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Developing a Teacher-Training Module for Increasing Girls' Participation in Primary Schools: Action Research Phase - A Report

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STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN INDIA

Developing a Teacher-Training Module for Increasing Girls’ Participation in Primary Schools

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE - A REPORT

developed by

Dr. Urvashi Sahni, Activities Director

in collaboration with the Center for International Education, School of Education, UMASS Amherst, MA

a USAID-Funded Project

The opinions expressed in this document are those of the writers and are not necessarily shared by USAID.
Strengthening the Education of Girls in India

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with the Government of India and the state of Uttar Pradesh is conducting an in-service teacher training process to promote girls' education. This five-year project is part of USAID's worldwide Girls' and Women's Education Initiative. The project is being implemented by the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts.

**Goal:** to increase girls’ primary school attendance, retention, and completion.

**Activities:** to develop, test, and implement a teacher-training module and a gender handbook for teachers from one district, as well as a plan for state-wide implementation.

**Training module:** components include training in action research methods for problem analysis in schools and communities; classroom analysis and modification in teaching strategies; curriculum review; and strategies for building school-community partnerships.

**Target population:** 5000 primary teachers in the district of Rae Bareilly

**Project phases:**
- Action research by 23 teacher-researchers in schools and communities (8-12/97)
- Development of draft module and training materials (1/98)
- Pilot testing with 50 teachers in Maharajganj block (3/98)
- Pilot testing with the 150 teachers in Maharajganj block
- Implementation with the 5000 teachers in Rae Bareilly district
- Development of state-wide plan

**Key features**

**Embedded in local structures:** National, state, district, and block level officials are committed to girls' education and to this project; representatives of national and local NGOs sit on the Advisory Committee; members of state and local teachers' unions are directly involved in planning and implementing the project.

**Participatory design:** Teachers and other key stakeholders such as community members have been involved in the initial development, pilot testing, refinement, and final development of training. Preliminary meetings with mothers and village leaders are helping build commitment to girls' education.

**Rooted in local knowledge, experience, and personnel:** the project builds on national and local expertise about girls’ education; the project is sensitive to local context, beliefs, and cultural values and is staffed by Indian nationals.

**Early lessons learned**

**Teacher Researcher comments after six months:** Community beliefs and values support boys’ education over that of girls. As a result, teachers enact these values in subtle ways.

**Action Research** is proving valuable for teachers to reflect on and begin to change their practice. Teachers have become more aware of their own beliefs, values and actions.

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ACTION RESEARCH PHASE - A REPORT

Objective
The chief objective of this phase was to enable the core-group of teacher-researchers get *an indepth understanding of the situation of girls in their classrooms as it exists*, to observe, self-reflect and problematise their own practices closely; to *identify the key relevant issues and then to collectively arrive at some possible ways in which the situation might be dealt with, with the aim of making their own practices in the classroom more girl-friendly*; to experiment with innovative ideas in their own classrooms and to *emerge with ideas for the development of a proposed training module and gender handbook*. The guiding objective of the training module and gender handbook being - the strengthening of girls education in primary schools, firstly by increasing enrolment, attendance and achievement and more importantly by transacting the curriculum such that girls were empowered to perceive themselves as equal persons and active participants in the socio-political world inhabited by them.

Participants: 21 primary school teachers from 17 schools in Maharajganj block and 3 from Harchandpur.
1. Ms. Vimla Awasthi - Harchandpur Primary School 1
2. Ms. Mamta Srivastava - Harchandpur Primary School 2
3. Ms. Kanchan Singh - Diparmau Primary School, Maharajganj
4. Ms. Premlata - Pali, Primary School, Maharajganj
5. Ms. Sunita Devi - Hardoi Primary School, Maharajganj
6. Ms. Adi Shakti - Hardoi Primary School, Maharajganj
7. Ms. Geeta Yadav - Athreta Primary School, Maharajganj
8. Ms. Geeta Singh - Andupur Primary School, Maharajganj
9. Ms. Krishna Devi - Maharajganj Primary School
10. Ms. Arundhati Devi - Hazipur Primary School, Maharajganj
11. Ms. Chandravati Devi - Mausarki Primary School, Maharajganj
12. Mr. Gyanendra Tewari - Maun Primary School, Maharajganj
13. Mr. Shivprasad - Kusdi sagar Primary School, Maharajganj
14. Mr. Ramprasad - Pure Badal Khan Primary School, Maharajganj
15. Mr. Rakesh Kumar - Kubna Primary School, Maharajganj
16. Mr. Shashikant - Chandapur Primary School, Maharajganj
17. Mr. Shivpratap Singh - Kotwa Mohammedabad Primary School, Maharajganj
18. Mr. Mathura Prasad - PureAchali Primary School, Maharajganj
19. Mr. Akhilesh Kumar - Raja Kans Pur Primary School, Maharajganj
20. Mr. Satendra Pratap Singh - Daudpur Primary School, Maharajganj
21. Mr. Nanhulal - Maharajganj Primary School.

Directed and supported by Dr. U. Sahni, Project Director
Ms. Arti Srivastava, Field Officer
2 Lecturers from the District Institute of Educational Training, Rai Bareilly: Ms. M. Kazmi and Ms. Chandrakanti Tripathi.

Site:

17 Primary Schools in Maharajganj and 3 Primary Schools in Harchandpur

Duration:

The Action Research Phase began on 9/9/97 and closed on 24/11/97.
It was divided into 2 main phases:
1. The Observation Phase: Which consisted of Classroom Observations, in neighbouring schools. The classroom observations started on the 9th and were over on 19/9/97. 4 observations were done on the 9th, 12th, 16th and 19th of September.

2. The Participation Phase: Which consisted of experimental work in their own classrooms. This phase began on 22/9/97 and continued till 24/11/97.

Methodology: Ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing were used. There were frequent support and sharing meetings during the entire action research phase.

For monitoring and support purposes, we divided the 21 schools into 4 sectors, to be monitored by the 4 facilitators, who made field visits regularly to each of the schools in their sectors.

