Bringing the Marginalised Back to School

drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-editorials/25-08-2020/print

This editorial analysis is based on the article **Bringing the marginalised back to school** which was published in the Indian Express on 24th of August 2020. It analyses the impact of Covid-19 on children especially the marginalised ones and their educational needs.

The **Covid-19 pandemic** has significantly disrupted the education of millions of students. This has proven worse for the children of marginalised sections of the society who don't even have the option of digital learning.

The longer children and youth are unable to attend learning facilities (Schools,Colleges, Anganwadi etc), the more likelihood of their failing to return to their institutions, especially girls, and the marginalised, such as children on the move, children forced to live on the streets, children in tribal areas, children in slums and those from low-income households. This must be prevented as this would have a huge impact on our future.

Impact

Closure Of Schools

- The pandemic has impacted the education of more than 300 million children. More than 10 million children are in the age group of three to six years across India.
- This has denied them their fundamental right to quality, inclusive and safe education.

Digital Divide

- Only a handful of private schools could adopt online teaching methods.
- Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions.
- Even in schools which were offering online education, the poor couldn't avail it because of the lack of technical facilities and resources at their own end.

Denial of Food

- In India, the anganwadi are also known as "khichdi ghars".
- They provide food that in many cases is the only meal that children from most marginalised communities receive.
- Closure of education facilities also means no nutrition for children from 0- 6 years during this time and thus they are being subjected to economic and social stress. Closure of the Mid day meal schools have led to denial of food to children as well.

Unsupportive Family

- During the lockdown, when the anganwadis are closed, parents are the best facilitator for children's learning.
- But many of them struggle to perform this task especially the marginalised families.
- This is primarily due to their limited education level or scarce resources at their disposal.

Gender Discrimination

- Research suggests that the girls living in areas affected by conflict or recovering from disasters are more likely to be out of primary learning facilities than boys.
- The gap between the numbers of girls and boys out of learning facilities during COVID-19 is likely to increase as girls are less likely to return to education facilities as they could be forced into early marriage, early pregnancies, domestic and sexual violence.
- Existing gender discrimination could be exacerbated by the current situation.

Way Forward

Urgent Restoration

- During the phase of the recovery from the pandemic, there should be urgency in restoring the safe, protective and nurturing environment for children.
- This is especially for children who have witnessed loss of life in family, social distance from caregivers, extended periods of self-isolation at home, violence and exploitation.

Health Counselling

- Anxiety caused by the pandemic could negatively impact the mental health, nutrition and wellbeing of children.
- It would be ideal to provide **psychological and social support** to children and their caregivers, both at home and at the anganwadis.

Digital Solutions

- Open-source digital learning solutions and Learning Management Software should be adopted so teachers can conduct teaching online.
- The **DIKSHA platform**, with reach across all states in India, can be further strengthened to ensure accessibility of learning to the students.

Leveraging Mobile Penetration

- With a rapid increase of mobile internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85% households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalization of education even in the remotest parts of the country.
- This can change the schooling system and increase the effectiveness of learning and teaching, giving students and teachers multiple options to choose from.
- Many **aspirational districts** have initiated innovative, mobile-based learning models for effective delivery of education, which can be adopted by others.

Parents Counselling

- Parents require support and the same must be emphasised.
- There must be dedicated programmes for the parents to help them guide their ward in such testing times.

Focus On Prevention

- Disseminating COVID-19 related messages on social distancing, hand washing and ways of engaging with children especially to mothers' groups will support reduction in risks of pandemic.
- The children must be taught to prevent and at the same time live with this pandemic for some time to come.

