

Study for Reasons for Drop Out at Elementary Level

District Report: Mungeli

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
CWSN	Children with Special Needs
Ed.CIL	Educational Consultants India Limited
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MoHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PTMs	Parent Teacher Meetings
RTE	Right to Education
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council for Educational and Training
SMC	School Management Committee
SSA	SarvaSikshaAbhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TOR	Terms of Reference

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Executive Summary

Background

Education provides individuals with the opportunity to realize their full potential and is also linked at the macro level with a country's overall socio-economic development. The constitution of India recognizes access to education as a fundamental right of every citizen and has mandated the universalization of access to education. In order to deliver against this mandate, the Government of India has formulated a number of policies & programs that seek to bring Indian education at par with global benchmarks. The Government has already made considerable investments in this direction and with every annual budget is constantly increasing its allocation to the sector.

The problem of dropouts is an area of major concern for the Government as it clearly highlights the systems inability to retain the students it has worked hard to enroll. Being successful in bringing them back to the formal schooling system can help in ensuring that the government doesn't lose out on the investment it has already made towards building their future capacity.

Addressing the issue of dropout is particularly difficult because there is no standard definition of 'dropouts' for an academic year and as a result there is no standard procedure for identifying them and bringing them back to school. As per DISE, in 2011-2012, the estimated number of dropouts in India was 8.9 million.

A closely related issue to dropout is the issue of out of school children, on which more elaborate studies have been conducted. As per a sample survey report by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MoHRD) and EdCIL, in the year 2009 there were approximately 8.1 million out of school children in India. More recently as per a parliamentary update, the number of out of school children in the year 2012 was estimated to be 16 million.

In Chhattisgarh, as per government records, in the year 2011 approximately 1, 78,500 children were out of school. This suggests that roughly 3.5 per cent of primary school going children and 5.5 per cent of upper primary school going children were out of school. Further, the out of school rates were observed to be higher for girls. At the primary level, 3.4 per cent of boys were found to be out of school and the corresponding figure for girls stood at 3.7 per cent. Similarly at the upper primary level, 5.4 per cent of boys were found to be out of school and the corresponding figure for girls stood at 5.8 per cent.

While there is a broad understanding of the reasons for out of school children, there is need for comprehensive studies that showcase specific reasons for dropout and also identify the strategic steps that are required to be taken at a systemic level to address the issue of dropout. While dropouts may constitute a subset of out of school children, their circumstances and reasons need to be identified and studied independently. This study is directed toward unearthing these reasons and developing an in-depth qualitative understanding of how various variables combine to lead to a child dropping out of school. The study seeks to understand the interplay between reasons in order to determine which reasons have the potential to combine and increase a child's vulnerability to dropping out of school.

Methodology

The study was mainly qualitative in nature, with a quantitative aspect included to both substantiate the qualitative data and also triangulate it. The study included data collection from 16 schools from two blocks. Both the blocks were rural in their profile. From each block two clusters were selected. The schools in these clusters were chosen in consultation with Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). The schools were selected to ensure a mix of primary and upper primary levels, as well as to ensure that there were at least five dropouts from each school. **For the purpose of this study a dropout was defined as a child who had not attended the school for one month or more due to any reasons except for illness.** This operational definition was derived in consultation with the State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT).

A range of research tools such as interview checklists, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), household survey were used to gain perspective from a variety of respondents at the school, village and district level. In each school, interviews were conducted with Head Teachers and FGDs with children. In each village, where the school was present parents of five dropout children were interviewed through a household questionnaire. Additionally one School Management Committee (SMC) member from each village was also interviewed. A total of 16 Head Teachers were interviewed, 16 FGDs were conducted, household survey was undertaken in 80 households and 16 SMC members were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with CRCs, Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and District Education Officer (DEO).

District Socio-Demographic Profile & Education Profile

A recently defined district; Mungeli is a political unit of governance that has been carved out of the district of Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh. The district is largely untouched by the recent spike in industrial activity and 91.6 percent of workforce in the district is engaged in agriculture and allied work¹. The district is also characterized by low levels of literacy and 46.4 percent of the population is illiterate.

The literacy rate in the district clearly highlights the fact that a large number of children in the district are expected to be first generation learners. The socio-demographic profile of Mungeli is bound to pose a series of challenges on the path to universalization of education. However, at the same time it is also clear that given the low literacy base, universalization of education can usher in an era of greater prosperity and social integration in Mungeli.

In this direction, the 693 state run primary and upper primary schools in the district support the education of approximately 85.2 thousand children². However, The district's current socio-demographic profile, its educational profile and the profile of schools visited during the study sum up to present a landscape that provide origin to a number of socio-economic, school related, family related and community related factors, perceptions and actions that can often result in students dropping out from the schools in the district.

Key Findings

- 1. Limited intrinsic understanding of the economic benefits of formal education:** The family/parents perception of the value of education in their child's life and the possibilities it can open up for him/her in the future forms the backbone of the effort/seriousness with which the child will progress across various academic grades. Therefore a poor understanding of education and its impact on children often results in them attaching little importance to their child being regular at school. The gravity of this issue is highlighted by the fact that 32.6 percent of the parents whose children have dropped out of formal schooling in Mungeli reported that they had no particular reason, goal or aspiration for sending their child to school. Another 44.2 percent of parents reported that they sent their children to school so that they could attain basic literacy and numeracy. While the families reason for sending their children to school do not directly lead to the child dropping out of school; they have the capacity to act as a trigger point that gets activated once one or more of the other reasons for dropout become applicable.
- 2. Economic pressure and livelihood pattern/compulsions:** One of the most prominent factors that can trigger the child dropping out of school is the family's compulsion to migrate. The demand for labor in agriculture and allied domains is necessarily linked to the cropping pattern. As a result the demand for agricultural labor also tends to follow a seasonal cyclical trend. The sowing and harvesting season experience peaks in demand for agricultural labor and are therefore also the period which offer the highest daily wage. On the other hand the interim period experiences a sharp fall in the demand for labor and is also the period which offers the lowest daily wage. The biggest challenge during this interim phase is to sustain the family's expenses and given their lack of formal skills training, the easiest and at times the only alternative available is to migrate to cities and work at construction sites. Construction projects offer a volume of opportunities to

¹ Figures derived from block wise census data (2011) for Lormi, Mungeli and Patharia

² UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

unskilled labor and pay comparatively higher daily wages than the agricultural sector (especially in the lean season). As a result 57.0 percent of the households covered under the study reported that they migrate to cities during the lean season and return to their villages once the demand picks up in the agricultural sector. These families tend to migrate with their children and the child is forced to dropout of school during this aforementioned interim period.

Even during the peak season; the fact that these families sustain/manage the household budget on or around the poverty line also increases the probability that the family might pull their child out of school to act as an additional hand capable of adding to the family income. At 17.4 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that the child had dropped out of school to contribute towards the family income. They said that if the child was above fourteen years of age he/she would be counted as a distinct unit of labor and if he/she was below the age of fourteen then he/she would travel to the work site with the family and pitch in with the work assigned to one of the elders in the family.

3. **Contributing towards domestic responsibilities and performing domestic chores:** Also, the source of livelihood of the families and the seasonal nature of their employment in the agriculture sector also entails that the family members are usually overworked/busy during the sowing and harvesting season. At these times, the family might not necessarily depend on their children to contribute to their work as an active participant but rather passively support the family by taking care of other domestic responsibilities and domestic chores. At 41.9 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that their child had dropped out of school in order to support/help with domestic responsibilities and chores.
4. **Domestic discord & peer pressure as reasons for dropout:** A number of children are also dropping out of school because of reasons that can directly be attributed to their connect/dependence on their family and friends. The state of Chhattisgarh is observed to have a heavy incidence of alcohol addiction. The problem of chronic addiction to alcohol is documented to have a negative impact on the addict's family life and employment. The most negative impact of this vice is often borne by the children in the family. At 20.9 percent of the households visited during the study, family members reported being aware of incidents where the child had dropped out of school because of such domestic discord. At another 8.1 percent of the households, members of the family reported that a child in their family had dropped out because of this reason.

In a number of other cases the households covered under the study reported that their child had dropped out of school under the influence of his/her peer group. At 17.4 percent of the households covered under the study, the family reported that their child has dropped out of school under peer pressure/influence. Some of the families also said that they believe that their child keeps bad company and that he/she and his/her friends have also been caught indulging in social vices such as drinking, smoking, gambling and in extreme cases doing drugs (thinner & diluter fluid). The families reported that their reaction to this problem is naturally to pull the child out of school and get him attached to their daily work so as to keep a steady eye on him and his company.

5. **Teacher's attitude towards their responsibilities:** In many cases, the parents have pulled their children out of school because of poor quality of education being imparted at the schools. The teaching staff at any educational institution forms the backbone of its operations and is usually the face of the institution as it is the only live factor/variable involved in its operation. As a result the teachers at any government school are involved throughout the value chain of enrolling children at the school, teaching them and helping them in their transition through grades. It is therefore obvious that they play a pivotal role in retaining and attracting children to school. Any deviation from their responsibilities as envisioned by the educational machinery adds to the probability of the child dropping out of school. The child's interest or disinterest in coming to school is also largely a function of the teacher, his/her teaching methodology and his/her behavior towards the children. Any behavior or attitude of the teacher that parents interpret as/translate into poor quality of education can potentially lead to the child dropping out of school.

A major factor which leads to parents developing a negative perception of the quality of education/teaching at the school is teacher absenteeism. It raises doubts in the parents mind about the seriousness with which their children are being taught and question the benefits that their children might/can derive from such education. At 68.6 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that the school doesn't hold classes as per schedule and this is primarily because of teacher absenteeism.

6. **Lack of remedial teaching and its impact on academically weak students:** It is also important to note that in a number of cases, factors such as migration, domestic chores, domestic discord etc. don't necessarily entail that the child is going to permanently dropout of the formal schooling system. However, the prolonged absenteeism from school can result in the child becoming academically weak when compared to the rest of the class. This is but natural because the child has missed out a number of regular teaching days and falls behind the pace of the class. If left unaddressed the gap only widen further as the child tries to cope with the curriculum in the subsequent grades without having the strong foundation that should have been established during the previous ones. Given the repercussions that the lack of remedial teaching can have on the academically weak students, it is alarming to note that only four of the sixteen schools visited under the study were found to be holding any such classes.
7. **Indifference of teachers:** An evaluation of the other factors/reasons because of which the child might develop a dislike for his/her school and therefore dropout out of the same reveals a number of other school related factors for dropout. In cases where the child is a first generation learner, his disinterest in coming to school doesn't get negated by his/her parents desire to send him to one. In fact it is more likely that in such cases the parents are going to be indifferent to the benefits/value of education and simply go with the child's opinion. At 43.0 percent of the schools covered under the study the parents reported that the child didn't like going to school (when he/she was still enrolled). Issues such as bullying, caste based & gender based discrimination, corporal punishment etc. are all reasons that can push the victim to dropout of school. These problems are often invisible to the teachers and in other cases to the system as a whole and as a result go unchecked. Prolonged exposure to any of these factors not only leads to the child dropping out of schools but can also have an adverse negative effect on his/her personality.
8. **The case of children with special needs:** The case of the CWSN who have dropped out of schools presents a set of unique and distinct reasons for their dropping out of school. The three physically disabled children covered under reported that they often find it difficult to commute to school without external support and are unable to attend classes on days when their family members are unable to drop them to school. The head teachers responsible for these children's education reported that their school lacks the teaching aids that they require to work with these students (deaf, dumb and blind).

The study also covered three children with non-physical disabilities and interactions with their families and teachers revealed that the school environment is not in a position to support their education. The head teacher's reported that they haven't received sufficient training to work with such disabilities and also don't have the relevant teaching-learning aids that they could use while working with them. Further, the families of these children reported that they don't like going to school as their class mates tend to make fun of them and their teachers largely neglect them while teaching the class.

Recommendations

An understanding of the profile of the children who dropout of government schools in Mungeli and an analysis of the reasons for dropout clearly highlights a number of areas and gaps that the government can address through simple and spontaneous measures.

1. **Improving upon quality of education at government schools through improved monitoring & evaluation:** The government is well aware of the need to maintain a certain quality of education across all the schools in the district. While the required resources are in place there exist a number of gaps between the processes established to monitor the quality of education at the schools and the actual effort being invested towards following these processes. In order to ensure, that the

processes established to monitor the quality of education are being followed, the government may want to leverage on tamper proof time encrypted technology tools that can provide a real review of the quality of education at all the government schools in the district. The government may want to consider using time, date and location encrypted mobile photography devices to record delivery against all monitoring processes.

2. **Leveraging upon the community's support to curb dropout rates:** A large percentage of schools do not have active/functional SMCs. The government may want to expedite the process of creating a structure/process under which SMCs should be constituted and providing them with the required capacity development support.
3. **Providing children of migrant families with continued access to education:** The government must work towards running awareness campaigns that would provide greater clarity on Right to Education and in specific on how migrating to another school no longer requires a transfer certificate. Further, the aforementioned information/awareness campaign can be supported by a suitable MIS system which would enable schools to register a family's intent to migrate to a particular place/city/site. This information could then be relayed to a BRC/CRC office close to that site. This would help in ensuring that the educational machinery at the migration site is aware and ready to receive the student once the family migrates.
4. **Developing an integrated approach to cater to the needs of the children in the community:** The government may want to integrate the schools and the aanganwadi centers on to a single campus. The advent of such integration will enable children to come to school with their younger siblings. While the child will continue to study in the classroom, the younger siblings could continue to be in the care of the aanganwadi workers. Between classes, the child could check on his/her younger siblings and could pick them up from the center when he/she is ready to return home post school hours. In case physical integration is found to be impractical; the government may want to explore the option of integrating knowledge. Herein, when a teacher discovers that a child is not coming to school because he/she has to take care of his/her siblings; he/she can pass on the information to the local aanganwadi center. The aanganwadi center can then act on this information and visit the child's home in order to encourage the parents to send the child's younger siblings to the center.
5. **Helping the academically weak:** There is a need to provide a clear directive to schools mandating them to hold remedial classes for the academically weak. In case the government feels that the current strength of teaching staff will not be able to successfully manage this task (given their existing work load), additional models could be explored/developed.
6. **Aligning the academic calendar to the agriculture cycle:** Student absenteeism is at a peak during the sowing and harvesting season. This is primarily because parents tend to pull their children out of school as they are required to help out with the cultivation/harvesting in the field or because they have to manage domestic chores while their mother is busy in the field. The government can explore the option of aligning the school calendar to the agriculture cycle. In this direction, the academic calendar should tend to have holidays during the peak season (sowing/harvesting).
7. **The specific case of CWSN:** The government has already put aside a portion of funds for developing a more enabling environment for CWSN. The first and foremost need utilization of these funds should be towards providing schools with the necessary teaching-learning aids. This needs to be followed up with adequate training that will enable teachers to use these learning aids to work with CWSN.

1. Background

1.1 Context for the Study

It is widely recognized that education not only provides individuals with the opportunity to realize their full potential, but is also linked at the macro level with a country's overall socio-economic development. The constitution of India recognizes access to

education as a fundamental right of every citizen and has mandated the universalization of access to education. In order to deliver against this mandate, the Government of India has formulated a number of policies & programs that seek to bring Indian education at par with global benchmarks.

In this regard, the *SarvaShikshaAbhiyan* (SSA) is the Government's flagship program that seeks to provide all children with access to free education. Launched in 2001-02 to attain this objective, the program is being implemented across all states in the country. Further, in 2009 the Government translated its efforts into a justiciable legal framework by passing the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act.

Yet another significant milestone was the launch of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009, wherein a justiciable legal framework entitled all children between the ages of 6-14 years to free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of eight years of elementary education. This thrust towards transforming India's population into human capital has shown significant achievements and as per census (2011) the literacy rate in the country has improved to 73.0 percent. Major improvements have been recorded in areas such as physical access to schools, enrolment rates, gender parity index etc.

However, the Country still grapples with a number of issues that act as a barrier to the universalization of education. There is still a gap between male and female literacy rates and with the literacy rate for men is 81.0 percent the corresponding figure for women is moderately lower and stands at 81.0 percent. Further, while the gross enrollment rate at the primary education level is 112.6 percent (as of 2011); the gross dropout rate stands at 6.5 percent.

While some challenges concerning education are common across all states in the country, others are state-specific. These specific challenges most often stem from differences the socio-cultural landscape and the economic status of the families residing in the state. In order to overcome these challenges, the government needs to develop dedicated/concentrated policies and programs which subsequently need to be implemented under dedicated/customized methods and mechanisms. Both central and state governments have established departments and institutions which either directly or indirectly design, direct, implement, support and monitor such programs. Given that knowledge forms the backbone of such programs; a number of these departments and institutions also bear the responsibility of undertaking research that generates this knowledge.