Day long report sharing and support meetings were conducted on 2/9 (Preparatory meeting); 12/9, 20/9, 27/9, 14/10, 27/10, 24/11 and a concluding, evaluation meeting on 6/12. These meetings were held at a central place in Maharajganj, once in Harchandpur and once at the field office in Rae Bareilly. These meetings were conducted by the Project Director. The participants shared their field notes and the events in their classroom, in small groups facilitated by the Monitoring team. Many suggestions were given to them and short term tasks assigned for experimenting with in their classrooms.

Findings and Analysis:

REPORT OF MEETING HELD ON 12/9/97

The first reporting meeting was on the 12/9 held in Maharajganj, during which teachers shared their field notes. Several of them reported that due to a shortage of teachers in some schools, they ended up doing the teaching instead of observing, for part of the time. This is a common predicament and we had to allow that, though they were urged to divide...
their time between observing and teaching, both. During this meeting the focus was almost entirely upon all the various problems that afflicted the schools. Almost all of them report a shortage of teachers and space. This was confirmed by the block educational statistics and by the field visits made by the monitoring team. I myself saw that in the schools that I visited.

**Report of school visit made by Project Director:**

For Example: In Chandapur - which is a very interior school, there are 6 teachers in a school with 465 children enrolled and an attendance of 350. On the day I visited only 2 teachers were present - 2 had gone to get their salary and 2 were sick. Out of the 465 enrolled - 177 are girls and 288 are boys.

Class 1 - 99 b and 48 g (enrolled) 80 b and 40 g (attended)
Class 2 - 78 b and 49 g (en) 52 b and 46 g (att)
Class 3 - 31 b and 42 g (en) 25 b and 22 g (att)
Class 4 - 37 b and 18 g (en) 30 b and 17 g (att)
Class 5 - 34 b and 20 g (en) 27 b and 17 g (att)

Caste Distribution: Total Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes 117; Other Backward Classes 307; Minorities 22 and General (upper caste) 16

Regarding attendance records, the Principal said that since the mid-day meal had begun they give real attendance figures, or else the wheat quota does not work out. (The Government provides a quota of 3 kgs wheat per student enrolled, provided the attendance recorded is at least 80%.)

The school was established in 1904 and the older section of the building was in a dilapidated condition. The rest of it was in urgent need of repair and maintenance.
There was a severe shortage of Tatpattis (floor mats used for seating), though the Principal admitted that the money was there in the account. Operation Blackboard material was unused and much of it had been stolen. There had been 2 thefts so far and even the pictures of the national heroes had been stolen. Only 2 blackboards remained - the others had been stolen, claimed the Principal.

There was no lady teacher, which the entire staff regretted, as they said it was a great draw for all children in primary schools and for girls more particularly. The reason there was no lady teacher was because the school was in too interior a region for a lady teacher to come to, as public transportation was not available in the area.

Sharing of field notes:
Field notes written by the teachers during their visits were shared in small groups and then reported in the whole group. Given below is an example of a field note written by one of the teacher-researchers - Krishna Devi.

*Example of one field note of a class observation visit:*

The children were being made to exercise in the school courtyard after prayers. The children were lined up according to height order. The small boys and girls were lined up together. The older girls were lined up separately in 2 lines. The teachers were making the children exercise to the count. After exercises the children went to their classes. After that I introduced myself to the Principal, told him about our program and explained the purpose of my visit to him.

There is a total of 3 male teachers, no female teacher. The Principal teaches class 5, Shri Sitaramji teaches class 2 and 4 and Shri Ramlakhanji teaches Class 3.
The condition of the building: There are only 2 rooms in the school. There is no verandah. There is a handpump for drinking water. There is no boundary wall. There is an open ground in front of the school where there are a couple of trees and plants. The surroundings are quite pretty. There are fruit gardens behind the school and field on either side of the school. There is no toilet in the school. Classes one and 5 are conducted together, in the same room. Classes 2 and 4 are conducted together in the same room. Class 3 is conducted under a tree.

Observation of Class 3:

10.15 am: The class was conducted under the peepul tree. The teacher was taking attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of kids enrolled</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number present</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of girls enrolled</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number present</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of boys enrolled</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number present</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 5 children found absent in the class.

Seating arrangement:

There was discrimination in the seating arrangement. The girls and boys were seated separately, in lines. The long jute matting was laid out in rows on the dirt floor. The rows were very straight. The girls were talking to each other and the boys were also talking only amongst themselves. The class was very disciplined. After this the teacher asked the children to turn in their writing/transcription books. All the children came one by one, turned in their books to the teacher and went back to their place to be seated.
The children kept looking back at me to see what I was doing. The girls are talking to each other and wondering when I will start teaching them.

10.45: After correcting their books, the teacher asked the children to take out their Arithmetic books. He taught them a lesson in addition. The children were to add 10 successively 3 times over:

536 - [546], [556], [566]
634 - [644], [654], [664]

While working on the blackboard, the teacher was interested only in his own work and was paying almost no attention to the children. Some of the boys were talking to each other and looking at each other's copies and not at the black board. In between he even asked the children some questions like - what is 36 plus 10. A boy called Dwand kumar replied and gave the right answer - 46. In this way he asked questions from many children. Only the boys gave correct answers to the questions in Arithmetic. The girls were asked no questions at all.

11.30 am: After this a pundit came and told the teacher to remove the children from under the peepul tree, because he wanted to conduct a prayer there. The teacher complied immediately, removing the children to another tree in the field. The tree was covered with weeds and there was only a small patch of clear ground. He seated the children in a patch of wet soil. The pundit seemed not to care about the children at all. After his prayer he left his prayer things under the tree, so that the children had to continue sitting on the wet soil. After the change of place, the teacher corrected the copies on which the children had tried to solve the problems he had put on the board for them. He had put the sums and their answers on the board, which is why the sums were all correct. The children writing was satisfactory. After this the children had a break.