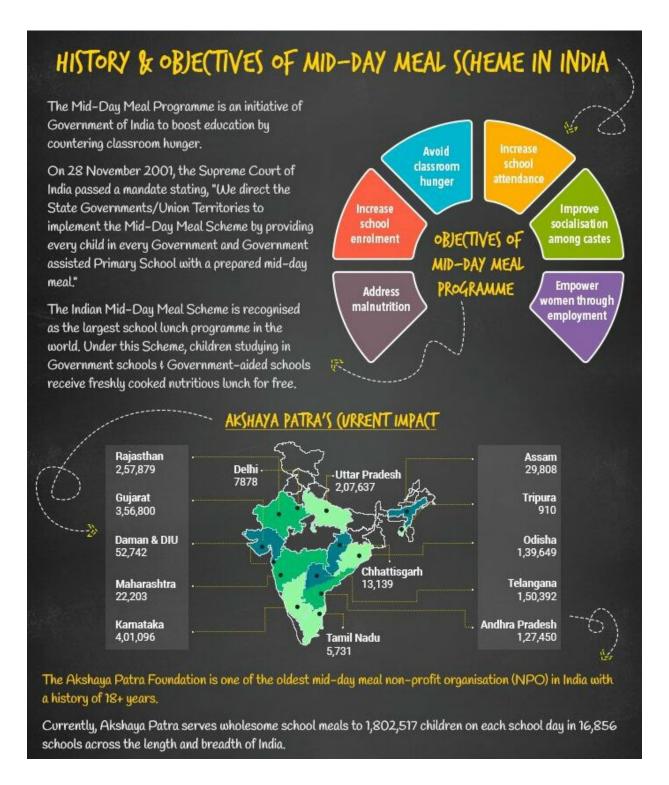## Access To ICT

- The government must aim to provide teachers, educators, school authorities and caregivers access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platforms and train them in the dissemination of learning materials.
- The Government and the civil society must come forward and collaborate to gulf this digital divide so that everyone can have access to quality education.

Conclusion

- Among the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** that were agreed upon in 2016 by the countries across the globe, **SDG-4's goal is to "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning".**
    This, of course, is also a necessary condition for people to improve their wellbeing and that of future generations. SDG 4 is, therefore, crucial for the attainment of all the other SDGs.
- The pandemic is an opportunity for all organisations, institutions and individuals working in the education sector to collaborate, innovate and act in solidarity to support the government in ensuring that the education community and its stakeholders emerge stronger from the crisis.
- We need to find new ways to integrate distance learning, scientific cooperation, and information support in our ways of working.

HISTORY & OBJECTIVES OF MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME IN INDIA

The Mid-Day Meal Programme is an initiative of Government of India to boost education by countering classroom hunger.

On 28 November 2001, the Supreme Court of India passed a mandate stating, "We direct the State Governments/Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary School with a prepared mid-day meal."

The Indian Mid-Day Meal Scheme is recognised as the largest school lunch programme in the world. Under this Scheme, children studying in Government schools & Government-aided schools receive freshly cooked nutritious lunch for free.

OBJECTIVES OF MID-DAY MEAL PROGRAMME

- Avoid classroom hunger
- Increase school attendance
- Increase school enrolment
- Improve socialisation among castes
- Address malnutrition
- Empower women through employment

AKSHAYA PATRA'S CURRENT IMPACT

State/UT	Number
Rajasthan	2,57,879
Gujarat	3,56,800
Daman & DIU	52,742
Maharashtra	22,203
Karnataka	4,01,096
Delhi	7878
Uttar Pradesh	2,07,637
Chhattisgarh	13,139
Tamil Nadu	5,731
Assam	29,808
Tripura	910
Odisha	1,39,649
Telangana	1,50,392
Andhra Pradesh	1,27,450

The Akshaya Patra Foundation is one of the oldest mid-day meal non-profit organisation (NPO) in India with a history of 18+ years.

Currently, Akshaya Patra serves wholesome school meals to 1,802,517 children on each school day in 16,856 schools across the length and breadth of India.

Drishti Mains Answer

Discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education of the children especially the marginalised children. What needs to be done in this hour to mitigate the impact on them?

Watch Video At:

https://youtu.be/IXw35rlBK9c

This editorial is based on **"The quest for cleaner cities"** which was published in The Hindustan Times on August 24th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.