The State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT), Chhattisgarh is an institution that contributes towards the creation of such knowledge and development of initiatives that can help in improving upon the quality of education being imparted at schools in the state.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The problem of out of school children and school dropouts is one of the biggest challenges that the government still faces towards achieving universalization of education. The challenge in combating this problem stems from the fact that there is no standard definition of 'dropouts'³ and as a result there are no precise formal estimates of their numbers. A number of studies have developed an approximation of the number of dropouts on the basis of their own definitions. As per a sample survey report by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MoHRD) and EdCIL, in the year 2009 there were approximately 8.1 million out of school children in India. More recently Minister MoHRD provided a parliamentary update as per which the number of out of school children in the year 2012 was pegged at approximately 16 million. While the estimates may differ, there is a consensus that the number of drop-outs in the country is high and that the problem of drop-out warrants attention.

As per government records, as per financial year ending 2011 approximately 178.5 thousand children in Chhattisgarh were out of school. This translates into roughly 3.5 percent of primary school going children and 5.5 percent of upper primary school going children being out of school. Further, the out of school rates were observed to be higher for girls. At the primary level, 3.4 percent of boys were found to be out of school and the corresponding figure for girls stood at 3.7 percent. Similarly at the upper primary level, 5.4 percent of boys were found to be out of school and the corresponding figure for girls stood at 5.8 percent.

It is also important to note that the percentage of children out of school was marginally higher in the case of children from Scheduled Tribes. The out of school percentages for children from scheduled tribes at the primary and upper primary level were 4.7 and 8.1 percent respectively.

The problem of dropouts is an area of major concern for any educational system as it clearly highlights the systems inability to retain the students it has worked hard to enroll. Being successful in bringing them back to the formal schooling system can help in ensuring that the government doesn't lose out on the investment it has already made towards building their future capacity.

Developing a deeper appreciation for the implicit reasons that lead to children dropping out of school and developing an understanding of the socio-cultural and economic landscape in which these reasons prevail is necessary to develop programs & measures to address these issues.

This study is directed toward unearthing these reasons and developing an in-depth qualitative understanding of how various variables combine to lead to a child dropping out of school. The study seeks to understand the interplay between reasons in order to determine which reasons have the potential to combine and increase a child's vulnerability to dropping out of school.

1.3 Terms of Reference

In light of the aforementioned rationale, the study seeks to establish a better understanding of the factors that contribute to a child's vulnerability to dropping out of school. In order to cover for geographic disparity in reasons as well capture variations caused by changes in the socio-economic landscape, the study was undertaken in five districts of Chhattisgarh (*Balrampur, Janjgir-Champa, Kanker, Mungelland Raipur*). Therefore, the specific objectives of this research study were:

- ▶ To compare students dropout rates of across the districts covered under the study and benchmark the same against the state and national aggregates;
- ▶ To compare students dropout rates across type of locality (rural/urban), level of schooling (Primary/Upper Primary), gender (male/female), and community category (SC/ST/OBC/ Minority/Others);
- ▶ To find out district specific reasons for dropout thereby commenting upon reasons for dropout at the state level.

³For the purpose of study a dropout has been defined as a child who had not attended the school for one month or more due to any reasons except for illness. This operational definition was derived in consultation with SCERT.

1.4 Methodology

Given the mandate of the study and the larger goal that it ascribes to; the study was conducted through a mixed-methodology approach that laid emphasis on identifying the right informants to seek the right information in order to develop relevant and meaningful insights. The following section describes in detail different aspects of the methodology.

Study Design

The study results are based on a combination of analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. This data/information has been collected and collated using a combination of three tools – household questionnaires, focused group's discussions and semi-structured interviews. The study results have been developed while maintaining a certain degree of statistical significance as household survey were administered to a sample of 400 households, semi-structured interviews were held with head teachers at 80 schools, focussed group discussions were conducted with children at 80 schools and semi-structured interviews were administered to School Management Committee (SMC) members at 80 villages. Within Mungeli, household surveys were administered to 80 households. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with head teachers at 16. Semi-structured interviews were also held with the SMC members at these schools and focussed group discussion were held with students at these 16 schools.

Target Respondents

The target respondents in the study are the parents of children who have dropped out, head teachers at schools, children both from primary and upper primary schools, SMC members, representatives of local governance bodies, officials at block and district level and representatives of SCERT, SSA and Tribal Welfare Department at the state level.

Study Tools

Household questionnaire: The objective of the household questionnaire was to understand parents' perception of dropout. The questionnaire, while designed to record the exact reason for dropout, also attempted to understand the profile of the household and the socio-economic and psychological reasons that contribute to dropout.

Focus Group Discussions: FGDs were conducted with children at all the schools that were visited as a part of the study. The FGDs were conducted in order to capture children's perspective of the underlying factors for dropout. These also helped to identify the children's opinion about their school and their teachers.

Semi Structured Interviews: Semi structured interviews were administered to the following stakeholders:

- ▶ **Head Teachers:** Discussions were held with the head teachers at the schools covered under the study in order to record their understanding & perspective of the problem dropout. The interview was used to collect information regarding the head teacher's understanding of the issue, the reasons that lead to the same and the processes followed or to be followed in order to address the issue.
- ▶ **SMC members:** Discussions with SMC members provided insights on their understanding of dropout, their role in curbing dropout rates in their community and their understanding of their larger roles and responsibilities as identified under the RTE.
- ▶ **District/State level officials:** The objective of interviewing district/state level officials was to understand their perception on dropout. These interviews also helped to understand some of the interventions that have been undertaken to control dropout and the results that have been achieved.

Data analysis and reporting

The information from the household surveys was transformed into an electronic spreadsheet which was subsequently cleaned under defined statistical processes. The spreadsheet was then analyzed using suitable statistical packages/software. The

qualitative information from the household questionnaires was coded where possible and added to the electronic dataset. Information recording sheets were developed to capture the qualitative information that could not have been coded. This information was analyzed and used to develop anecdotal evidence/case studies.

The information collected through the FGDs with students and semi-structured interviews with head teachers and SMC members were also assembled into recording sheets. Where possible similarity in responses was classified and unified to determine trends and absolute number frequencies.

1.5 Limitations

- ▶ The current study is a document dedicated towards examining the reasons for dropout specific to the district of Mungeli. Therefore, while it closely emulates the overarching study methodology and scope as mentioned above; it bears certain subtle differences in analysis and representation of findings.
- ▶ This study is based entirely on the team's interactions with parents of children who have dropped out, children both from primary and upper primary schools, SMC members, representatives of local governance bodies, officials at block and district level and representatives of SCERT, SSA and Tribal Welfare Department at the state level. Thus, the scope of the study is limited to the information that was available from these sources.
- ▶ As part of the study, the team was required to collect data on dropout for the last five years from the schools that were visited. In the absence of a mandate to keep data on dropout at school level and also a common format to record it, the team has been able to collect limited data.
- ▶ Given that a few of the districts covered under the study have only recently been defined, the availability of government records is limited and the same is responsible for limited temporal trends in some of the district reports.

2.1 Socio-demographic profile

A recently defined district; Mungeli is a political unit of governance that has been carved out of the district of Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh. The district comprises of three administrative blocks (Lormi, Mungeli&Patharia) and is typically identified as a rural landscape with a primarily agrarian economy. Unlike its neighbouring districts, Mungeli is largely untouched by the recent spike in industrial activity and 91.6 percent of workforce in the district is engaged in agriculture and allied work⁴.

The district has a sex ratio of 974 women to 1,000 men and has a heterogeneous demographic mix with a considerable share of population being from marginalized groups. 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST) account for 10.4 percent of the population and 'Scheduled Castes' (SC) account for 27.8 percent of the population⁵.

The district is also characterized by low levels of literacy and 46.4 percent of the population is illiterate. The gender disaggregated literacy rates clearly highlight a gender divide. While 36.0 percent of men are illiterate, the corresponding figure for women is 56.9 percent⁶.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile – district snapshot

Population	355,549
Sex ratio	974 women to 1,000 men
Workforce engaged in agriculture & allied activities	91.6 percent
'Scheduled Tribes' as a percentage of total population	10.4 percent
'Scheduled Castes' as a percentage of total population	27.8 percent
Literacy Rate (Men)	36.0 percent
Literacy Rate (Women)	56.9 percent

2.2 Educational profile

The literacy rate in the district clearly highlights the fact that a large number of children in the district are expected to be first generation learners. Therefore, it is clear that the socio-demographic profile of Mungeli is bound to pose a series of challenges on the path to universalization of education. However, at the same time it is also clear that given the low literacy base, universalization of education can usher in an era of greater prosperity and social integration in Mungeli.

Being able to realize this potential necessarily entails a comprehensive and quality, state run educational machinery that has the capacity engage with the children in the district and groom them towards the future they aspire to/deserve to realize. Given the aforementioned landscape; it is important that an analysis of the reasons behind children dropping out of formal schooling arrangements be necessarily built against the district's educational profile.

The 693 state run primary and upper primary schools in the district support the education of approximately 85.2 thousand children⁷. The important role that these schools can play in the development of the lives of the children they seek to educate is made prima facie clear by the fact that 49.9 percent of the children studying at these schools are girls⁸. Further, these schools cater to a heterogeneous mix of caste and culture and act as a platform where all children from the community essentially have

⁴ Figures derived from block wise census data (2011) for Lormi, Mungeli and Patharia

⁵ Figures derived from block wise census data (2011) for Lormi, Mungeli and Patharia

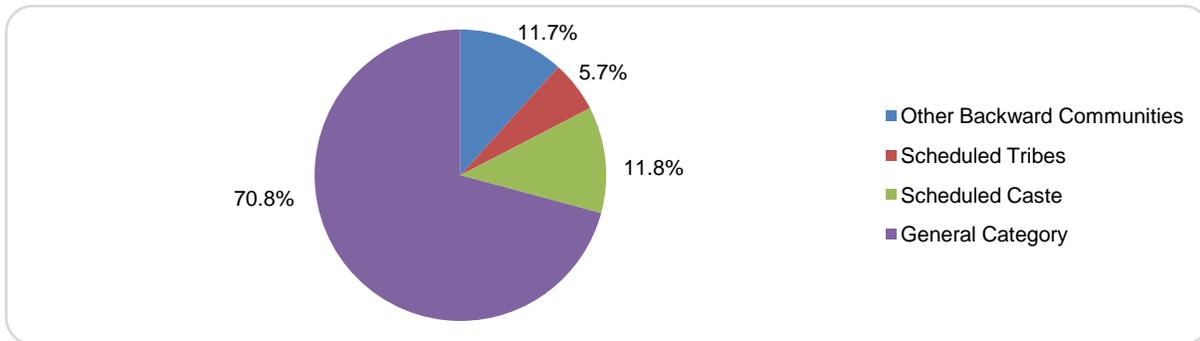
⁶ Figures derived from block wise census data (2011) for Lormi, Mungeli and Patharia

⁷ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

⁸ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

access to the same quality and standards of education and therefore in turn have equitable access to the future it promises. As of financial year ending 2013, 11.7 percent of the students at government schools were from 'Other Backward Communities' (OBC), 11.8 percent were from SC families and 5.7 percent were from ST families⁹.

Figure 1: Socio-cultural profile of students enrolled at government schools in Mungeli



Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

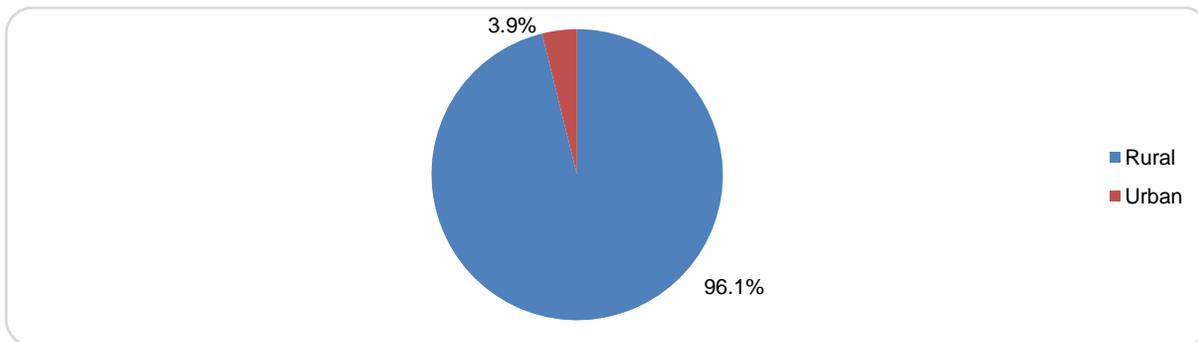
The government schools are also a medium of inclusion and a platform for empowerment for children with special needs (CWSN). The educational infrastructure in Mungeli acts as a second home for 943 CWSN (approximately 1.1 percent of the total enrollment at these schools)¹⁰. These schools can also be playing a pivotal role in the capacity development and economic empowerment of the economically weaker sections of society. Given that 96.1 percent of the government schools in Mungeli function out of rural areas¹¹; they have the capacity to help children in rural areas progress upwards on the economic curve by transforming them into the human capital that will drive the nation's economic progress in the future.

⁹ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁰ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹¹ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

Figure 2: Geographic distribution of government schools in Mungeli



Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 - 2013)

Over the course of the past decade, a number of initiatives, investments and measures have been taken to strengthen and spruce up the educational machinery to make it more galvanized and responsive to the requirement, needs and aspirations of the students. With the introduction of the Right to Education Act (RTE), the state has provided a clear indication that it expects to provide to all the children in the country; access to quality education.

However, a closer evaluation of the quality of the infrastructure and teaching staff at the government schools in Mungeli reveals a number of gaps that the government needs to bridge before it is able to truly deliver against its promise of quality education for all.

As of financial year ending 2013, about 7.2 percent of government schools were operating without a source of drinking water for their students¹². Further, 2.6 percent of the schools reported not having a sanitation/toilet facility on their premises. It is also important to note that 60.6 percent of schools (co-educational) reported having a toilet for girls but not having one for boys. While, there is a possibility that these are actually common toilets; if they are indeed only for girl then in all likelihood the boys from these schools have no other option but urinate or defecate in the open¹³.

The schools seems to have adequate number of classrooms for the children (pupil-classroom ration of 36:1), however 313 of the 693 government schools in the district reported that their classrooms were in need of minor or major repairs¹⁴. Further, 47.9 percent of the schools in the district reported not having a playground that the children can use for sports/recreational activities. The schools are also underequipped to support CWSN and this is made evident by the fact that 47.4 percent of schools report not having a functional ramp to access the school premises¹⁵.

The district education machinery is also found to be in need of adequate experienced/qualified teaching faculty. So while the pupil-teacher ratio for Mungeli is 36:1, as of financial year ending 2013, 38.3 percent of the teachers teaching at government schools didn't hold required/relevant professional qualifications and 24.1 percent of the teachers did not have a graduate degree¹⁶.