As soon as the bell rang, the children put their things in their bags, collected their lunch boxes and went out of the class. Since the village is close to the school, some of the kids
go home for lunch. The boys ate their lunch in a separate group and the girls in a separate one. Similarly the boys played kabaddi together and the girls played geetas together. Then I asked the girls why they didn’t ever play with the boys. A child called Renu said: “My grandmother says I should not play with boys.” Gradually most of the girls came close to me and sat around me. I chatted to them for quite a while. They all told me their names and class. When I asked them why they did not play kabaddi with the boys - they told me that at home their parents forbade them from doing so and in school, the master forbade them from this. He said they could play kabaddi, but not with the boys.

After lunch, the teacher came into the class and asked the kids to take out their Hindi text books. He asked them to open the lesson “Raakhi ki Laaj.” All the children in the class had text books. The word meanings of difficult words had already been given. Now the difficult words were repeated out loud, in order to improve their pronunciation. The girls were concentrating less on their books and more on me. The teacher said “I taught you the lesson yesterday. Now I’m going to ask you questions.”

Ques.1. In which month is Rakhi celebrated? He asked this question to a girl called Renu.

Answer: Rakhi is celebrated in the full month of the Sawan.

Ques 2. Members of which community/caste celebrate Rakhi?

No child in the class could give the answer to this question. Then the teacher gave the answer, saying that Rakhi is a festival celebrated by the Hindus. And then he told them about the national festivals of India. He made the distinction between Hindu and Muslim festivals. After this each child was asked to read from the text book. Most of the children could read the text book. The meanings of difficult words were also told to them for eg: festival -

Because the class was in the fields the children kept looking at the comings and goings around them. A dictation of the same lesson was taken after this. The children were looking into each other’s copies. After taking dictation all the girls came and stood next
to me and began asking me to check their copies. After I checked some of the girls' copies, some boys also came up to me. Then I checked most of the copies and found that some of the children had misspelt some of the words. The teacher did not mind my checking the copies. After this he gave them some general information like - name of the state, the district, why we go to the post-office, where the market is held, what we get there etc.

At this time the class 1 kids came out into the field. The principal lined them up in 2 rows and taught them counting in tens and ones upto a 100. He also asked them to recite their tables - 2-5. There was no gender-discrimination, as the girls and boys in class 1 were lined up together. Some of the boys were pulling the girls' plaits lightly. The girls did not complain to the teacher. The teacher kept walking up and down and yet managed to keep an eye on the kids and to teach them. The children from classes 2, 4 and 5 were sitting inside. Directed by the Principal the class 5 kids rang the bell. Children from all the classes came out and lined up. After “attention”, “at ease”, “Jai Hind” and “dismiss” the children all wished the teachers and then ran off in the direction of their respective homes.

Conclusions:
1. The discipline in the school is good.
2. They need more rooms.
3. They need more seating mats.
4. There is a shortage of teaching aids.
5. There should be at least one female teacher.

Note: Upon chatting with the girls during my observation visit, I felt that the girls really wanted to get close to me and chat for as long as they could. Even when I went out into the field a class 4 child, Sunita, followed me out with her maths text book. She said “Didi you should come to my school every day.” I told her that I would come for 4 days
Certainly. At this another child Pawan Kumari from class 3 said “Bring another didi with you, then she can teach us. We all wish there was a bahenji in our school.”

Even the Principal felt that we should certainly have a female teacher in the school. The girls will feel very encouraged. By the time girls reach class 5, the girls become big, they are unable to tell their innermost concerns to male teachers. If there is a female teacher then they can talk openly to them.

Observation note written by Mrs. Krishna Devi, Maharajganj Central school.

Report of Support Meeting held on 20/9/97

On the final meeting after the classroom observations had been completed, held on 20/9/97, the first half of the day was used up in discussing the experiences of the teachers during their classroom observations. They tended not to describe but prescribe - “there should be sufficient number of teachers.” We had to focus hard on eliciting descriptions from the welter of prescriptions they provided.

The teachers had written detailed notes (as is evident from the sample provided above) describing the teaching as well as the physical environment. When they were asked to report they seemed to focus on points like these:

1. Severe shortage of seating space
2. Too much paper work for the teachers
3. A severe shortage of teachers - this was emphasised time and again by all the teachers
4. Teacher-absenteeism (This was not pointed out as such, descriptions revealed that in most schools one or more teachers were absent - so it was pointed out by me)
5. Much disturbance due to lack of seating space - in some cases classrooms were shared with the administrative staff and that resulted in much disturbance.
6. Parents resisted mixed seating.
7. Almost all teachers had to resort to multigrade teaching and use of monitors. - as a result of this teachers find it difficult to teach even when they want to and much of their work is wiped out.

8. Teachers seem to have no relationship with their children - they hardly spend any time in one class. Often all they do is to write work on the board in one class and then move to the next to do the same and then back to do the checking.

9. There were very few gender specific comments or observations. It seemed to be a case of gender neutral benign neglect.

10. The depressing and dilapidated condition of the classrooms was commented upon. In one case the teacher-researcher said it was really too hot to sit in the classroom to observe so he chose another classroom.

11. Teachers commented that where there was a strong principal, there was more discipline amongs the students and staff both - and Halor and Chiloli are good examples of that.

12. The teachers were not punctual and often came late.

13. Attendance of children was recorded at a healthy 80%, though the same could not be said for the staff. They were often absent for reasons like - collecting of salary; administrative work and personal work.

14. Teaching methods described were very archaic and minimal - emphasising rote-learning and copying from the text book or the blackboard. In many cases - very little teaching-learning was accomplished during the entire day - often just 4 sums on the board, or copying from the text book and copying the letters from the blackboard.

During the latter half of the meeting, we discussed the general findings. Every one commented upon the heartening fact, that the teachers had reported honestly, on their peers. They also said that it was a good exercise in self-reflection for all of them. They said that it gave them an insight into their own practices. We tried to move them away from too loud a bemoaning of the structural and organisational problems and focussed on the examples where efforts were being made despite the problems. For eg: In Hasanpur, where there were only 2 teachers and 300 children, the classrooms were far better
organised than at Jamuliya where there were 60 children and 2 teachers. So the point was made that there are no blanket problems or blanket solutions. Everyone commented upon the lack of punctuality, poor attendance of teachers and their apathy.

