhancing the classroom environment further.

It is very impressive to see the confidence level of the mainstreamed students that we receive from the Centre. They're found to be very comfortable in their new environment and at times actively lead the class session.



Kamal Singh Kushwaha, Headmaster, Government Primary School, Upla, Rajpur, Barwani



Jhingli Rawat's story

"Participating in the activities is the best part of the classes. Mathematics is taught through songs and Hindi through cards. It is very different from how we were taught at the old school".

11-year-old Jhingli Rawat is talking non-stop for the last 10 minutes as she leads us to her home in Upla village of Rajpur Block in Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh.

A year back, however, she was not the dynamic young girl that she is today. In spite of her immense love for studies, Jhingli dropped out of school three years ago. For two years she spent her days doing household chores and walking the goats to the forest for grazing.

"She was scared of the school environment due to the teacher's attitude. Children always want to have fun. If they don't get that at school, they drop out," says Jagdish Rawat, Jhingli's father.

Surely parents' responsibilities demand them to encourage their child to go to the school in spite of the sub-optimal school environment. However, in these impoverished regions where livelihood options are extremely limited and agriculture is entirely rain-dependent, parents themselves need to be motivated in order to make informed decisions about their child's education.

In Jhingli's case, her parents were unaware of various government initiatives such as special girl child scholarships, midday meals and direct credit of funds for school uniforms. As such, they never took any initiative in getting their daughter re-admitted in the school once she dropped out.

In mid-2015 Humana People to People India's Step up Centre was launched in Upla village. Education Volunteers at the Centre identified Jhingli as an out-of-school child and started counselling her parents about the significance of education and the various government-run

schemes that they can benefit from. Following her enrolment at the Centre, Jhingli joined the programme as a 5th grade student and today is a part of the Government middle school in 6th grade.

The Centre has proved to be an imperative impetus for many students of the village. Leading them from a life out of school, through an accelerated learning environment of specially designed curriculum, to ensure retention at the mainstream school by much-needed social conditioning, Step up Centre is today accepted as an ideal model for mainstreaming out-of-school children in this region.

"Once their inner potential opens up, children begin to generate a dynamism that directs their own learning. Today, along with getting good education, Jhingli is motivating other families of her village to send their children to school as well," says HPPI Education Volunteer Naval Singh.

And the excitement is palpable in Jagdish's voice when he says, "We're suffering this poverty but our children don't deserve the same fate. Education is the only way out for them and I'm proud of my daughter today. I can only thank the Centre and the EVs for their effort."

Such voices of positive change are today increasingly being heard in the tribal regions of Jhabua and Barwani where 80 Step up Centres are implementing the mainstreaming programme for the past one year.



*Jhingli (2nd from left) with her family members
Village: Upla, Barwani*

Block Resource Coordinator, Meghnagar, Jhabua

For the past one year, the Humana People to People India-run Step up Centres have been able to provide some very valuable inputs to the primary schools of Meghnagar block in mainstreaming out-of-school children. The programme design and study material makes for accelerated learning and provide students with key social skills to continue their education at their age-appropriate level in the school.

The one-year programme has been able to successfully mainstream a number of children in our block. This has been achieved due to efficient coordination between the HPPI Education Volunteers and the school faculty.

Seasonal migration is the biggest reason for most children dropping out of schools here. They accompany their parents to the neighbouring states and it has been a persistent challenge to try to retain them in the schools. The state administration has launched several schemes to retain such students in the schools by providing them with residential facilities and additional scholarships. However, the challenge remains.

Programmes such as the one implemented at the Step up Centres are critical interventions to check the issue of out-of-school children in this region, and helps us achieve the vision of universal quality education.

Continuous efforts by passionate Education Volunteers in targeted counselling of village residents and community elders has been able to result in a progressive change in their outlook towards the significance of education. It is important that such interventions are implemented with active inputs from the Block Resource Centres, where officials fully understand the persistent gaps in the providing quality education in various villages.

The Step up Centres have been able to efficiently assist the school administration in mainstreaming out-of-school children in coordination with the Block Resource Centre, Meghnagar.



*Nirmal Tripathi, Block Resource
Coordinator, Meghnagar, Jhabua*



Education Volunteer, Government Primary School, Bamniya, Petlawad, Jhabua

As soon as Neha Bhosle enters, the classroom turns into a riotous chorus of “GOOD AFTERNOON MADAM”.

Neha is an Education Volunteer of Humana People to People India at the Step up Centre being run at the Government primary school, Bamniya in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. And the enthusiasm she induces in the class is palpable.

“These students are always filled with excitement. They only need a proper channel to express it. I’m happy to provide it to them,” says a cheerful Neha.

At GPS Bamniya, Neha has been able to successfully mainstream nearly 30 out-of-school children from the neighbouring area who dropped out of the education system due to various reasons.

Unlike most other parts of this region, students in this area don’t drop out due to seasonal migration. Petlawad is a fledging township with optimum livelihood options for its residents.

“There is a fundamental lack of interest in education among the children here and the families mostly do nothing to change that. It is the traditional chalk-and-talk teaching methods that push students away from schools. If only we can make learning interesting, students will themselves get attracted to schools,” says Neha.

And that’s exactly what she did. With active support from the school headmaster, Neha has managed to create a learning environment which reflects the reception she receives each time she enters the classroom.

“Students should be allowed to express themselves in any manner they like, within the broader boundaries of accepted discipline, of course,” she says.

“

It is important to let students present their creativity. This gives a healthy boost to their confidence levels and enhances their presentation skills. This brings them to school day after day. //

Hence, it is not uncommon to find students receiving 5-minutes dance breaks after few hours of lessons, where those interested in dancing present their moves – either individually or as a part of a group – while others join in the song chorus.

“It is important to let students present their creativity. This gives a healthy boost to their confidence levels and enhances their presentation skills. This brings them to school day after day,” says Neha.

Neha is one of the 80 Education Volunteers working in as many Centres in the districts of Jhabua and Barwani towards mainstreaming out-of-school children, fired with a belief in the inherent creativity of the children to guide their own learning process.



*Neha Bhosle, HPPI Education Volunteer,
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