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers with required/relevant professional qualifications

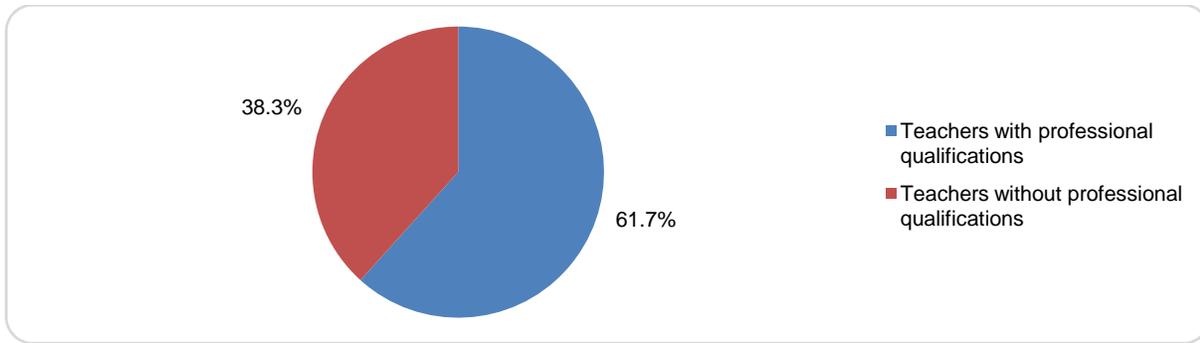
¹²UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹³UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁴UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁵UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁶UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

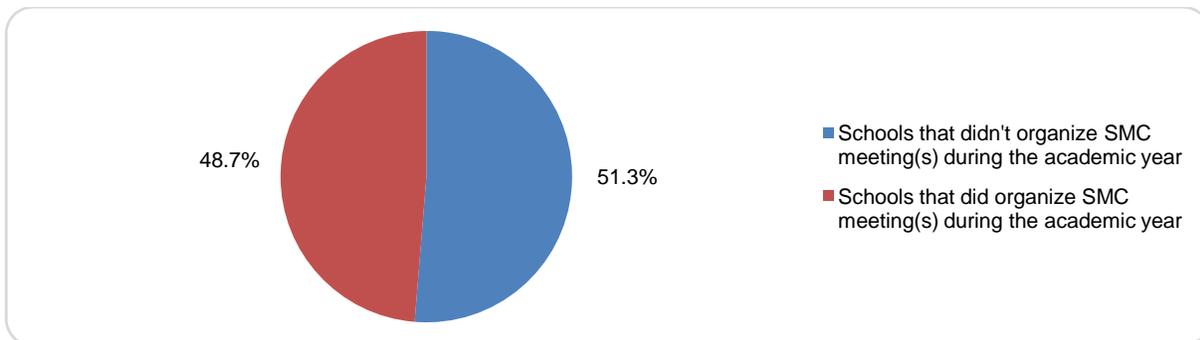


Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

Another area of concern is that a number of schools in the district do not have female teachers. As of financial year ending 2013, 50.8 percent of the government schools in the district reported not having any female teachers¹⁷. The larger quantum of schools is yet to benefit from the influx of technology in the classroom teaching-learning transactions and only 4.6 percent of schools in the district had a functional computer. This might also be a resultant of the fact that only 30.3 percent of the schools in the district have an active electricity connection¹⁸.

The efforts towards providing all children in the district with access to quality education at the primary and upper primary level is further impaired by inadequate monitoring and supporting mechanisms/institutions. This is made evident by the fact that 51.3 percent of the government schools did not hold any School Management Committee (SMC) meetings during the previous year. Further, 10 of the 693 government schools in the district are yet to constitute a SMC¹⁹.

Figure 4: Percentage of schools that organized SMC meeting(s) during the previous academic year



Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

The institutional mechanisms for monitoring and support are found to be further ineffective when internalizes the fact that during the previous academic year, the Block Resource Coordinators (BRC) didn't visit 58.6 percent of the schools functioning under their purview²⁰. Also, 8.7 percent of the government schools in the district were not visited by the Circle Resource Coordinator (CRC) assigned to them for monitoring and support²¹.

Figure 5: Percentage of schools not visited by BRCs during the previous academic year

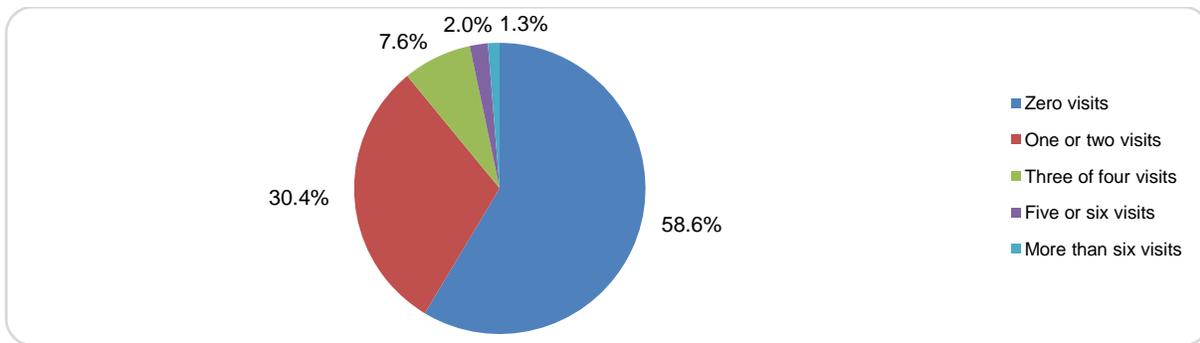
¹⁷ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁸ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

¹⁹ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

²⁰ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)

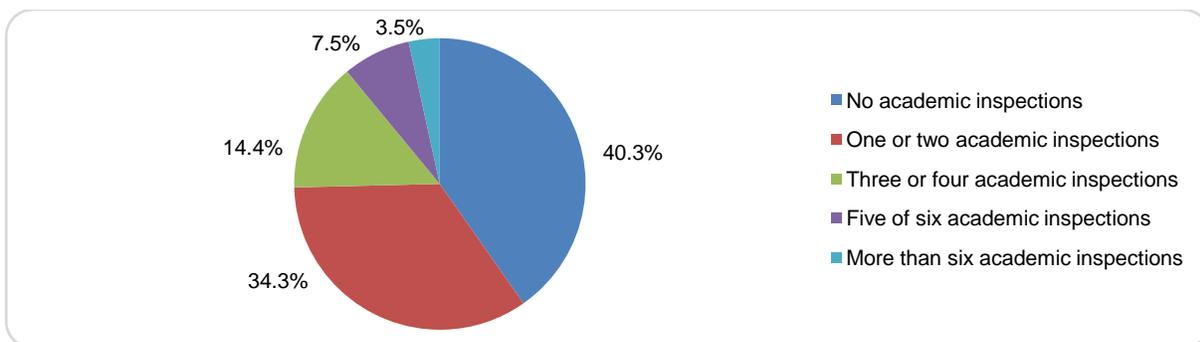
²¹ UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 – 2013)



Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 - 2013)

Another fact that reveals the absence of monitoring and support mechanisms is that during the previous academic year, approximately 40.3 percent of the schools in the district weren't subjected to an academic inspection/review²².

Figure 6: Percentage of schools subjected to academic inspections



Source: UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 - 2013)

Therefore, while it is evident that while the district educational machinery has the capacity to act as a medium of education and empowerment for the children in Mungeli; it is also very clear that the government needs to close a number of gaps if it needs to be effective in realizing this potential.

Table 2: Educational profile - district snapshot

Number of government schools in Mungeli	693
Number of children enrolled at government schools	85,178
Girls enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment	49.9 percent
OBC enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment	11.7 percent
SC enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment	11.8 percent
ST enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment	5.7 percent
Number of CWSN enrolled at government schools	943
Rural - urban distribution/spread of government schools	96.1 Rural - 3.9 Urban

²² UDISE data for Mungeli district (2012 - 2013)

Pupil – classroom ration	36:1
Percentage of schools with drinking water facility	92.8 percent
Percentage of schools with adequate sanitation facilities	35.1 percent
Percentage of schools with a ramp for the disabled	52.6 percent
Percentage of teachers holding relevant professional qualifications	61.7 percent
Pupil – teacher ratio	38:1
Percentage of schools with female teachers	49.2 percent
Percentage of schools that held a SMC meeting during the previous academic year	48.7 percent
Percentage of schools visited by the BRC during the previous academic year	41.4 percent
Percentage of schools visited by the CRC during the previous academic year	91.3 percent
Percentage of schools that went through an academic inspection	59.7 percent

2.3 Profile of schools visited

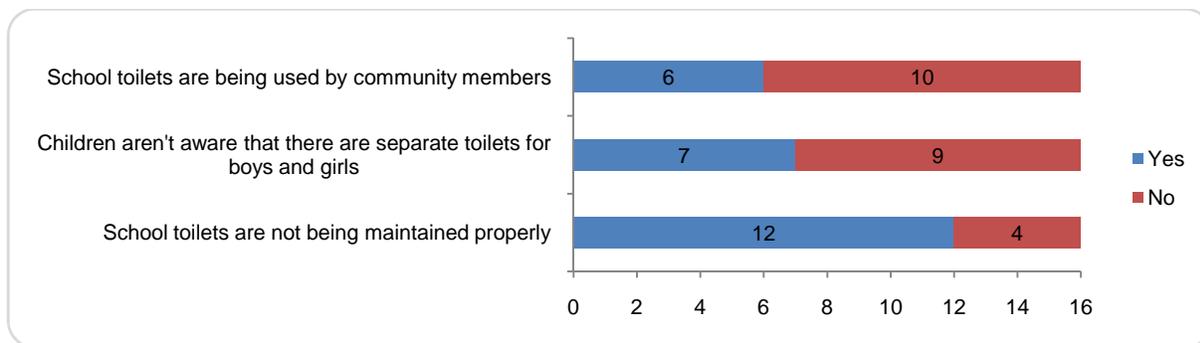
The interactions held with the head teachers at the schools covered under the study, the focused group discussions (FGD) held with the children studying at these schools and interactions held with the parents of these children provided a volume of additional information and insights that further reveal deficiencies within the district’s educational machinery. The schools covered as a part of this study operate out of rural areas and cater to families that primarily rely on agriculture for their income and sustenance.

As per the data & information collected during the field visit to sixteen schools in Mungeli, all the schools had separate toilets for girls and boys, had a drinking water facility and a playground for the children. However, the children studying at these schools were quick to report that these facilities are not being maintained properly and in a number of cases are being encroached upon by members of the community. In twelve out of the sixteen schools, the children reported that the school toilets were not being maintained properly and that on a number of days it was almost impossible to stand in the vicinity of these facilities.

Children at seven out of the sixteen facilities reported that while there were two toilet facilities attached to their school; they are not aware that these facilities are gender assigned and that both boys and girls access the two facilities on the basis of availability. Further, at six of the schools, the children reported that the sanitation facilities and the source of drinking water were also being utilized by members of the community.

The children informed the field teams that an absence of a boundary wall at the school meant that members of the community used these facilities even post school hours and that these facilities were in a mess when the school would resume the next day. Some of the children also reported that the onus of cleaning up/washing these utilities rested solely on their shoulders and that the first child to use the facility on a given day would eventually need to lug water to the toilet and wash it before using the same.

Figure 7: State of sanitation infrastructure at school visited as a part of the study



Source: Focused group discussions with children at the sixteen schools visited during the study

The lack of a boundary had also resulted in members of the community encroaching upon the schools land/premises. At six of the schools visited, the head teachers pointed out that the community had started using the school playground as a temporary cattle shed. Further, in two of the cases families residing in the vicinity had encroached upon the school land and had built extensions to their hutments/living quarters.

In conflict with the community; families encroaching upon school property & facilities

At Primary School, Budhwara it is hard to distinguish between the school property and community settlements as the two simply merge into one another. During the visit to the school the field team observed that the members of the community were frequenting the school hand pump for water. They were also using the facility to wash utensils, brush their teeth, wash their hands etc. Further, the sanitation facilities were also being used as a public good and the community members had ready access to the same.

The head teacher was quick to point out that while he had raised this issue with the community leaders; the families living adjacent to the school would still continue to use the facilities and further discussion on this subject could translate into confrontation. Given that the school can't exist and operate without the community's support, the head teacher revealed that the school staff had now gotten accustomed to the idea of the community members utilizing the school property.

He also pointed out that while the school boasts a large playground for its students; the ground has been encroached upon to build cattle sheds and livestock readily grazes on the ground.

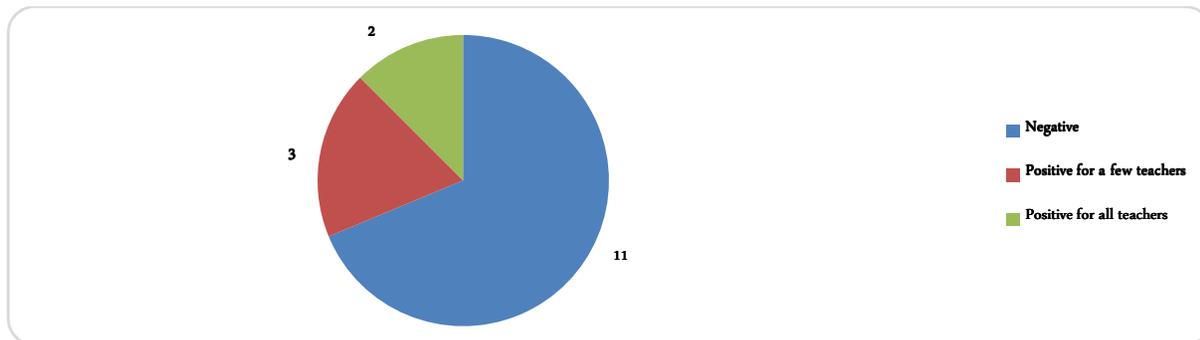
At a number of schools, the head teachers also reported that classrooms are in need of minor/major repair. The nature of repair required ranged from reinforcement of ceiling, plastering & whitewashing to refurbishment of the floor. At twelve of the sixteen schools visited, the classrooms were in need of such repair and at ten of these schools (all primary schools) the children reported that not only was the flooring in need of major repair; but there was a need for adequate number of floor rugs for them to sit on. None of the primary schools visited had desks and chairs for the students and all the children sat on floor rugs/mats. While the unavailability of desks and chairs wasn't a major concern for most of the students, its importance was emphasized upon by the physically disabled children. The physically disabled reported that they found it difficult to sit on the floor and it would be easier for them to manage during school hours if they had a chair and desk to work with.

The children at all the sixteen schools also pointed out that they weren't very happy with the appearance of their classrooms and would appreciate if the classrooms had some more color, charts, art work etc. In four of the schools visited, the children pointed out that they had actually made multiple pieces of artwork that at one time adorned the classrooms walls but during the previous whitewash, their creations were removed and disposed.

The schools covered under the study also provided a broad representation of the quality of the teaching-learning transactions at

these centers of learning. At eleven of the sixteen schools covered under the study, the children had nothing positive to report about their teachers and were rather critical of the attitude with which they perform their duties. At all the eleven schools, the predominant reasons sighted for not being happy with their teachers were irregularity of teaching staff (teacher absenteeism) and their disinterest in going beyond the curriculum to respond to their doubts and queries. At three of the five schools where students were appreciative of the effort their teachers invest in teaching them; they made it clear that this positive perception only applied to some of their teachers and that not all teachers approached their duties in a diligent manner.

Figure 8: Students opinion of the efforts being invested by their teachers



Source: Focused group discussions with children at the sixteen schools visited during the study

During in depth discussion on why teacher absenteeism is a major cause of concern, the students revealed that a number of their teachers were regularly absent from their duties and as a result the school usually operate with inadequate staff. They said that the staff present on any given day responded to this issue by adopting any of the three following approaches:

- **Self-study classes:** The students were asked to study on their own and a child was selected from the class to lead the self-study session by reading out sections from the prescribed text books. On a number of occasions, a child from a senior class was asked to lead the self-study session of a junior class. Herein, the students complained that these classes were largely alienating as it felt that they were confined to a particular classroom and seemingly keeping themselves engaged without any guidance.
- **Joint classes:** The students from a number of classes were merged into a singular set and a teacher would then lead the teaching-learning process for this joint set. Herein, the students complained that depending on the grade specific curriculum that the teacher would use, a certain section of the joint class would either not able to comprehend the curriculum (as it was from a senior grade) or was disinterest in the curriculum (as it was from a junior grade that they had already cleared).
- **Simultaneous classes:** The students continued to sit with their peers and study in their respective classrooms and a teacher would shuttle between classrooms; covering sections of the curriculum and assigning exercises for them to complete while he/she attended to the other classes. The students said that this setup was much better than the previous two setups. However, they reported that the pace of learning was still much slower than usual and they would still have a lot of idle time which they had to spent being confined to the classroom.

The case of missing teachers and blank faces

At Primary School, Gharaghat when the field team asked the head teacher to provide us with a mixed group of students to interact with under a FGD; he pointed out that the grade five classroom was currently occupied by students from class three, four and five. When the field team enquired into the reasons for this heterogeneous mix of grades in a single classroom the teacher said that it was a result of a number of teachers being absent on that given day.

While the school was supposed to have four regular teaching staff; at the time of the field visit only two teachers were

present on rolls. It is interesting to note that while the head teacher was present on the premises, the second teacher (present on rolls) was nowhere to be seen.

Upon entering the classroom the field team realized that the heterogeneous mix of grades was trying to follow a common curriculum for that day's teaching learning transactions and that a number of children were simply idling at the back of the classroom. In depth discussion with the children revealed that this is a regular feature at the school and is one of the major things they dislike about coming to school.

When asked to describe the teaching-learning process or methodology of teaching; the children said that they study largely from the prescribed textbooks. When provided with examples of 'Activity Based Learning' (ABL), all the children at the primary schools covered under the study reported that they would like to study under such alternative modes of instruction. However, the children at the upper primary schools said that they would prefer being taught under the current text based methodology. They said that given that they haven't ever studied under these alternative methods they wouldn't be comfortable adapting to the same at their age.