We then devoted our energies to **PLANNING THE PARTICIPATION PHASE**. It was unanimously decided that before focussing on gender specifically during the participation phase of the research, we would focus on just improving the teaching in our schools. All the teachers felt the need to do that. We broke up into small groups and every one made a few resolutions on the specific changes they were planning in their classrooms - for eg:

1. Handling the problem of shortage of space by using Panchayat ghars or trees outside the school area
2. Using small group teaching in order to deal with the large numbers
3. Improving the physical face of their classrooms (this was inspired by the cheery appearance of one of the schools in the Harchandpur block)
4. Focussing on teaching the children, rather than completing the course.
5. Improving the discipline amongst the staff - more punctuality, better attendance, better organisation in the schools
6. Improving the quality of their teaching.
7. Meeting with the parents.

**Report of Support Meeting held on 27/9/97**

After this we met on the 27th of September. The support meetings were day long meetings, at which our agenda was as follows:

1. Reporting of achievements and happenings in a large group - followed by discussion
2. Detailed reporting in small groups - facilitated by Arti, 2 Diet staff and myself
3. Whole group sharing of small group reports
4. Planning for next week - assignment of specific tasks
During the Meeting on 27/9/97, the teachers reported in the large group for the first couple of hours. After this the whole group discussed the reports and made suggestions. We gave out the interview sheets prepared by the group during the July training workshop and discussed once again the salient points of interviewing. It was decided that gender-specific activities could now be introduced in the classroom. After lunch, I presented the Usha Nayar book on gender sensitive and girl-friendly education and read out parts with special reference to curriculum transaction, as a way of providing examples of transacting the curriculum in girl-friendly ways. The group broke into 3 groups and each group discussed the sections of one subject - Maths, Social Science and Language. The teachers participated enthusiastically and made notes. There were requests for the book, which was provided to each participant subsequently. They were asked to try out similar curricular innovations in their own classrooms during the next week. I suggested that the monitor system, which was already in place in several schools, due to the shortage of teachers, be adopted by all and made more equitable, by appointing 2 monitors - a girl and a boy and doing so in rotation. I also suggested that prayers be led by girls as well as boys. Games be played by both together. Girls be attended to particularly in classrooms.

Gender issues were discussed at each meeting as the rationale for each of the activities was discussed. Some of the male teachers needed much convincing.

**Report of Support Meeting held on 14/10/97**

During the meeting on 14/10/97 the teachers reported that there was much change in them and the reasons they gave were as follows:

1. Regular inspection (by our team)
2. Regular sharing meetings
3. Specific short term tasks
4. Sharing and reporting - therefore increased accountability
5. More self-reflection - because of the writing
6. Inspiring discussions during the meetings
7. Increased sense of responsibility
8. Enjoying the program
9. They see this participation as “training”

Changes reported in their classrooms and school

1. Attendance of children more regular
2. Better organisation in the classroom
3. Children more punctual
4. Teaching focus shifted from course to knowledge gained by the children
5. Much better relationship with children
6. More interaction between boys and girls
7. More active teaching methods and more active participation by the children.
8. Girls have started opening up more
9. The monitor system has worked and has given girls more confidence
9. Teaching has become more interesting for the children and staff both

Interviews of parents, teachers and pradhans were shared and discussed. Some sample interview reports:

Kanchan Singh interviewed the Principal of Andupur Primary School. She reports: The Principal had been teaching for the last 28 years and had been working in the current position since 1995. He said the reason girls did not attend school were - family apathy, care of younger siblings at home; poverty and social apathy. Most important of all was parental apathy towards the education of their daughters. Kanchan reported one mother as saying “If we send girls to school, who is going to take care of the younger children at home? And then, we are field labourers, if we spend our money on these girls’ education, then what will we do for food?”
Gyanendra Tewari interviewed several parents and asked them why girls did not come to school - he reports: There are several social traditions like the dowry-system which are hindrances in girls continuing education - “If we educate our daughters too much then we need boys with a higher education too and then they want too high a groom-price. So it’s better not to educate our girls too much.” The unavailability of a high school in the vicinity is also another reason, why girls education is discontinued, as parents do not consider it safe to send their girls to another village or to co-educational schools after puberty.

The Principal of Maun Primary School, said that mothers are the chief culprits as they are the ones who prevent their daughters from going to school and favour their sons more than their daughters.

Krishna Devi reports that in one of the family she interviewed, all the members were educated. Their perspective was that it was very important to educate girls in modern times and the government should make provisions for higher education for girls in each village so that girls could avail of it, as it was dangerous to send girls too far. They also expressed their concern regarding high dowries for girls with higher education.

Vidyavati from Pure Dadi Khan said that almost all the girls in her village were going to school and the one or two who did not go, were kept back less because of financial reasons and more because they were needed at home for sibling care and house work. She belonged to the lower caste herself and stated that girls from upper and lower castes went to school. She also said that whether the parents were educated or not, they all sent their girls to school up till the 5th at least.

Ram das, a lower caste labourer from Mardaniya said that “Every one in our village is lower caste and uneducated, therefore they have no value for education. But given the need of the day, I am in favour of sending girls to school. If educated people can help to
make the uneducated villagers aware of the importance and benefits of education, especially for girls, then there can be some progress. These people just do not understand."

Raj Rani a Pasi (lower caste) woman from Pure Badal Khan said that if poverty could be alleviated then there was hope for the girls. Uneducated people, she said, do not value education, especially for girls. It is important to make them more aware.

Chandrani Devi, a 60 year old lower caste woman from Hazipur said that, poverty is the main reason why girls aren’t sent to school. Large families are another reason—"With 10-10 children who can you educate and who will you leave out? Obviously the girls get left out. They have to be married off, after all! Why do they need an education?"

Kamla, another woman from the same village said that "we can’t send our daughters to a co-ed school even if it is close. There will be a social scandal if we do that. If there is a single sex school then we will send our daughters to school after class 5."

Vijay Pratap Singh from Daudpur, who has a Masters Degree and whose wife has passed the Intermediate level says that, she would educate her daughter till the Bachelors level definitely. "We are all educated in our family and so we will definitely educate our daughters."

The teachers all concluded that community mobilization should be an important part of their agenda. They all decided to hold parent-teacher meetings very soon in their schools, to raise the issues that had emerged from their interviews.

During the next few weeks we focussed completely on gender. The assignments I gave to the teachers were as follows: - Do a gender scanning of the text books; Write stories or poems with girls as central characters and teach them in the classroom; Change one lesson from the text and teach it innovatively with gender as a focus.
Report of Support Meeting on 27/10/97

The meeting on 27/10/97 began as usual with a sharing of the poems and stories written by the teachers. (Examples provided in Annexure 1) The teachers had all written poems and reported that they enjoyed writing them. The stories all had girls as the main characters, but were cast quite heavily in the traditional, patriarchal mould. Marriage for the girls figured often in all the stories and the message sent was that education makes for more intelligent motherhood. The discussion centered around patriarchy and marriage as central to the lives of women. We pointed out that if the stories were meant to empower women then they must do more than merely include girls as central characters. While marriage was very important in the lives of girls, it was also one of the chief area of oppression. It would help if the stories problematised the issue and raised important questions for discussion. The stories also had a very adult tone and often it was not clear who the audience was. It was pointed out that the stories must be child-appropriate.

Rakesh raised the question about History - “How shall we change History lessons? That would be factually incorrect.” Fortunately, Sunita had an answer in the story she had selected for her classroom. She had made the effort to find a historical story of a brave woman. We pointed out that the effort would be to bring in the forgotten stories and to make the effort to show girls that they had a place in history, even though it had been forgotten. There was much discussion about the “genderizing” of the curriculum in terms of making it more girl-friendly. We focussed on changing traditional gendered role-perceptions and showing women in more untraditional roles.

When teachers shared how they had used their stories and poems in their classrooms, it emerged that the stories had been read, to be learnt and reproduced. The learning elicited was passive and the teaching was not interactive or dialogic. We then discussed and demonstrated interactive, dialogic teaching and the value and nature of critical dialogues in the classroom.
We also discussed Parent-teacher meetings. Most of the teachers had been unable to hold them, because of the holiday season. They resolved to hold them soon and we discussed the agenda for the meetings.

Teachers then shared reports of the text books scanned by them. The gender scan of text books involved an examination of the subject matter, the pictorial presentation and the language for gender discrimination i.e., along with the kinds of representation of men and women. The teachers had divided the text books amongst them according to their interest, some of them taking Maths books, some Language and some the EVS and Science books. They chose the books used in the class they were teaching. Almost all of them reported that girls had a lesser presence in the text books than boys, in the subject matter and the illustrations both.

The scan of the Maths books revealed that in the class 4 and 5 Maths text books there was only one picture of a girl and most of the practice problems featured only boys. The class 3 Maths text book revealed a similar picture. The Class 1 and 2 books dealt only with objects and in that sense was gender neutral.

Kanchan Singh’s gender-scan report of the 1st grade language text book: After a detailed lesson-wise analysis of the pictures, she summarised her analysis in the following analytical note -

*Various professions like - Carpenter, Mason, Lawyer, Tailor, Rider, Baker, Teacher etc have all been represented by men in the pictures in the book, even though women are all members of these professions too. Only the boys have been shown doing exercise. The farmers too have been represented only by men. Boys are shown eating fruit, drinking milk etc and again only boys are shown helping in the building of homes etc. This is a false and sexist representation of reality, because it is generally true that working class women work in the fields as labourers and at building sites too, where*
women and girls are the ones who carry bricks, sand etc. Women work at home, in the fields and at other laborious tasks, but in the text only men are shown as doing all this work. Though the new text books reveal some difference, yet there is a long way to go. In order to alter the mentality and attitudes of people the text books will have to undergo much more transformation. Wouldn’t it be much nicer if both men and women were shown as lawyers, doctors, carpenters, teachers etc. If the text books will try to give an equal place to both boys and girls then peoples perceptions will also change to more equitable ones where boys and girls both have equal importance.

Sunita Devi’s gender-scan report of the 2nd grade language text book:

Contents: Upon scanning the list of contents in this book, it is evident that where virtues like courage have been the central theme, the lesson is a male-centered one. Further more, where qualities like compassion, fear and helplessness have been central, the lesson features women. For eg:

Lesson 6: Respect for Rakhi (woman)
Lesson 12: Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel (Freedom fighter and National Hero) (Man)
Lesson 14: Mother’s Compassion (Woman)
Lesson 17: Honest Victory (Man)
Lesson 20: Arjun’s target (Man)

Not only is the number of male-centered lessons more than female centered one, women have been presented as these weak, helpless creatures and Men as brave, strong, industrious and competent persons. Does this mean that women are not brave, industrious and competent? Shouldn’t they present both men and women as having these qualities?

Pictures: There are 62 pictures of men and only 16 pictures of girls. Shouldn’t there be some equality in the numbers?
Adi Shakti's gender-scan report of the 2nd grade language text book:

**Contents:** A close study of the contents of the 2nd grade language text book reveals that the number of male-centered lessons is much more than female-centered lessons. Furthermore, Men have been shown as brave, honest, industrious, responsible and patriotic. There is not even one lesson which shows women as heroines. In one of the lessons there is some information about Rani Laxmi Bai but even that lesson really has a male hero. Do we not have any heroines or patriotic brave women in our country? It would certainly seem like it, to look at the text book! There is not even one female-centered lesson in the whole book!

**Pictures:** There are many more pictures of men than of women. Men have been shown in leadership roles and women in the roles of follower and subordinate. For eg: Men are shown carrying the flags and leading the group in which some women are also members. In lesson 20 the teacher is a man and even the students are only boys. Only boys have been shown playing while the girl is shown studying alone.