A similar pattern was found to hold true when the students were asked for their opinion on the need for co-curricular, extra-curricular and sports activities. The children at the primary schools were unanimous in voicing their support for the idea of having art & craft lessons or sports lessons as an integral part of their time-table. They said that the introduction of such activities would increase their liking towards their school and in turn the concept of education. They said that one of the major reasons why they like to come to school is that they get to spend a lot of time with their friends and the introduction of such activities would provide them with space where they can actively work with/interact with them.

On the other hand, the students at upper primary schools felt that they had now outgrown the age where they would be enthralled/captivated by such activities. They said that they would prefer to dedicate their sole attention towards learning as much as they can from their teachers. However, they did specify that they would rather have a few structured/instructor led classes dedicated towards special activities such as basic IT, home science, needle work etc. They believe that these classes will add more value to their personality by providing them with additional skills that they can put to practical use in the future.

Students at all the sixteen schools covered under the study also reported that they didn't appreciate the fact that their teachers met out harsh punishments if they fail to deliver against their expectations or make a mistake. The students at all the schools reported that the teachers still used a duster or a cane in the class. The students at the upper primary level said that they didn't appreciate such harsh behavior as they felt humiliated in front of their peers. On the other hand, students at primary schools were of the belief that such harsh punishments were common.

Facing the cane on a daily basis

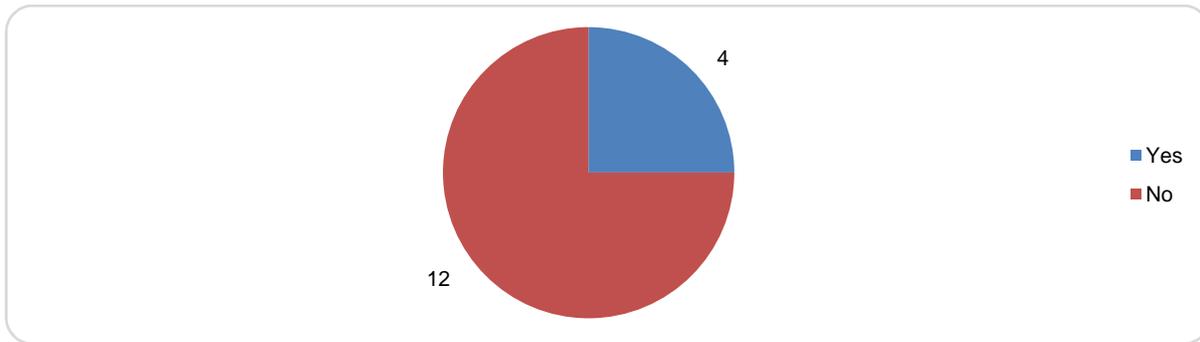
The field team found that almost all the schools covered under the study has a cane lying in the corner of the classroom. While one would want it to simply be a relic from the past, teachers were found to be wielding the same to discipline the class. When the teachers were asked to provide access to a classroom to hold a FGD, it was commonly observed that they would use the cane to try and instill order in the classroom as we entered.

Later during the FGDs, the children pointed out that the cane (and in many cases the duster) in the classroom was actively used to administer beatings for disciplining students.

The teaching-learning arrangements at the schools covered also have no space to help academically weaker students. The head teachers at twelve of the sixteen schools visited said that they didn't hold any remedial classes for academically weaker students and this was because they had not received any clear policy directive/communication in this direction. The head teachers at the

other four schools said that remedial classes were held when the teachers were able to arrange for some additional time from their regular responsibilities. They said that these classes were being held as a prerogative by the teachers because they feel that it is their duty to help the academically weaker students. They said that these classes were not being held under or according to any particular directive from the state educational machinery. They said that schools are really not clear about the state's stand on this issue.

Figure 9: Percentage of schools holding remedial classes for academically weak students



Source: Semi structured interviews with head teachers at the sixteen schools visited during the study

The quality of teaching-learning transactions is found to be worse in the case of CWSN. The head teachers at all the sixteen schools covered under the study said that they and their teachers are not in a position to work with CWSN (especially non-physical disabilities). They said that the maximum support they have received in this direction is fifteen to thirty days of training and that this isn't sufficient for them to deal with the practical constraints attached to teaching and managing CWSN.

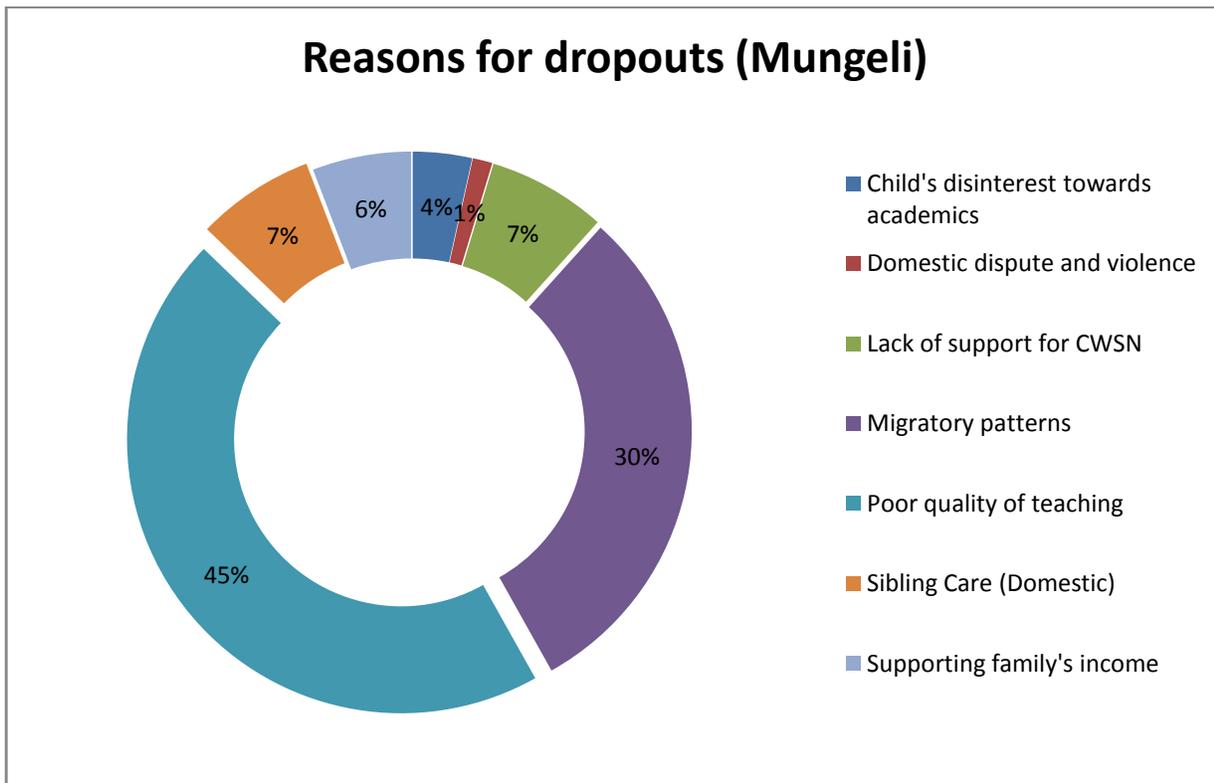
The head teacher at nine of the sixteen schools also pointed out that the quality of education at the school could benefit from increased monitoring & support from the state education machinery. They said that their schools hadn't been visited by BRCs and CRCs during the previous academic year. It was also noted that while all the sixteen schools reported having established a SMC, the head teachers at eleven of the sixteen schools reported that these SMCs were not functional and that they had no formal platform to engage with the community members.

2. Reasons for drop out

The district's current socio-demographic profile, its educational profile and the profile of schools visited during the study sum up to present a landscape that provide origin to a number of socio-economic, school related, family related and community related factors, perceptions and actions that can often result in students dropping out from the schools in the district.

Addressing the various reasons why students drop out of the formal schooling system necessarily entails the development of an in-depth understanding of these reasons. Herein, it is important to understand the developments and factors that add in to the reason, how the reason play out across time and geography and finally what is the gravity/magnitude of the impact it has on the child's academic life.

Figure 10: Reasons for dropouts



The chart depicts the distribution of reasons for drop out as stated by the parents of all drop out children covered during the study in the district. It is important to state that the above reasons are primary responses of the parents and would in some of the cases differ from the final reasons stated in the report. This is primarily because the reasons presented in the report have been concluded after analysing responses from different stakeholders and observations made on field.

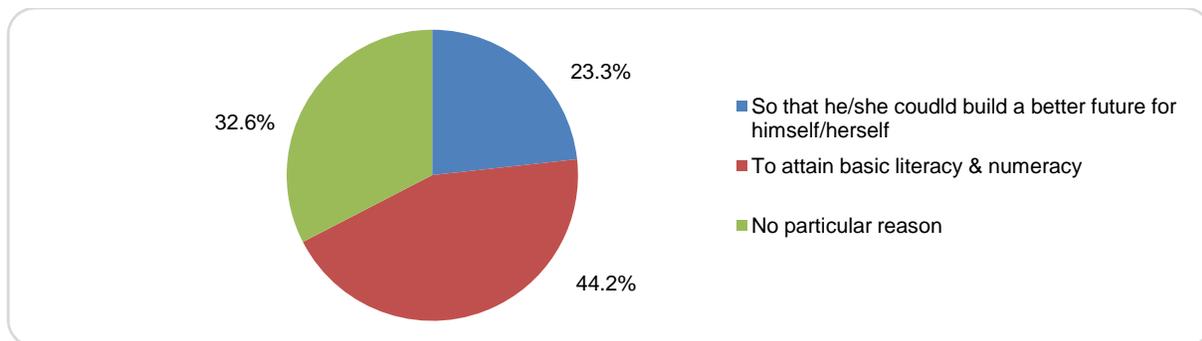
It is evident from the chart that majority of parents accounted poor quality of teaching (45 per cent) as the major reason of dropout among their children. Migration in search for work due to limited opportunities in their area accounted for 30 per cent of parent's response as reason for drop out. Sibling care especially common for girl child and lack of support for CWSN formed 14 per cent of the total response from the parents. Somewhere highlighting the need for more concerted effort towards gender and disability inclusion in the existing school system. Though reported as one of cases, domestic dispute and violence also emerged as primary response for drop out among the parents.

Limited intrinsic understanding of the economic benefits of formal education

The family/parents perception of the value of education in their child's life and the possibilities it can open up for him/her in the future forms the backbone of the effort/seriousness with which the child will progress across various academic grades.

In this regard, 32.6 percent of the parents whose children have dropped out of formal schooling in Mungeli reported that they had no particular reason, goal or aspiration for sending their child to school. Another 44.2 percent of parents reported that they sent their children to school so that they could attain basic literacy and numeracy. Only 23.3 percent of parents reported that they had sent their children to school so that they could make a better future for themselves.

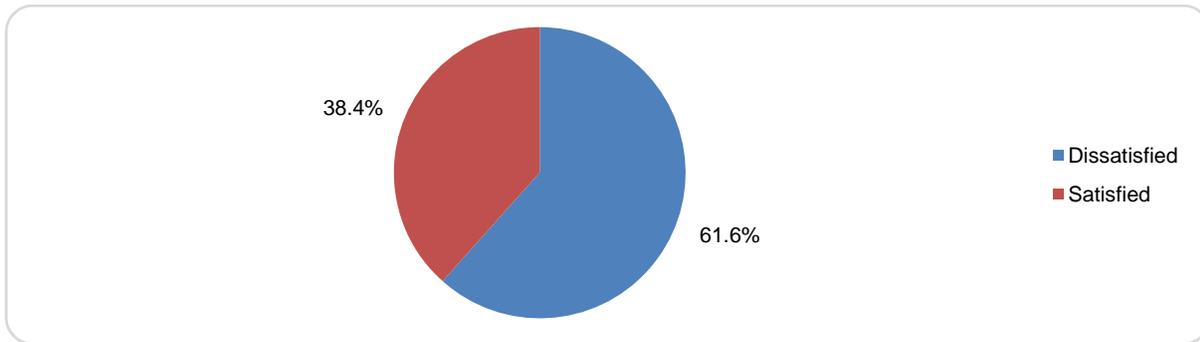
Figure 11: Reasons for sending children to school



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

While the families reason for sending their children to school do not directly lead to the child dropping out of school; they have the capacity to act as a trigger point that gets activated once one or more of the other reasons for dropout become applicable.

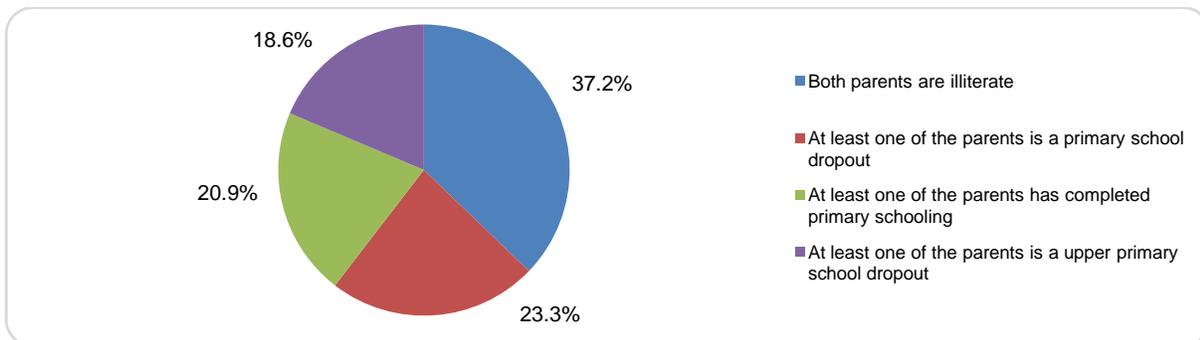
Figure 12: Parents perception of their child's progress against the goals that they had set for him/her



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

In this regard, it is also important to note that most often the students and their families are also unaware of the impact education can have on the child's future. During the FGDs with the children studying at the sixteen schools covered under the study it was evident that the children were unclear about how education connects to better employment/career opportunities. The children at all the sixteen schools were of the opinion that education is important for their future development. However, when asked as to how is it expected to provide them with any foreseeable benefits, they were unable to connect education with the socio-economic gains associated to the same (awareness, employment, empowerment or enlightenment). This limited understanding of the not tangible and non-monetary benefits that one can derive from quality education is also a resultant of the fact that majority of the children who have dropped out of school are first generation learners.

Figure 13: Parents educational status/profile



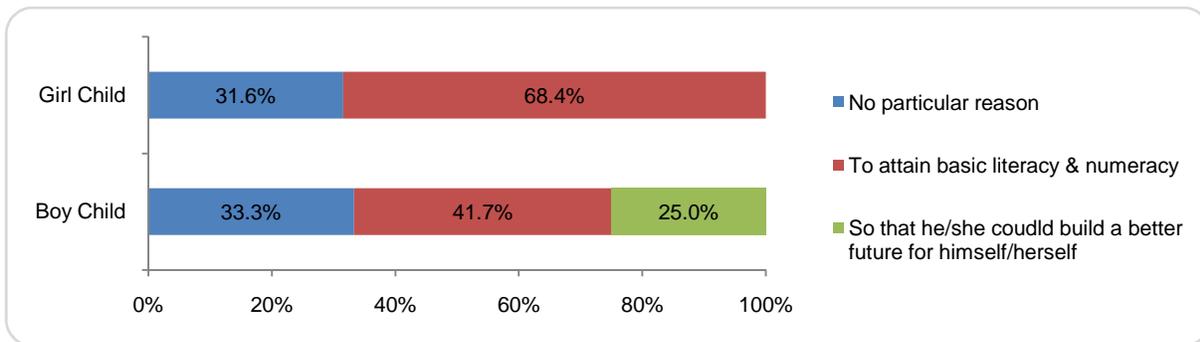
Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The children at these schools were also equivocal in their opinion that their parents want them to study so that they could earn a better living in the future by gaining more purposeful and secure employment. However, they were also unanimous in voicing their concerns that they and their families are currently unaware of what these employment opportunities are, which employment opportunities are available at the completion of every level of formal schooling and finally what further educational qualifications are required to qualify for better employment opportunities.

Limited value accorded to the education of girl child

It is alarming, that out of the 23.3 percent of parents who reported that they had sent their children to school so that they could make a better future for themselves; none of the wards under consideration was a girl child. Parents either send their girls to school without any particular goal or objective in mind or for the simple goal of attaining basic literacy & numeracy. Given that these goals can be achieved at the initial grades/primary schooling level; it can be safely assumed that girls are more vulnerable to dropping out of school once any other reasons for dropout become applicable.

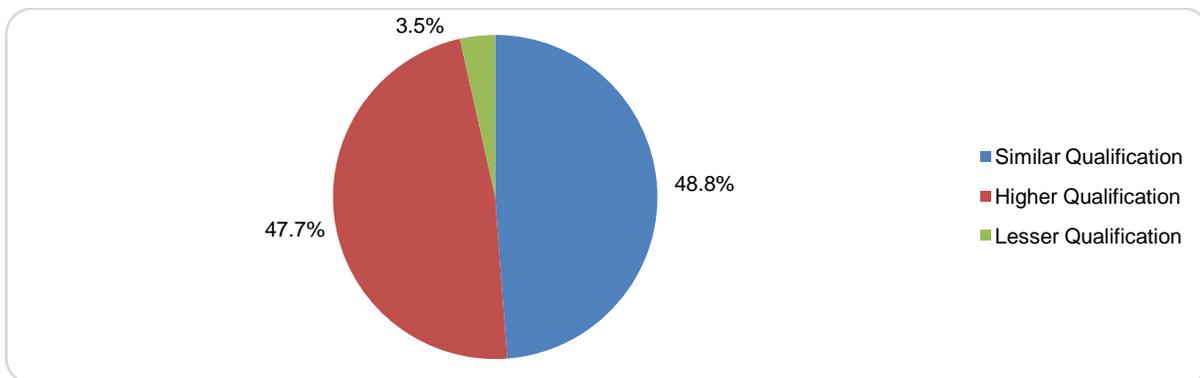
Figure 14: Gender disaggregated reasons for sending children to school



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

It is obvious that parents believe that it is more important for the boys in the community to study and this might be a resultant of the prevailing socio-cultural landscape. A hint towards this mind set is clearly seen when one looks at the educational status of the dropout’s father vis-à-vis the qualification of his/her mother. In 96.5 percent of cases the father has a similar or higher qualification than the mother.

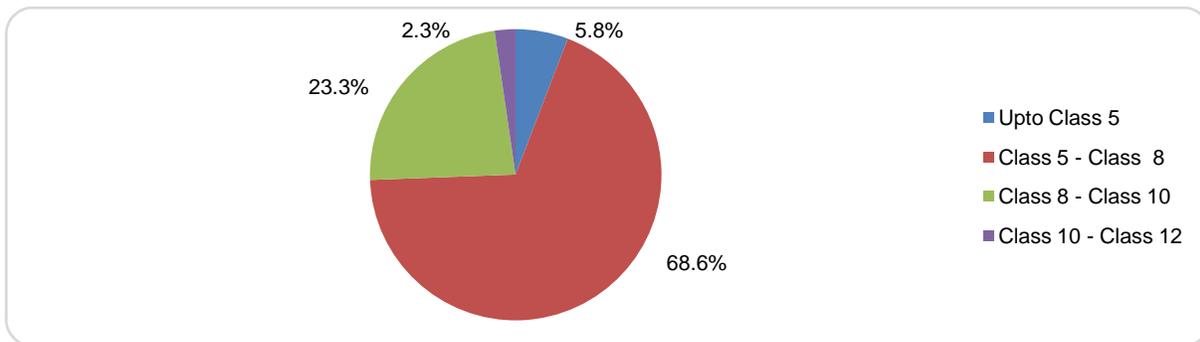
Figure 15: Father’s educational qualification vis-à-vis the mother’s educational qualification



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The communities perception of value of education for girls is further made clear by the fact that it is an accepted notion that girls don’t need to study beyond completion of class eight (upper primary education) and in fact it is ok if they drop out before that. As per 74.4 percent of the households covered under the study; girls in the community only study till class eight (many a times dropping out before reaching class eight).

Figure 16: Prevalent educational qualification amongst girls (below eighteen year of age) in the community



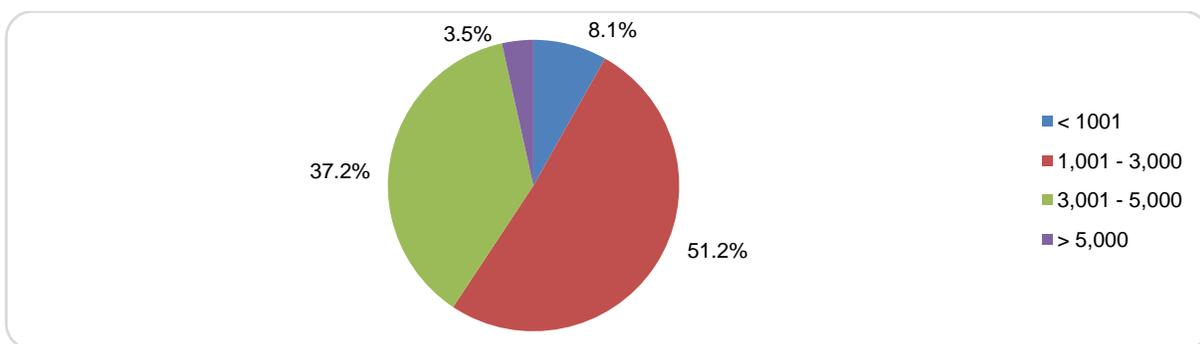
Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Economic pressure and livelihood pattern/compulsions

Even though the community functions with a slight undertone of disparity between the state and status of men and women; it seemingly provides both men and women with equal access to employment opportunities. These employment opportunities mostly originate from the agriculture sector and the modality of employment is usually a daily wage arrangement. The members from the household usually work in groups and at any given point of time are attached to the same assignment. None of these assignments require any form of specialized skills and they usually operate using basic labor. The women from the household also work as daily wage earners and this is primarily because their efforts and income are required to ensure that the family is able to make ends meet.

This is made clear by the fact that 59.3 percent of the families covered under the study reported an average family income below INR 3,000 per month. Given that the average family size in the community is 6 – 7 individuals, this translates into roughly INR 450 – 500 per head per month.

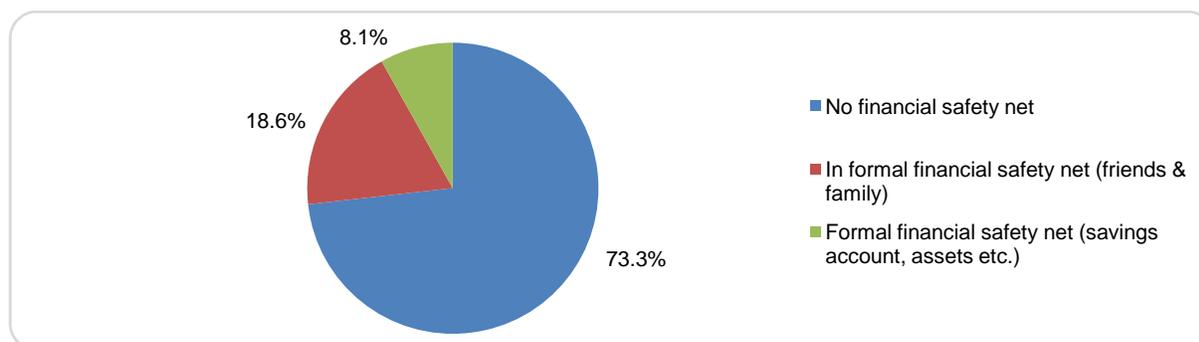
Figure 17: Average monthly income at households covered under the study



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The demand for labor in agriculture and allied domains is necessarily linked to the cropping pattern. As a result the demand for agricultural labor also tends to follow a seasonal cyclical trend. The sowing and harvesting season experience peaks in demand for agricultural labor and are therefore also the period which offer the highest daily wage. On the other hand the interim period experiences a sharp fall in the demand for labor and is also the period which offers the lowest daily wage. In these time periods, families are forced to survive around the minimum subsistence level and at times their monthly income drops below the same. Majority of the families do not have any savings and financial safety nets that they can rely on during this period. About 73.3 percent of the households covered under the study reported not having any financial safety net and another 18.6 percent reported that they had to rely on an informal financial safety net (friends & family).

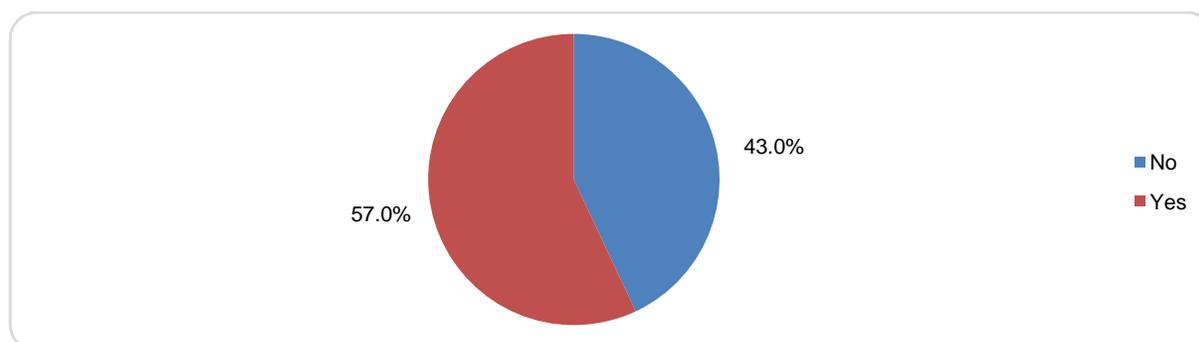
Figure 18: Percentage of families with a financial safety net in place to deal with income shocks



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The absence of a financial safety net forces families to look outwards at supplementary sources/avenues of income during the lean season for agriculture labor in Chhattisgarh. Given their lack of formal skills training, the easiest and at times the only alternative available is to migrate to cities and work at construction sites. Construction projects offer a volume of opportunities to unskilled labor and pay comparatively higher daily wages than the agricultural sector (especially in the lean season). As a result 57.0 percent of the households covered under the study reported that they migrate to cities during the lean season and return to their villages once the demand picks up in the agricultural sector.

Figure 19: Percentage of families migrating during lean season



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

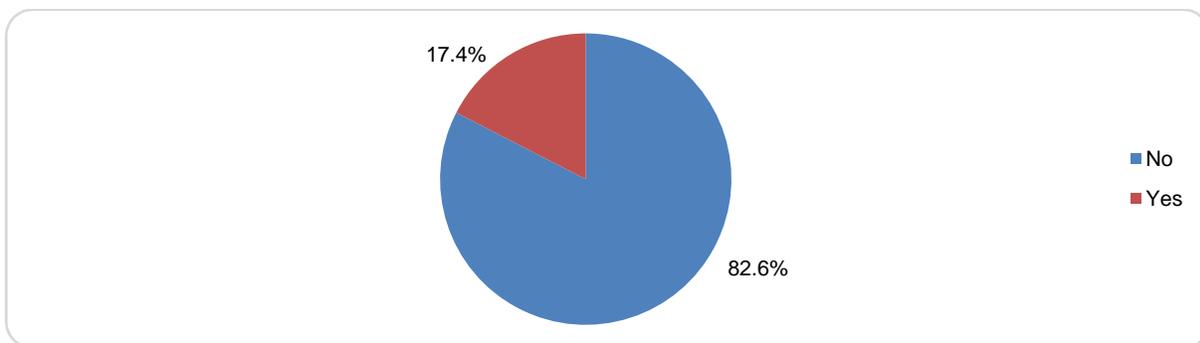
While migration helps the households in maintaining a steady monthly inflow of funds; it disrupts the lives of the children in the family. In majority (73.5 percent) of the cases the families take their children along with themselves and these children drop out of school with immediate effect. Herein, the children do not work at the construction sites as they are still below the legal age of being eligible to work. The parents report that they wouldn't mind if their children were to study at the local school near their place of work in the city but don't try to get them enrolled there as they do not want to go through the process of seeking a transfer certificate for the same. They say that even if they were to put in this effort, they would have to repeat the process at the time when they return back to their homes and this was just too much of an ask. It is clear that these families were obviously not aware that getting a Transfer Certificate is no more a pre-condition to taking admission in another school, under the RTE rules. The households that migrate under such arrangements are generally those which didn't have any particular objective/reason for sending their children to school of who went their children to school to attain basic literacy and numeracy.

In the rest of the cases (26.5 percent), only the work force participants in the family migrate and leave the school going children in the custody of their relatives or the elders in the family. While this ensures that the child still resides around the school and can continue to attend the same, it doesn't necessarily translate into the children regularly attending school. The lack of supervision from their care givers leads to the children skipping or bunking school. The households that migrate under such arrangements

are generally those which have sent their children to school so that they can get educated and build a better future for themselves/get a good job in the future.

The fact that these families sustain/manage the household budget on or around the poverty line also increases the probability that the family might pull their child out of school to act as an additional hand capable of adding to the family income. At 17.4 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that the child had dropped out of school to contribute towards the family income. They said that if the child was above fourteen years of age he/she would be counted as a distinct unit of labor and if he/she was below the age of fourteen then he/she would travel to the work site with the family and pitch in with the work assigned to one of the elders in the family. An analysis of the profile of such households clearly reveals that these are families that are at the bottom of the pyramid in terms of monthly income (INR 1 – 2,000 per month) and did not have any specific objective in mind when they got their child enrolled at school. Also the children under consideration in such cases are all boys. These are also the families that did not have any specific reason for sending their child to school or sent their child to school so that he/she could attain basic literacy & numeracy.

Figure 20: Percentage of families that reported that their children had dropped out to contribute to the family income



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Seasonal Migration and its implication on children

Phool Singh (name changed) has the responsibility of sustaining a nuclear family of five. He and his wife are daily wage earners and have a small land piece that they used to cultivate rice and lentils. The family has a monthly family income of INR 1,000 to 2,000 and in order to sustain this income, the family migrates on an annual basis to work at construction sites in Delhi.

The family doesn't want their migration to affect their children's education but says that they have no option but to pull the children out of school when they migrate. The family is unaware that under RTE their child is automatically eligible to gain admission at the local government school near the construction site. They are still under the impression that they need a transfer certificate to migrate the child to this new school and that they would have to repeat the process when they return home.

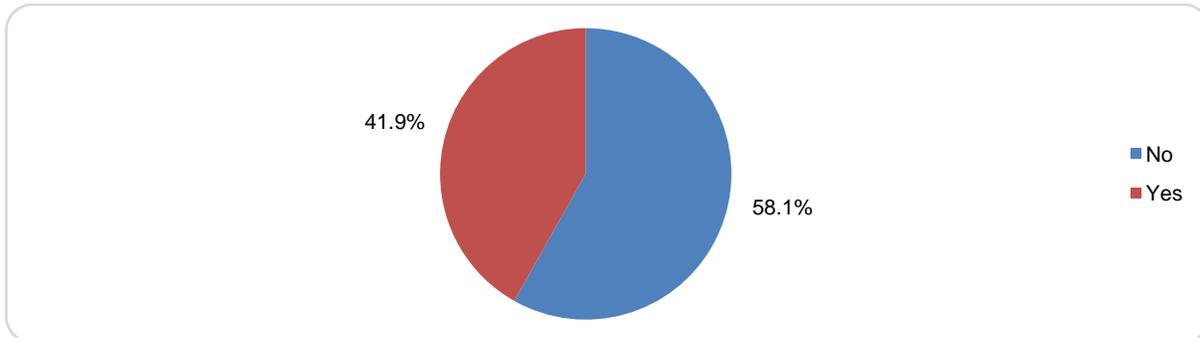
The family says that they would in fact be happy if the children were to get admitted at the local school as they are always worried about them when they go to work at the site. They believe that the local school would be a safer environment for the child to be in when they go to work.

Contributing towards domestic responsibilities and performing domestic chores

The source of livelihood of the families and the seasonal nature of their employment in the agriculture sector also entails that the family members are usually overworked/busy during the sowing and harvesting season. At these times, the family might not

necessarily depend on their children to contribute to their work as an active participant but rather passively support the family by taking care of other domestic responsibilities and domestic chores. At 41.9 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that their child had dropped out of school in order to support/help with domestic responsibilities and chores.

Figure 21: Percentage of families that reported that their children had dropped out to help out with domestic chores and responsibilities



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The nature of the domestic responsibilities and chores highlights a gender disaggregated dimension. The boys in the family actively help the family in the sowing or harvesting the crop (especially on the small land tracts that the family owns) or in taking care of the cattle and livestock. On the other hand, the girls in the family usually substitute for their mother and take care of the washing, cleaning and cooking at home and also take care of their younger siblings.