In the first lesson “RamKrishna Gautam ki Dharti” - only men are portrayed as being capable of making decisions of justice. No learned woman ever makes and appearance. In the 2nd lesson, the boys are playing with a top, the father is sitting and the girls and mother are cooking. A girl is sitting at the door reading a story about sacrifice and worship. She is shown learning about compassion, sacrifice and obedience. In Lesson 4 - “Chidiyon ki Chinta” (The anxiety of the birds)- when the bird gets injured, the decision to take her to the doctor, is taken by Somu, who is a boy. And Niloo(the girl) is frightened. The Doctor is also represented by a man. In Lesson 7, the role of giving presents to the children is played by the father, and not by the mother. Lesson 9 - “Prassanata ke aansoo” (Tears of happiness”) is the story of an honest boy, not girl. Once again it is a male-centered story.
This is to ignore the fact that girls too are doctors, they too are honest and hardworking, brave etc. Similarly most of the lessons are about great M En - like - Pyare Bapu, Vir Sapoot, Daud Khan. Are there no great WOMEN to write about? There is not one lesson about a great WOMAN. What is the message we are giving to girls, through texts like this?

The teachers claimed that this exercise had made them more gender-sensitive to their own text books and were beginning to detect underlying biases against girls, which had escaped their notice before this.

The assignment for the next week: Make classrooms more dialogic; Children to act out stories; Interactive teaching out of lessons; Modification of lessons that were perceived as gender biased, into more gender neutral and girl friendly lessons. Hold one parent teacher meeting and prepare a context for it - a poem, or a song or a play and discuss the issue of child marriage with them.

It appeared to me that the regular discussions in the context of their own efforts in the classrooms were helping to sensitise them to gender issues in their classrooms.

Most of October and early November was taken up by the festivities of Dussehra and Diwali and attendant holidays. As such, our next meeting was held on 24/11/97.

**Report of Support Meeting held on 24/11/97**

The participation phase had ended on 21/11/97 and this meeting was supposed to be the concluding one. This meeting began as usual with sharing and reporting. Teachers read out some more of their stories and plays and there was a general discussion. Once again pedagogical methods of interactive and dialogic teaching were demonstrated and
discussed. The teachers said that they would like training in better teaching methods, apart from their work on gender-focussed teaching. The teachers had used girl characters in all their stories and playlets, they had tried to show girls in non-traditional roles. Premlata had asked all the children to give their mother's names and found that many of them did not know what these were. She asked them to find out and report on the following day. Most of the teachers had made name cards for all their kids and had begun using them. They reported that the children loved this show of interest and intimacy. They sported their name cards very proudly.

On the issue of parent-teacher meetings, almost all the teachers reported only very limited success. The turn out had been poor, in some cases only 3 parents showed up. Mamta had a turn out of 15 parents, Vimla had about 30, the others reported much smaller numbers. The issue of parent-attendance was discussed at length and it was decided that perhaps written notes through the children would make the invitation more official. It was also pointed out that the teachers had to be sensitive to the daily schedule of the parents while setting the time and date of their meetings. The mother turn out was almost negligible, in most cases.

Some of the teachers had used the issue of child-marriage for discussion. Mamta and Vimla, had organised her children to give a small performance (they are both part of the Harchandpur project and have had prior exposure to such activities) and reported that the parents were very pleased with this. The other teachers immediately decided to adopt the same method.

Rakesh expressed his failure to call a meeting because of his poor rapport with the community. Satendra said he couldn't call a meeting because of the tension amongst the staff in his school, which had led to a strained relationship with the parent body as well.
We discussed the importance of having a good relationship with the parent community and both Rakesh and Satendra resolved to try and repair their relationship and to try once again.

Shivprasad said that though only 6 parents attended his meeting, the discussion was good. He said that parents wanted to know if a good education would guarantee employment for their children. Shiv Prasad said he had no answer to this and wanted help from the group on this issue. We discussed the issue of education and employment at length, emphasising the point that education was related to development certainly even when it did not directly and immediately result in employment. It led to an enlightened populace who could make demands and could think of imaginative ways of self-help.

After lunch we focussed on developing an outline for the gender handbook. The teachers were all very insistent that it be kept simple, direct and SLIM! The following outline emerged.

**Chapter one:** This should lay down the ideological principles upon which the whole programme was constructed. It should include a discussion of women's status in general and some of the problems facing girls education. It should spell out the programme's commitment to equality for women.

**Chapter 2:** This should lay down the general principles of classroom organisation that should govern a girl-friendly classroom.

**Chapter 3 and 4:** Should help teachers with ideas on how to transact the different subject areas of the curriculum in girl-friendly ways, by giving model lessons, supplementary material by way of stories, poems, plays etc.
Chapter 5: Should deal with the issue of Community Mobilisation and should deal with ways of relating to the Community and gaining their support and involvement.

On this note we concluded the phase and announced the next meeting on 6/12/97 as the preparatory meeting for the workshop on drafting of the training module and the gender handbook. We told the group that not everyone could be included in this exercise, but would be included in the larger programme.

Report of Support Meeting held on 6/12/97

This was a short self-evaluation meeting during which every one made an oral report of the changes that had occurred in themselves, their classrooms, their school and their co-teachers as a result of their participation in this programme so far.

Sample summaries of the Self-evaluations:

Geeta Yadav:

My attitude has changed. I notice girls more now. I have begun mixed seating in my classroom and mixed participation in games. In my teaching, the focus has shifted from the curriculum to the children. I now focus more on what they are learning rather than upon finishing or “doing” the course.

I’ve added storying, poetry and improvised drama to my teaching. I pay more attention to girls and they have become less hesitant as a result of this. There is more talk and chatting with the children in my classroom, as a result of which the children are less afraid and have come closer to me. There is an improvement in attendance, though these days because it is the harvest season, the children too are away at work in their fields.
Adi Shakti:

I’ve started paying much more attention to the girls and as a result they are opening up more. My classroom has become more dialogic and participatory. I make sure all the children speak and come to the board, especially do I focus on the girls. The girls are feeling very encouraged. The issuing of name cards has pleased the children no end. All the children take turns to lead the prayers and that has helped make them more confident. They all also get a chance to become monitors, turn-by-turn.