The children under consideration here usually belong to families that did not have a defined goal in mind when they enrolled them at school or simply wanted them to attain basic literacy and numeracy. In a number of cases, these children are first generation learners and their parents are not in a position to understand that prolonged absenteeism from school can have an adverse effect on the child's education as he/she becomes susceptible to falling behind on the course or curriculum.

A major point to note here is that the exact timeframe when this reason comes into play and can lead to a child dropping out of school is well documented and precisely defined as it corresponds to the agriculture cycle. This makes the reason seasonal and cyclical in nature with the seasonality coinciding with the cropping/agriculture pattern followed in the state.

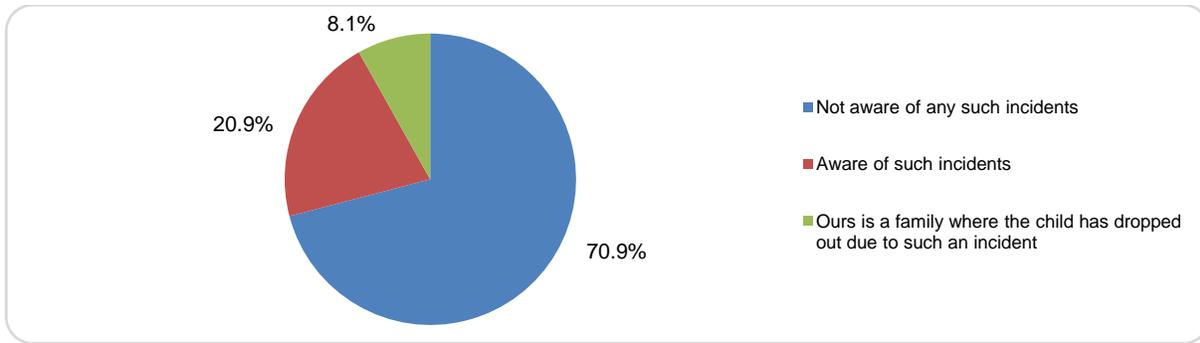
The agricultural cycle and its impact on children

The time of the field visits coincided with the paddy harvest season and also with the midterm examinations at schools. While seated in the head teachers room at Primary School, Chattan the field team observed that a child walked in and turned in his incomplete examination answer sheet in order to go and help his father in the field. The child said that the father had come to pick him up as he needed his help in the field.

Domestic discord and its impact on children

At 20.9 percent of the households visited during the study, family members reported being aware of incidents where the child had dropped out of school because of such domestic discord. At another 8.1 percent of the households, members of the family reported that a child in their family had dropped out because of this reason.

Figure 22: Domestic discord resulting in child dropping out of school



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

These families provided an insight into how the domestic discord affects the lives of their children. In such cases, a major fight/dispute can lead to the mother leaving the house to go and live with her parents; more often taking the children along with herself as it is her responsibility to take care of them. Although, the mother does return to join her husband once the discord is settled, the children have to dropout of school in the interim period. Just as in the case of migrant families, these families are also unaware of the implications of the RTE and believe that they would need to arrange for a transfer certificate if their child is to gain admission to the government school near their maternal grandparents' house.

In a number of other cases, frequent disputes between the parents can have a potential negative impact on the children. Such domestic discord tends to create an environment where the mother/father is no longer as attached to the families daily functioning as they should be. As a result the child's formative years might go unsupervised by the parents. Such children are more likely to bunk school to pursue other hobbies/interests or even develop bad habits/addictions.

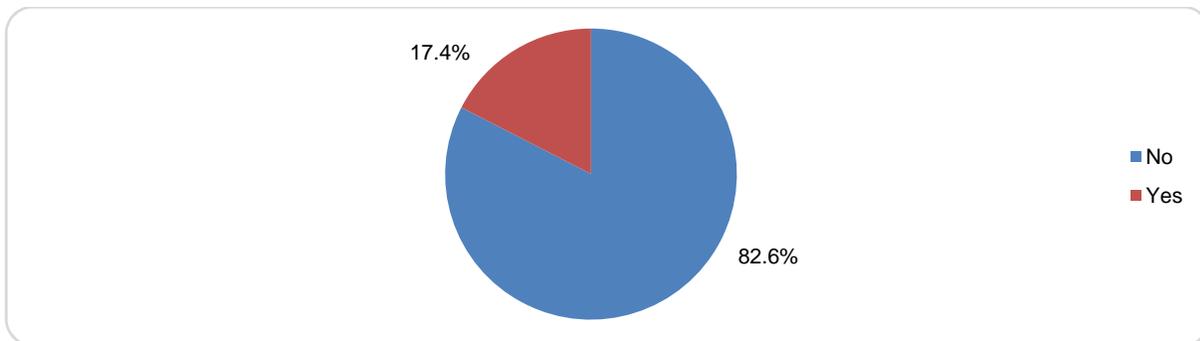
Peer pressure and dropping out of school in groups

In a number of cases the households covered under the study reported that their child had dropped out of school under the influence of his/her peer group. They said that that the child's peers were not interested in academics/education and would rather prefer to spend their time in sports and recreational activities. At 17.4 percent of the households covered under the study, the family reported that their child has dropped out of school under peer pressure/influence.

Some of the families also said that they believe that their child keeps bad company and that he/she and his/her friends have also been caught indulging in social vices such as drinking, smoking, gambling and in extreme cases doing drugs (thinner & diluter fluid). Herein, it is important to note that all the households that reported that their child has dropped out under the influence of their peer group are boys.

The families reported that their reaction to this problem is naturally to pull the child out of school and get him attached to their daily work so as to keep a steady eye on him and his company. They said that they are aware that this reaction of theirs resulted in the child dropping out of school but it was easy for them to take this decision because the child was not attending school/classes any which way.

Figure 23: Peer group influence as a cause of dropout



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Addiction and absenteeism from school

Dhaneswar (name changed) has five children. He resides in the vicinity of the Middle School, Chattauna. The community seems to be grappling with a heavy prevalence of alcoholism and this evil seems to have made a grasp on the lives of the children as well.

Dhaneswar reported that his son Abhay (name changed) is one of those unfortunate children who has fallen victim to alcohol addiction and said that he holds himself partially responsible for this problem because till recently he was an addict as well.

He said that while the rest of children are attending classes, Abhay and some of his friends tend to bunk school and consume alcohol in the fields. He said that they play cards to while away time and that the problem has escalated to the point where they tend to steal money from home in order to purchase the liquor they consume.

Teacher's attitude towards their responsibilities

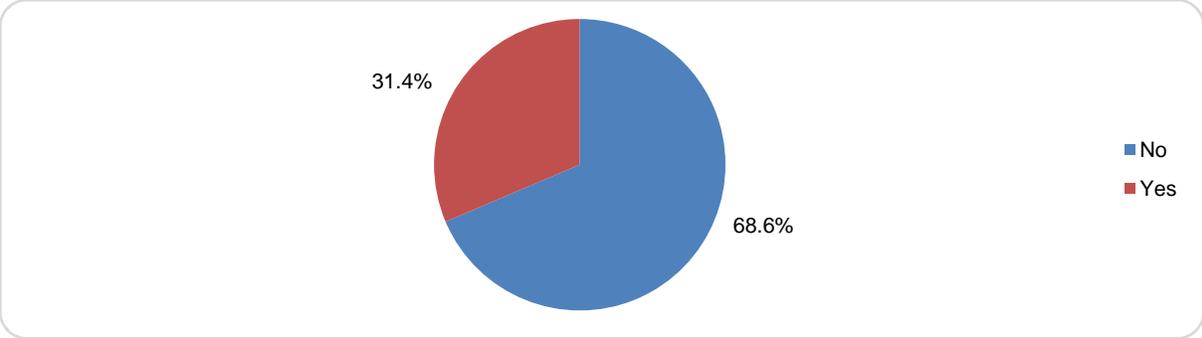
The teaching staff at any educational institution plays a pivotal role in retaining and attracting children to school. Any deviation from their responsibilities as envisioned by the educational machinery adds to the probability of the child dropping out of school.

A large proportion of the students who have dropped out of school are first generation learners and as a result their parents gauge the quality of education through perception and observation rather than a deep understanding of the quality of the same. In another sense their evaluation of quality of education is largely perception and observation based. This includes observations such as teacher absenteeism, teacher's attitude towards children, homework given to children, children's feedback on their teacher's etc.

Similarly, the child's interest or disinterest in coming to school is also largely a function of the teacher, his/her teaching methodology and his/her behavior towards the children. Any behavior or attitude of the teacher that parents interpret as/translate into poor quality of education at school or any such behavior or attitude that can make the child lose interest in coming to school can potentially lead to the child dropping out of school.

A major factor which leads to parents developing a negative perception of the quality of education/teaching at the school is teacher absenteeism. It raises doubts in the parents mind about the seriousness with which their children are being taught and question the benefits that their children might/can derive from such education. At 68.6 percent of the households covered under the study, the parents reported that the school does not hold classes as per schedule and this is primarily because of teacher absenteeism.

Figure 24: Percentage of households reporting that classes are held as per schedule

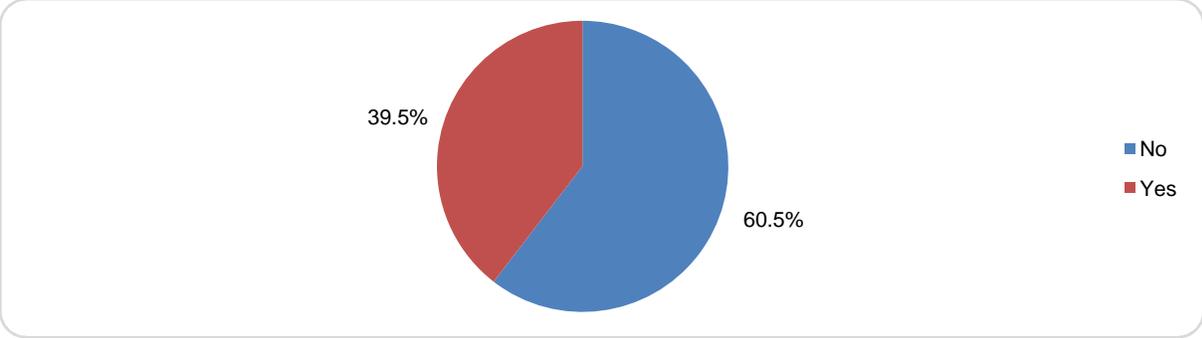


Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

It is obvious that teacher absenteeism is not taken well by the students as well and as mentioned earlier, majority of the students believe that it is irksome at the least. A drop in the teaching staff on any given day is usually responded to by 'self-study lessons', 'joint classes' multiple grades or a single teacher holding 'simultaneously lectures' in multiple classrooms by shuttling between the same. These arrangements provide the children with a lot of idle time that they must spend remaining confined to the classroom. It is but natural that they communicate their irritation with such arrangements to their parents and this in turn adds to their parents' perception of the quality of teaching at the schools.

In fact the seriousness with which the teachers approach the issue of 'dropout' is further made clear by the fact that 60.5 percent of the families covered under the study reported that none of the school teachers got in touch with them when their children dropped out of school.

Figure 25: Percentage of households visited by teachers when the child dropped out



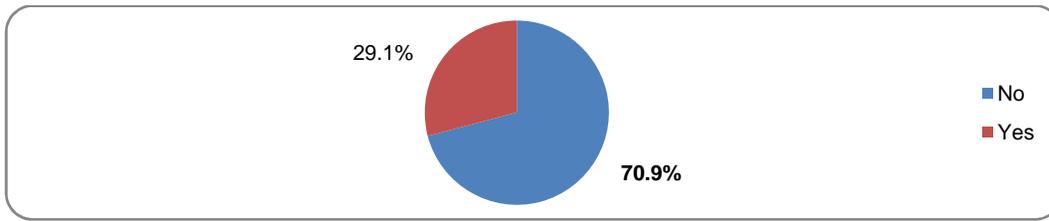
Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

In turn, the teaching staff at the schools visited said that they did not visit all the households covered under the study because they are not clear about the formal definition of a dropout and therefore which students they need to meet/cover under door to door household visits. When asked for the definition being followed at the school, all the teachers identified dropout identification to be a function of prolonged absenteeism. However, the length of absenteeism required for a child to be classified as a dropout varied from 15 days to a year. Herein, the teachers operating with smaller time frames considered a short phase of absenteeism as vulnerability to dropout and hence covered the same under the processes that they have been mandated to follow with every dropout. On the other hand, teachers working with longer time frames believe that prolonged absenteeism is more often seasonal and cyclical and that children necessarily come back to school once the season or cycle gets completed. Therefore they do not reach out to the families of these children.

Further, when it is clear that majority of the children enrolled at the schools are first generation learners then it becomes even more important for teachers to regularly organize parent teacher meetings (PTMs) and keep the parents informed about the child's progress at school. These PTMs can improve upon the parent's perception of the school, its teachers and the quality of

education being imparted by them.

Figure 26: Percentage of households reporting that the school organizes parent teacher meetings (PTM)



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Lack of remedial teaching and its impact on academically weak students

In a number of cases, factors such as migration, domestic chores, domestic discord etc. do not necessarily entail that the child is going to permanently dropout of the formal schooling system. However, the prolonged absenteeism from school can result in the child becoming academically weak when compared to the rest of the class. This is but natural because the child has missed out a number of regular teaching days and falls behind the pace of the class.

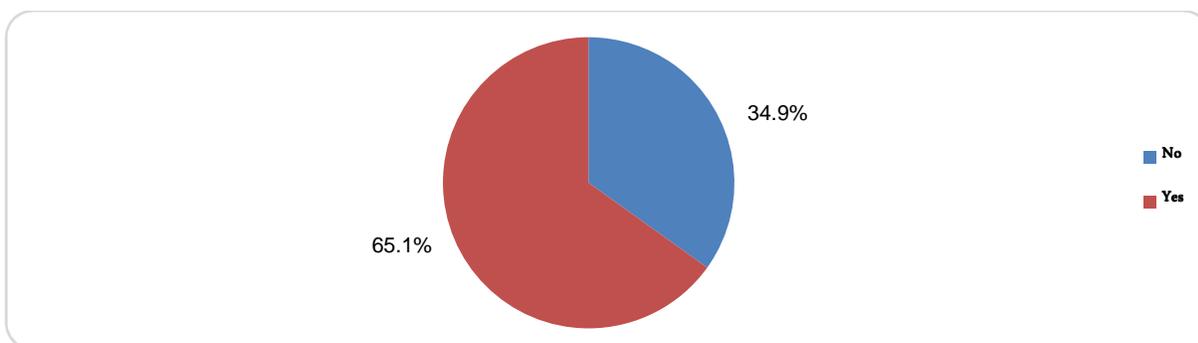
If left unaddressed the gap only widen further as the child tries to cope with the curriculum in the subsequent grades without having the strong foundation that should have been established during the previous ones.

It is also possible that the child might have never been out of school for a prolonged period and yet falls behind the pace at which the class is proceeding as he seeks/need conceptual clarity on some of the previous lessons.

In such cases, the school is expected to and needs to organize remedial classes/lessons wherein the teacher can do a case by case need analysis and structure his/her teaching in order to help each child come to level with the rest of the class. However, as noted earlier, only four of the sixteen schools visited under the study hold any such remedial lessons for their students. Further, even the four schools that do hold remedial lessons do not hold the same in a structured and scheduled manner.

The schools need to become mindful of the repercussions this can have on the children. These remedial classes become even more important when one internalizes the fact that under RTE each child is assigned to an age specific grade. The need for such remedial classes and the number of children whose vulnerability to dropout can be addressed through the same can clearly be gauged by the fact that 34.9 percent of the households covered under the study reported that their children are not able to cope with their homework as they find it to be too difficult to manage/handle.

Figure 27: Percentage of households where children are able to manage their homework



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The case of the academically weak and ever increasing vulnerability to dropping out

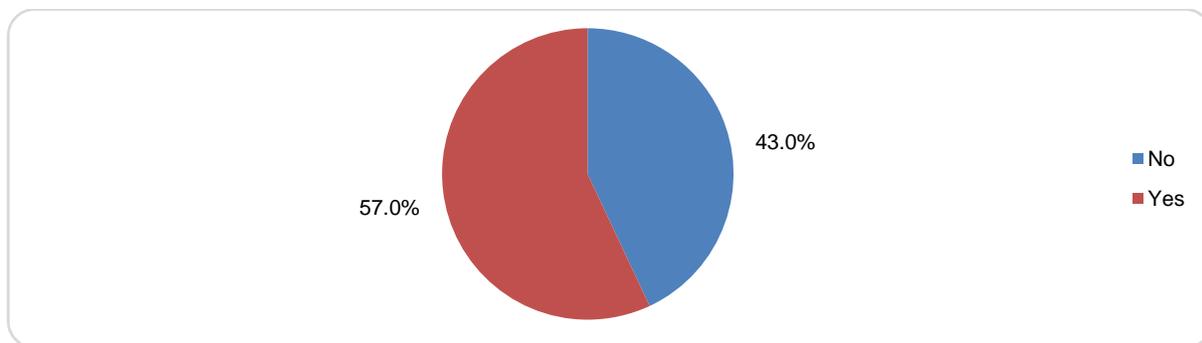
TikaramSahu (name changed) is a student of class four and finds it difficult to count till ten. His father points out that while his inability a direct manifestation of the families need to migrate annually in search of work; the child could have been at par with his peers if the school had some provisions for such academically weak students.

Tikaram informed the field team that he only goes to school to spend time with his friends and that he can hardly understand what is taught in the classroom. He said that his teachers are supportive of his questions but then he is so far behind his class that he is never out of questions.

Indifference of teachers

It is also important to understand and explore the other factors/reasons because of which the child might develop a dislike for his/her school. In cases where the child is a first generation learner, his disinterest in coming to school does not get negated by his/her parents desire to send him to one. In fact it is more likely that in such cases the parents are going to be indifferent to the benefits/value of education and simply go with the child's opinion. At 43.0 percent of the schools covered under the study the parents reported that the child did not like going to school (when he/she was still enrolled).

Figure 28: Percentage of families reporting that their children liked going to school (when enrolled)



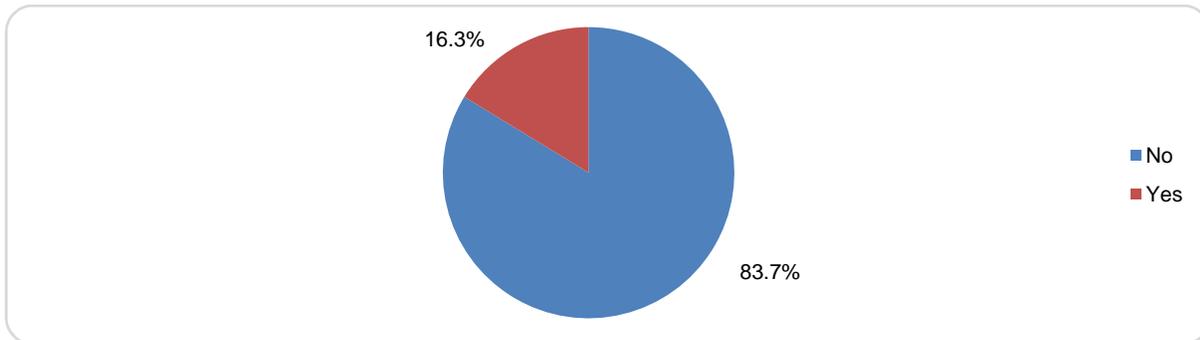
Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

A number of the schools covered under the study cater to a heterogeneous community which houses SC, ST, OBC and general category families. The head teachers at four of the sixteen schools covered under the study reported that the heterogeneous nature of the community comes with its share of disagreement and stress between the various communal groups. They reported that the community is often split on the lines of SC and OBC; with each group holding on to its own opinion during discussions thus transforming them into arguments. The teachers reported that on a number of occasions these disputes tend to creep into the classrooms and lead to the formation of groups as well as arguments amongst the students. Herein, the student's ideology, approach and actions are largely determined by his/her parents' beliefs and therefore a solution to these issues necessarily require structured interactions with the community members.

In a number of cases the head teachers also reported that the community members are not as proactive and concerned about their daughters' education as they are about their sons' education.

It seems that teachers at the schools also tend to exhibit tendencies of being biased towards particular groups from the community. At 16.3 percent of the households covered under the study reported that they have observed or been informed about discriminatory behavior at school. There is no particular community group that is at the receiving end of such discrimination and such negativity can be targeted at SC students, ST students, OBC students or girls.

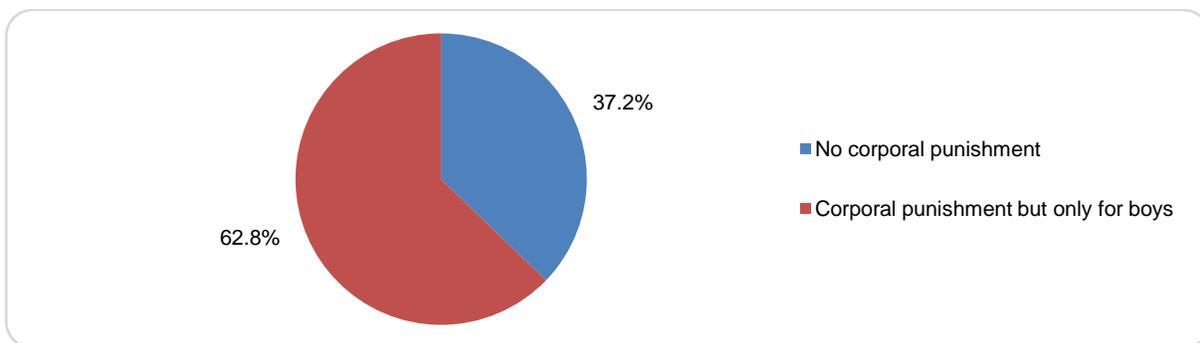
Figure 29: Percentage of families reporting instances of discriminatory incidents/behavior at schools



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The fact that teachers and their actions are somewhere also responsible for a disruptive environment at the school is also made evident by the fact that corporal punishment has still not made its way out of the classrooms in Mungeli. At 62.8 percent of the households covered under the study, the families reported that the teachers still give out corporal punishment to boys.

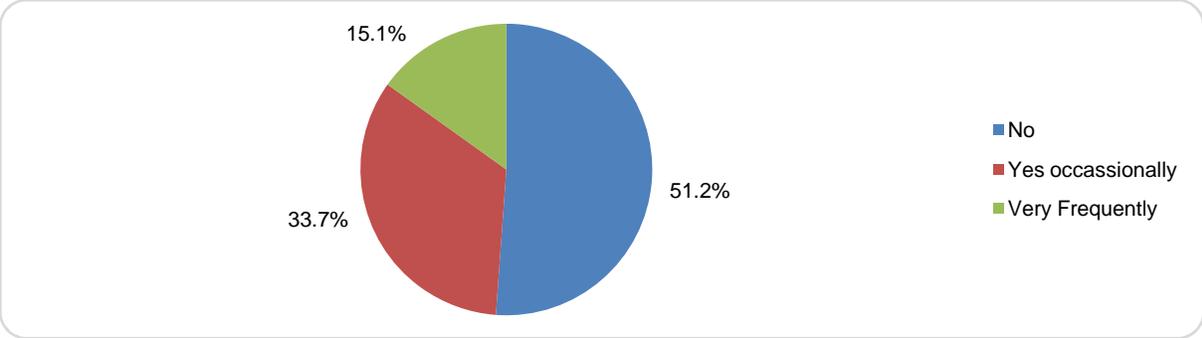
Figure 30: Percentage of families reporting that teachers still give corporal punishment



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Further, 48.8 percent of the households covered under the study reported that the teachers ask their children to run errands and help out with school upkeep and maintenance. In 15.1 percent of the cases the families reported that their child was frequently asked to perform odd chores at the school such as assisting the MDM vendor, sweeping the courtyards/classrooms or even run personal errands for the teachers. They said that they did not respect such behavior and if the child is going to go to school to perform odd jobs then he might as well do so at home; thereby providing an extra hand towards managing the household or for providing for the same.

Figure 31: Percentage of families reporting that their child is asked to take care of chores at school



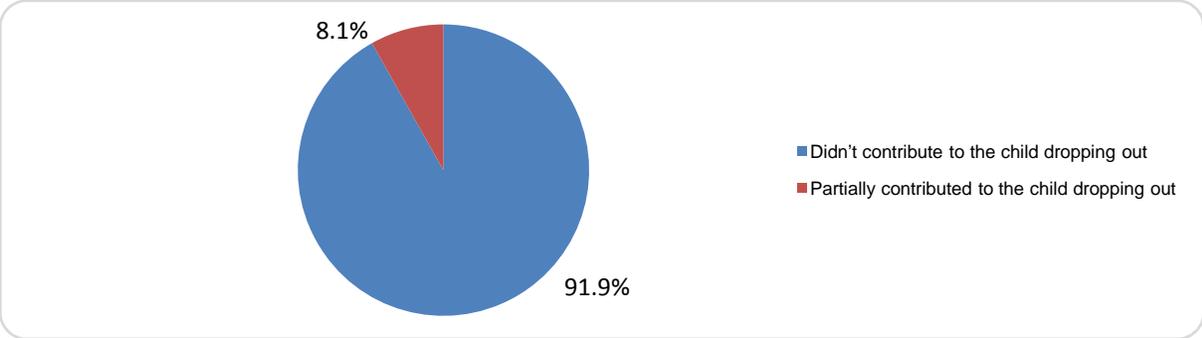
Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

A number of primary schools covered under the study operate adjacent to or on the same premises as an upper primary school. Herein, during the FGDs the students reported that the students from upper primary schools had a habit of picking on them and would often ask them to run personal errands. They said that there have been instances where a dispute amongst classmates at the primary school attracted the attention of their elder siblings and as a result turned an ugly/violent side. The children reported that while the teachers were usually quick to respond in such situations they would turn a blind eye to repeated incidence thereby leaving it to the children to settle the dispute amongst them.

Infrastructural inadequacy as a metric of quality of education

8.1 percent of the households covered under the study reported that infrastructure inadequacy is one of the contributing factors that led to their child dropping out of school.

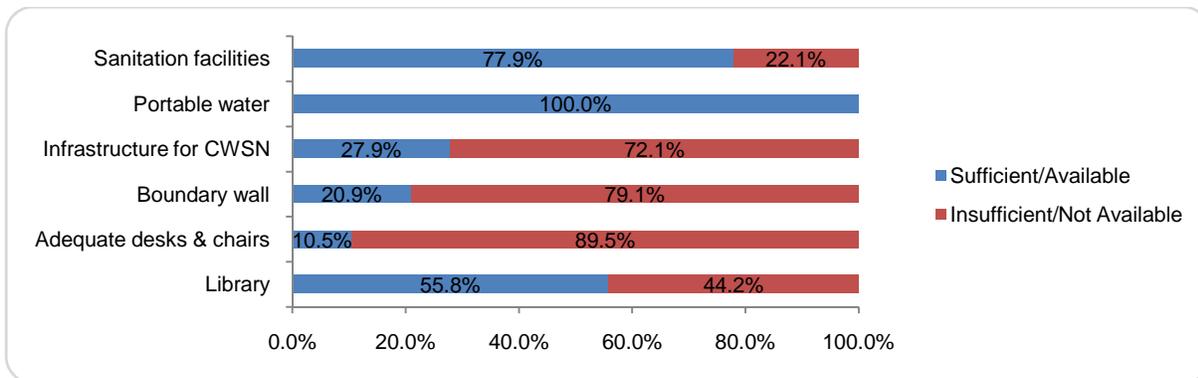
Figure 32: Inadequate Infrastructure as a factor contributing to student dropout



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

Deeper analyses of these infrastructural inadequacies reveals that parent have observed that the schools have insufficient sanitation facilities, boundary walls, library infrastructure and infrastructure for CWSN. The families that responded that the reason why their child had dropped out of school was poor quality of education at these schools and one of the factors that led them to believe the same was inadequate school infrastructure are households that fall in the higher income brackets. These are families that if given the choice, would have sent their children to a private school but could not because of the unavailability of such schools in their neighborhood.

Figure 33: Infrastructure inadequacy as reported by families of children who have dropped out of school



Source: Household questionnaire administered to parents of the children who have dropped out of school

The case of children with special needs

The case of the CWSN is unique in the sense that the reasons for their dropout are directly linked to the school. Household factors do not usually come into play as these children are usually not in a position to act as additional hands that can help out with domestic chores or add to the family income.

The three physically disabled children covered under the study reported that they did not face any issues in understanding the classroom based teaching-learning transactions and that their classmates and their teachers were largely supportive of their education and their presence in the classrooms. However, they reported that they often find it difficult to commute to school without external support and are unable to attend classes on days when their family members are unable to drop them to school. They said that they also find it difficult to manage their way around school because the school does not have the infrastructure for the same. The head teachers responsible for these children's education reported that their school lacks the teaching aids that they require to work with these students (hearing and visually impaired). The families of these children are also unaware of the benefits of education vis-à-vis disabled students and believe that these children will remain dependents throughout their life and will not have their own source of income and employment.

The study also covered three children with non-physical disabilities and interactions with their families and teachers revealed that the school environment is not in a position to support their education. The head teacher's reported that they have not received sufficient training to work with such disabilities and also do not have the relevant teaching-learning aids (such as braille or audio books) that they could use while working with them. Further, the families of these children reported that they do not like going to school as their classmates tend to make fun of them and their teachers largely neglect them while teaching their classes.

A life without access to education

Fruity is a student at the Primary School, Gharaghat. She is a child with severe/multiple disability and cannot commute to school without her parent's assistance. Even when in school, she sits passively at the back of the class unable to assimilate and understand anything. The head teacher at the school pointed out that the school infrastructure is not prepared to handle such children and that he does not have the required training and learning aids to teach such children.

Fruity's parents seconded the head teacher's opinion and said that the school staff has often asked them to pull her out of school and as a result they feel that it is best that she stays at home with her family.

3. Conclusions

Every dropout represents a significant opportunity cost for the state in terms of both a monetary and non-monetary loss. Herein, the monetary loss refers to the books, uniform, and infrastructural investments that were made towards enrolling and educating the child till the point where he dropped out. The monetary loss also refers to the potential gain in future income that the child could have gained through his/her progression to higher grades of learning/education.

On the other hand the non-monetary loss refers to the loss of the time & efforts that the teaching staff had so far invested towards educating the child. It also refers to the fact that the Nation stands to lose upon the possibility of this child becoming highly productive human capital capable of contributing towards building the state and society.

Therefore, every dropout is a cause of concern simply because the state has been able to enroll the child but not been able to capitalize upon this opportunity and groom & gear him/her towards a better future.

Low value attached to formal education

A number of families do not have in mind any specific objective or outcome when they enrolled their children at school. These children are the most vulnerable to dropping out of school. Further, a number of families only view education as a medium of gaining basic literacy & numeracy. Children from these families become vulnerable to dropping out post completing their primary schooling. These children are also susceptible to dropping out if their family lands up prioritizing other personal, occupational, economic objectives over the need for their children to attain basic literacy & numeracy.

Economic compulsions as a cause of dropout

Being a primarily agrarian market, the income and livelihood of the workforce in Mungeli is highly correlated with the agricultural cycle. The time period between the sowing and harvesting season is marked by a drop in the demand for labor. As a result many families find themselves surviving around the basic subsistence level. In order to maintain their monthly expenditure, these families usually tend to migrate to cities in search of work opportunities.

Given that subsistence is a goal or objective above any other, parents have no option but to withdraw their children from school. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that most of the families still believe that they would need a transfer certificate if their child was to migrate to a school near the site to which the family is migrating; and that the process will have to be repeated at the time when they return home. At a subliminal level, the responses provided by the parents also hinted towards a general apathy towards the need for continued education as most of the families said that seeking a transfer certificate was an unnecessary hassle as they were only migrating for a short time frame.

Domestic chores as a cause of dropout

The fact that the field visits coincided with the harvest season provided a realistic insight into how parents prioritize short terms economic gains over the long terms gains that their child can derive out of access to continued education. A number of children were absent from classes as they were busy helping their parents with the harvest. While the boys were working in the fields, the girls were helping with domestic chores. Here as well, it was clear that the families were prioritizing the more obvious economic gains and had a very limited understanding of how education could help their children in attaining more purposeful and secure employment.

Teacher's attitude towards education

At almost all the schools visited, the field teams observed that about half the teachers were absent and that a number of classes were going unsupervised. Parents of children who had dropped out of school were also equivocal in their analysis of the situation. They still continue to believe that access to quality education can help the children in gaining access to better employment opportunities in the future; however it was also clear that they drew a strong link between teacher absenteeism, absence of quality and education not being relevant to the child's future. The children whose parents had such a perception were found to be most vulnerable to dropping out as their parents attach a very low opportunity cost to them dropping out of school.