Kanchan:

My teaching has become much more child-centred and responsive to children’s developmental needs than before. It used to be very curriculum-centred. I would focus on completing my course. Children love their name cards. I’ve started focussing much more on girls and have tried to encourage my colleagues to do so too. My children seem to be much more interested in their lessons. I want my girls to do as well as the boys and I make special efforts to ensure this. I’ve started using stories, drama and song a lot and the children love it. The parents are still very apathetic. No dent there, I’m afraid.

Arundhati:

I’ve become more aware of the discriminatory practices I used to indulge in. Now I pay more attention to girls. I talk to the children more and especially to the girls. I’ve moved from the text books to the children. I’ve added story, drama, poetry and song to my teaching and the children are responding well to this. One of the teachers in my school was trained in Ruchipurna Shikshan but she never used to use any of her training. She’s suddenly become very active.

Rakesh:
We now have a cleaner, more organised school. Children love the stories I tell them. We've opened the library books and have started using them. The books are now given to the children. We have small cultural programmes every Saturday and even the girls participate. We devote more time to play and the children seem to like coming to school now. I have tried to speak more to the girls now.

**Shivprasad:**

The children now sit and play together. The punctuality level in the school has risen in both teachers and students. Rotating of monitorship has helped the children gain a lot of confidence and interest. We change the monitors weekly and have one girl and one boy. The wall-painting has made the classrooms more attractive to the teachers, students and parents. I've opened out the library books and have strung them up in the classrooms. The children have been made responsible for them. We also have critical dialogues. The children did a play on anti-dowry and they talked to their parents about it. The girls said they also spoke to their parents. Children's attendance has stepped up, because we make have started asking them to provide reasons why they have not attended. This keeps them on their toes. The boys and girls attend equally well or poorly. No special difference found. All our children lead the prayer in turn. We are paying special attention to cleanliness, because we know that anyone can come at any time to see us. The girls are talking more now.

**Ram Prasad:**

There is much change in me. I am much more punctual and involved with my children. My classroom is now a more active interesting one. Children too are more interested and involved. Parents have reported to me that the children talk about their
lessons at home too. I feel even more responsible now. I've introduced more peer
teaching, in order to beat the large numbers. The regular inspections have helped keep me
more on my toes. Since my teaching has become more child-responsive all my children
have started responding more. They seem to study at home too.

Shiv Pratap Singh:

I’ve become more conscious of and feel more responsible towards the girls in my
classroom. I’ve started mixed seating and am making conscious efforts to have the
participation of all the children in my lessons - especially the girls. I insist that they speak
and call them up to the black board frequently. I am enjoying my teaching more and so
are the children. My co-teachers also feel more inspired and have begun to change. I’ve
begun to communicate with the community more. We have a cultural programme every
Saturday, which is great fun for the children.

Mathura Prasad:

I’ve become more aware of the enrolment and attendance of girls in my classroom.
I’ve painted the school and cleanliness has become very important to me. I’ve begun
mixed seating. My teaching has become more active and I ensure that all the children
participate. The children are more active and interested and the attendance of girls has
improved. Our student attendance is never under 80%. Of course that’s because of the
wheat. The children send the children to school because they want the 3 kgs of wheat.
Mamta Srivastava:

I have found several echoes in the spirit of this programme and it is wonderful to find an opportunity to have discussions about gender issues. I now have a heightened awareness and feel that change, though difficult is certainly possible.

My school is better organised. We also have introduced mixed seating. The regular attendance of children is a matter of focus in all the classes in our school. We pay more attention to girls. There is generally more child-responsive teaching and a greater inclusion of girls in the transaction of the curriculum. Other teachers have also begun to see teaching as their moral responsibility. They’ve become more gender-sensitive and have started organising themselves more.

Though all the children seem more interested, there is a special change in the girls. An increased attendance and they are certainly more confident now.

The parents are feeling more respected, as they their children being more attended to.

Vimla Devi:

There is mixed seating now in our classes and equal opportunities of play for boys and girls. There is increased contact with parents. Teachers are interested in thinking up innovative ways of teaching. Children too are thinking more. Equal participation of girls ensured in all learning and teaching activities. The children upto class 3 are quite happy to sit and play together. Children are more punctual. They too are writing new stories and poems. Parents have also become more responsive and responsible.
General Observations:

The teachers found the exercise valuable and perceived it as a form of "training", which is how they referred to it. They expected much guidance, demanded it and valued it. They kept expressing their need for training in more modern pedagogical methods. Despite our repeated efforts to shape their perception of themselves as "teacher-researchers", they continued to view themselves as "trainees". They valued the opportunities to share with other teachers and with us. They found themselves working harder in their classrooms, because they knew they were being monitored. The written reporting procedure seemed to help them focus more on the task in their classrooms. The teachers fulfilled all the written requirements without complaint. They contributed less, in terms of ideas for the handbook, but engaged in much self-reflection and were greatly motivated to make real changes in their classrooms. It was interesting to see how successfully many of them managed to improve the conditions of their classroom without any additional financial or infrastructural support. More interestingly, after sometime the focus shifted from the lack of infrastructural resources (except the shortage of teachers) to the possibilities in the classroom, the teachers and the children. The sharing of problems collectively and the attempt to find solutions together proved to be very helpful. The women responded more interestingly than did the men. After this phase was over we identified 10 teachers to participate in the 10 day workshop to produce the gender handbook and the training module. We were able to select only 3 men from the entire group for this exercise. Several issues related to the classroom, the community and the curriculum emerged, as we kept trying to maintain the focus on gender. This emphasises the complex web in which all these issues are enmeshed. Most of the teachers did not express any hesitation to engage more intensively with the community. Here again the women teachers were more willing and also more successful in their efforts.

In sum, the main finding of this phase has been to show the kinds of support teachers require to be able to become more effective, better motivated and involved teachers. They need to feel valued as intellectuals and respected as people doing important work. They
need to be attended to, responded to and heard. They need a community of teachers and educators, in which to share their ideas and work. They need to have demands made upon them and close supportive monitoring as they try to meet these. Whereas the focus of this action-research is on strengthening girls education, the finding of this phase was that teachers need much strengthening and empowering themselves. As this happened, during this phase, the teachers engaged with the problem much more creatively and actively.

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The Story Of a Girl Child

Parvati and her husband Mohanchand lived in village Neelampur. Both of them were illiterate and depended on farming for their livelihood. The couple had three daughters and one son.

The elder daughters Meera Devi and Reena Devi were sent to the village primary school upto class five. That was the end of their education and they were made to stay at home to help with domestic chores. Soon they were married off. Getting married at a tender age and that too to uneducated boys, the elder daughters had many domestic problems to bear with.

Parvati and Mohanchand wanted to educate their only son Sanjay Kumar, so that he would become a doctor some day; while the youngest daughter Upma was told time and again that after completing class five she would have to sit at home, like her sisters had done. This upset Upma very much. She used to cry, saying, "because I'm a girl my parents will not educate me further". Sure enough, as Upma passed class five, her studies were discontinued, while Sanjay who was a year senior to her continued in school.

Upma was deeply interested in studies and when she saw other children of her age going to school, she felt sadly deprived. She begged her mother to let her study further. To which Parvati said that higher education for Upma was no problem except that she had to be married off and dowry would be a problem then.

Upma’s parents connived and sent her to her maternal Uncle’s home in another village, where there was no higher secondary school for as far as 7 Kms.

Upma now requested her uncle to educate her further. He liked the idea and soon Upma started going to school, although it was very far from the village. Upma was delighted. She studied diligently and passed class seven in first division; whereas Sanjay who was staying with his parents, passed in second division. So it carried on, as Upma passed each class with flying colours, Sanjay managed a bare second or third division. When Upma passed class ten in first division, Sanjay failed the examination.

Upma’s commitment to her studies was commendable. She was much praised by everybody, while her brother Sanjay was looked down upon. This is when Parvati and Mohanchand realised how wrong they had been in discriminating against the girl-child. They realized that education was as important for girls as it was for boys, and appreciated Upma’s efforts.
A BRAVE GIRL

Some years back Priya and Priyank, along with their parents went for a trip to the village. Priya was six years old while her brother was only two. This was the first time, the two children had come to the village and were fascinated by what they saw.

The mango orchard became their favourite haunt, and they played there with other children from the village. One morning as they were playing in the orchard, Priya suddenly realised that Priyank was missing. She remembered that there was a pond nearby with lotus flowers in blossom, and was wondering if Priyank could have gone there. Just then she heard a scream from the direction of the pond and hurried to get there.

On reaching the spot, she saw her little brother drowning in the pond, as two helpless children looked on. In a split second Priya knew how she could save her brother. She saw a nearby tree's branch overhanging the water. She asked a child to sit on the branch, so that it could be lowered. Then holding onto the branch, she started moving towards Priyank. She stretched out to reach Priyank, but couldn't. Slowly and carefully, she moved further, till she could hold Priyank with one hand. Then she lowered the branch with her other hand, and with some effort climbed onto it. Now the child who was already perched on the branch, helped Priya in pulling Priyank to safety.

By this time a passerby woman hearing the cacaphony of children's voices came to enquire. She saw the children trying to scramble off the precarious branch overhanging the water. She helped the children off the branch. Then looking at Priyank's condition, she lay him on the ground and pressed the water out of his stomach.

Thus Priyank was saved because of his brave and intelligent sister. All the village folk praised her.
Many years ago, near Kanpur, there was a Rajput state called Kisora. Sajjan Singh ruled Kisora. He had a son and a daughter. The prince was called Laxman Singh and the princess Tajkumari.

Tajkumari was a brave and courageous girl. Her father had trained her in martial arts, just as he had trained his son Laxman Singh. She was a good horse-rider and very competent with the sword and spear too.

In those days Qutub ud din Aibak ruled Delhi. His name commanded fear all over the country. One day when Laxman Singh Tejkumari were riding in the forest, they were attacked by Qutub ud din’s soldiers. The soldiers were 14 in number. Tajkumari beheaded 6 of them, as Laxman killed another 4. Finding 10 of their companions dead, the others fled. They reached Delhi and provoked the king to attack Kisora.

Qutub ud din’s massive army surrounded the fort of Kisora. When Tajkumari saw this, she told her brother that it was time for them to step into the battlefield. Laxman said that he would go first and she should come later.

He bravely faced the enemy, sword in hand, but was soon cornered, and wanted to run away from the battlefield. Tajkumari stepped in and infused her brother with the feeling ‘Do or die’. Running away from the battlefield was unquestionable for a Rajput, she reminded him.

The enemy was taken aback by Tejkumari’s presence. She attacked like an angry lioness. Wherever she flashed her sword, dead-bodies strewn the ground.

Qutub ud din was watching the proceedings through binoculars and ordered his army to catch the brave girl alive.

Meanwhile her father Sajjan Singh got killed. Seething in anger, she moved about with fresh vigour. The enemy was terrified and started moving back. Qutub ud din shouted at his men, “Cowards! You should be ashamed of yourselves. Look, how that brave girl is all alone and yet is roaring like a lioness. She is paying the price for each drop for her mother’s milk, and just look at you good for nothings.”

The war ended. Qutub ud din did manage a victory over Kisora, but all that he got was the empty fort and innumerable corpses. Brave Tajkumari died fighting for her country.

QUESTIONS THAT CHILDREN ASKED.

1. Can girls also use the sword?
   A. Yes if they are taught how to use the sword, they can use it competently.

2. Can only men ride horses?
   A. No, even girls horse-ride. Remember Rani Laxmibai, she rode horses and fought with swords too.
3. What is Kisora?
   A. Kisora is the name of a Rajput state which was near Kanpur. It was ruled by Sajjan Singh. It was attacked by Qutub ud din's army.

4. How old is this story?
   A. This story is about 400 years old, when The Slave Dynasty ruled Delhi. Qutub ud din Aibak was the ruler of Delhi at that time.