Lack of remedial teaching and its impact on children

There is no formal structure/model under which schools are holding remedial sessions for the academically weak. Most of the schools are not holding any such classes and the few which are; do not have a fixed schedule for the same. A number of children are visibly in need of such classes as they have remained out of school for prolonged periods (due to various reasons). Such children start lagging behind the class and if they aren't able to catch up; start developing a general disinterest towards academics.

Disruptive environment at schools and its impact on children

Issues such as bullying, caste based & gender based discrimination, corporal punishment etc. are all reasons that can push the victim to dropout of school. These problems not only exist at the schools in Mungeli but are often invisible to the teachers and in other cases to the system as a whole. Prolonged exposure to any of these factors not only leads to the child dropping out of schools but can also have an adverse negative effect on his/her personality.

The specific case of CWSN

Dropouts amongst the CWSN category pose a completely different set of problems that the system needs to address. The schools in the district are visibly under prepared to provide education to such children. Many of the schools report not having the infrastructure and teaching aids required to teach these children and many others report that teachers do not have the training required to work with them. While the parents of these children have no interest in pulling them out of school, the lack of access to quality education forces them to do so. This is because the lack of a system capable of teaching these children leads to these children developing a strong disliking for their schools.

The need for relevant and dynamic reforms

It is clear that a number of reasons for dropout are interlinked and therefore pose a complex set of problems and questions that the system must expediently address/answer. There is a need to improve upon the parent's understanding of the value of and need for education. The system also needs to reach out to the parents in order to improve upon their understanding of RTE and its implications on their child's present and future.

The Government must also seek to improve upon the system itself by improving upon the monitoring and support mechanisms. Here in the Government should try to develop monitoring systems that work outside the purview of human judgment, compassion or opinions and record the true picture of the quality of education at all the schools in the district.

The presence of such systems and a better understanding of the benefits of education can help in attacking the intrinsic reasons that lead to a child dropping out of school and help in decreasing children's vulnerability to dropping out of school.

4. Recommendations

An understanding of the profile of the children who dropout of government schools in Mungeli and an analysis of the reasons for dropout clearly highlights a number of areas and gaps that the government can address through simple and spontaneous measures. It is clear that these measures need to be developed at two distinct levels. Firstly, the government needs to address the fact that a number of households attach a low value to educational and its expected outcomes. Subsequently, the government also needs to explore reason specific innovations/measures thereby ensuring that the school environment does not provide any reasons to the family to pull their child out of school. Basis the interactions held during the study and the data/information collected and collated from the same, following are some measures that the government can explore in order to curb dropouts from its schools in Mungeli:

Improving upon quality of education at government schools through improved monitoring & evaluation

Analysis of the information and feedback provided by parents of children who have dropped out reveals that ensuring that children and their parents understand the value of education is not sufficient in convincing parents to keep their children enrolled at school. This is because the parents will still tend to pull their children out of school if they perceive the quality of education being imparted at schools to be of inferior quality.

The government is well aware of the need to maintain a certain quality of education across all the schools in the district. While the required resources are in place there exist a number of gaps between the processes established to monitor the quality of education at the schools and the actual effort being invested towards following these processes. In order to ensure, that the processes established to monitor the quality of education are being followed, the government may want to leverage on tamper proof time encrypted technology tools that can provide a real review of the quality of education at all the government schools in the district. The government may want to consider using time, date and location encrypted mobile photography devices to record delivery against all monitoring processes. These records could then be sample checked against physical data collected to identify schools and individuals who are not necessarily following the set guidelines. This technology could help in recording proof of

- Teacher attendance,
- Student attendance,
- BRC, CRC & academic inspections,
- Midday meal composition and distribution,
- Parent teacher meetings
- School management committee meetings
- Visits to homes of students of dropped out of the schooling system etc.

Leveraging upon the community's support to curb dropout rates

A large percentage of schools do not have active/functional SMCs. The government may want to expedite the process of creating a structure/process under which SMCs should be constituted and step up relevant monitoring mechanisms to ensure that these SMCs are operational.

The government also needs to look at stepping up its efforts of building the capacity of the SMC members on their roles and responsibilities and more importantly on educating them on the guidelines and implications of the RTE.

The government may also want to examine the SMC configuration as defined by other states in the country and examine the utility of each of the configuration in order to decide whether the influx of SMC members who are retired teachers, members of local NGO, mason etc. can add additional value to the functioning of the SMCs.

Providing children of migrant families with continued access to education

Migrant families still believe that they would need to seek a transfer certificate for migrating their child to a school nearer to the site to which they are migrating and that they would need to repeat this process at the time when they decide to return home. In order to tackle this information asymmetry, the government must work towards running awareness campaigns that would provide greater clarity on Right to Education and in specific on how migrating to another school no longer requires a transfer certificate.

Further, the aforementioned information/awareness campaign can be supported by a suitable MIS system which would enable schools to register a family's intent to migrate to a particular place/city/site. This information could then be relayed to a BRC/CRC office close to that site. This would help in ensuring that the educational machinery at the migration site is aware and ready to receive the student once the family migrates and is able to search out for the child and his family in cases where the family doesn't come forth to enroll the child.

Developing an integrated approach to cater to the needs of the children in the community

A number of children (especially girls) tend to dropout to take care of their younger siblings. Given that some of the schools visited reported that they have found some success in getting these children back to school by allowing them to get their younger siblings to school; the government may want to integrate the schools and the aanganwadi centers on to a single campus. The advent of such integration will enable these children to come to school with their younger siblings. While the child will continue to study in the classroom, the younger siblings could continue to be in the care of the aanganwadi workers. Between classes, the child could check on his/her younger siblings and could pick them up from the center when he/she is ready to return home post school hours.

In case physical integration is found to be impractical; the government may want to explore the option of integrating knowledge. Herein, when a teacher discovers that a child is not coming to school because he/she has to take care of his/her siblings; he/she can pass on the information to the local aanganwadi center. The aanganwadi center can then act on this information and visit the child's home in order to encourage the parents to send the child's younger siblings to the center.

Helping the academically weak

There is a need to provide a clear directive to schools mandating them to hold remedial classes for the academically weak. In case the government feels that the current strength of teaching staff will not be able to successfully manage this task (given their existing work load), additional models could be explored/developed. One such model could be to engage retired teachers for remedial classes. These retired teachers could be paid an honorarium for their services. Subsequently systems could be developed to monitor their work/efforts.

Aligning the academic calendar to the agriculture cycle

As mentioned earlier, student absenteeism is at a peak during the sowing and harvesting season. This is primarily because parents tend to pull their children out of school as they are required to help out with the cultivation/harvesting in the field or because they have to manage domestic chores while their mother is busy in the field. The government can explore the option of aligning the school calendar to the agriculture cycle. In this direction, the academic calendar should tend to have holidays during the peak season (sowing/harvesting).

The specific case of CWSN

The government has already put aside a portion of funds for developing a more enabling environment for CWSN. The first and foremost need utilization of these funds should be towards providing schools with the necessary teaching-learning aids. This needs to be followed up with adequate training that will enable teachers to use these learning aids to work with CWSN. The government might want to explore a demand related approach where in resources could be utilized to first provide necessary support to school where CWSN are already enrolled. Subsequently, the government could expand its support to the other schools so as to ensure that they are ready and able once a CWSN gets enrolled.

Annexure:Tools

School Dropout Study Chhattisgarh Interview for Head Teachers/ Teachers

Section I: School Related

School name:		In operation since:			
Village:		Grades			
Cluster:		No. of Teachers			
Block:		<i>Male</i>			
District:		<i>Females</i>			
Availability of Drinking water (Y/N):	No. of Students				
Separate Toilets (Y/N):	<i>Boys:</i>				
Water in Toilets (Y/N):	<i>Girls:</i>				
No. of Dropouts	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09
Is infrastructure present for CWSN? (<i>Details</i>)					

Section II: Drop -out Profile

1. When do you consider a student as dropped out?
2. What activities/processes do you generally undertake before considering a student as drop out?
3. At which grade is a student most likely to drop out?
4. Which social groups are most prone to dropping out and why? Is there a difference in dropout rates of girls and boys?
5. Where do the most drop outs happen – rural or urban areas and why do you think it happens?
6. What according to you are the main reasons for children from neighboring areas to drop out?

Section III: School Infrastructure and Teachers

7. Is there any important infrastructure component that is missing/ lacking at your school and do you believe that this might be leading to or adding to the problem of drop-outs?
8. Do you believe that your school has the capacity to cater to and support CWSN (physical disability, speech disorders, intellectually challenged)? Please share a few examples.
9. Does the school have a structured process to help/support students who are lagging behind in studies?

10. Are there any notable processes and systems that the school has developed or uses to ensure that the staff is able to cater to the needs and educational requirements of all students? Please share a few examples.
11. How do you ensure that the staff or any students do not discriminate against a particular child/student?
12. Has the school received any complaints related to a teacher(s) meting out corporal punishment?
13. Apart from mainstream teaching, do the teachers at the school have any additional responsibilities? Do these additional responsibilities come in the way of regular classes/mainstream teaching?

Section IV: Managing Drop-outs

14. What systems and processes do you have in place to prevent/curb drop outs?
15. When a student drops out, does any teacher from the school visit his/her home to find out why the child has dropped out and what can the school do to get the child back at school?
16. Do you maintain any records/registers for students who are absent for more than 15 days?
17. Are there any policies, programs or projects to tackle problem of drop out? What kind of strategies could be initiated to prevent drop-outs?
18. Is the school management committee operational and what is the community's involvement in managing drop-outs?
19. How is the data on drop outs collected and managed?
20. Have any drop –outs returned to the school in the past few years? Provide details.
21. What other challenges do you face in preventing drop out in your school? What support would you require form the Government in curbing drop out?

**School Drop-out Study
Household Questionnaire**

SECTION I: HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION

Name of household (HH) head _____	Name of student: _____
Phone number: _____	School _____
	Distance from home (Km) _____
District: _____	Block: _____
Cluster: _____	Rural/Urban: _____
Economic Status : APL/ BPL _____	Number of children: _____
Number of family members: _____	Siblings older than the subject: _____
Number of boys: _____	Number of Girls: _____
Is child raised by a single parent _____	Does child stay in a nuclear family _____
Education status (Choose from list given below) :	Occupational status (Choose from list given below) :
Mother: _____	Mother: _____
Father: _____	Father: _____

1. *Illiterate*
2. *Primary incomplete*
3. *Primary completed*
4. *Upper primary incomplete*
5. *Upper primary completed*
6. *Secondary school incomplete*
7. *Secondary school completed*
8. *Senior secondary school incomplete*
9. *Senior secondary school completed*
10. *Graduation incomplete*
11. *Graduate and above*
12. *Vocational Qualification*

1. *Unemployed (only if looking for work)*
2. *Stay-at-home*
3. *Salaried worker (Government or Private job)*
4. *Daily wage earner*
5. *NREGA worker*
6. *Other please specify: _____*

Approximate monthly income: INR _____

Which month has the least income? _____

Does the household have any of the following social/financial protection system to cope with income shocks?

1. Savings with formal banking institutions
2. Savings with informal sources
3. Any saleable property or land
4. Any investments held in the form of precious stones and metals
5. In a position to receive interest free financial support from friends & relatives
6. Other please specify: _____

7. No such safety net exists

SC/ST/OBC/General Category Categorization (To be filled in by enumerator and not to be asked from the respondent): _____

Why did the child stop attending school? Write down the reason for drop-out (verbatim as told by the parent)

SECTION II: Child Information Sheet (kindly pen in information of only those children who fall in the age group of 6 – 13)

S No.	Name	Age (Years)	Gender (F/M)	Is the child a CWSN (Y/N)	Age at which the child enrolled (Years or NA)	Class in which the child had enrolled (Grade or NA)	Was child a scholarship holder? How was the scholarship utilized?	Age at which the child dropped out (Years or NA)	Class from which the child dropped out (Grade or NA)	Reasons for Dropout (Choose from list given below)	What is child doing currently?
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
7											
8											

Reasons for drop out: 1 if distance related, 2 if cost related, 3 if child related, 4 if school related, 5 if related to domestic matters, 6 if related to social causes (e.g. child marriage and migration) and 7 if psychosocial factors (*Please specify nature of activity if choosing 6 or 7*) (*Please note multiple options permitted per child*). *In case where child dropped out to take admission to a 'private school' please mention the same*

If the child is enrolled in a private school and still studying, this is not a drop-out case, however, we would like to study what factors led to his/her changing the schools.

SECTION III: Socio-Economic Factors [including attributing psychosocial factors]

1. Why did you start sending your child to school?

2. How did the child used to go to school?

a. On his own – walking / cycle

- b. With friends
- c. Any other paid transport
- d. Parent (s) used to drop and pick child

3. If answer is (c or d) above, did it impact family's income negatively? (Check by how much)
- a. No impact
 - b. Very small impact – easily bearable
 - c. Moderate impact
 - d. High impact

4. How did you support your child's education as a parent?
- a. Ensuring that child attends school
 - b. Dropping him/her to school and picking up
 - c. Aware of child's performance in school
 - d. Ensuring that homework is completed
 - e. Others (please specify) _____
 - f. No such support/supervision

5. Did you think that the child was able to perform as per your expectations?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If no, please elaborate

6. Did you have to migrate seasonally for work?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
- If yes, did it impact the child's education

7. Did the child have to stay at home to take care of younger siblings and/or to do household chores?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, for how many days in a month/week _____

8. Did you have to spend any money on child's education in form of text books, notebooks, uniform, transport or tuition?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, then how much money did you have to spend? _____

9. Would you say that this cost had any role in child's dropping out of school?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

10. If this cost would not have been present, would the child still have dropped out?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, then due to what reasons _____

11. Is the child currently working to support or supplement household income?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, please specify, the nature of work and how much does he/she earn monthly

12. Would you say that the child was interested in schooling?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Please elaborate on the answer with examples _____

13. Were the child's classmates of the same age as child?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If no, tick the one that apply: Younger / Older

14. Were the child's classmates interested in studies?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If no, please specify

15. Were the child's classmates more interested in games or other activities than studies?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, please specify

16. Did you ever observe any discrimination in the school between students or did your child complain about any such discrimination? (Give example of discrimination - some children preferred over others by teachers)

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, please specify

Additional questions if drop-out is a girl child

1. Do you think a girl child should study and till what standard?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please elaborate

2. Did any of your child ever go to a private school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, please check if it was a boy or a girl _____

Additional questions if drop-out is a CWSN

1. Did you have to spend additional time and/or money to take your child to school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. If yes, please elaborate, how it impacted your work and budget

3. Did the school have infrastructure to support your child needs?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If no, please specify what was the school lacking

4. Were the teachers supportive of your child's needs?

- a. Yes

- b. No

Please specify

5. Were the other students helpful?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please specify

Section IV: School Related Factors [including attributing psychosocial factors]

1. Were there enough classrooms and seats for everyone to sit? (Was lack of school infrastructure a cause for drop out?)

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. What was not present in your school?

- a. Toilet facility
- b. Drinking water facility
- c. Specific infrastructure for CWSN
- d. Boundary walls
- e. Classrooms & furniture
- f. Other please specify: _____

3. Do you know if this school has any ramps or other infrastructure for physically challenged (CWSN)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, details

4. Were the school timings unsuitable? (Probe for very early in morning/ very late in afternoon)

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, then please specify why the timings were unsuitable: _____

5. How many games or extracurricular periods did you have in a day /week?

6. Were classes held regularly/every day in school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If no, then was it because of any one or more of the reasons listed below

- a. Teacher/s did not come on a regular basis
- b. Teacher/s were busy doing other work
- c. School premises was used for other purposes
- d. Other please specify _____

7. Was the child able to complete homework himself/herself?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If no, then probe about amount of homework received daily

- a. Was it too much homework
- b. Was it too difficult
- c. Anything else about homework _____

8. Do you think the teachers encouraged and supported the student in school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please give any instances

9. Was the child appreciated for something good that he did in school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If no, please specify

10. Did you know if teachers used any activities other than text books to teach in school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, details _____

11. Was the child frequently punished in school and was fearful of being beaten up or reprimanded in school?

12. Were any derogatory or caste related remarks made by teachers?

13. Did the child complain about being **regularly** asked to carry out tasks other than studying in school? *Probe* about child being made to do some personal work for teachers.

- a. Never
- b. Sometimes - How many times a week? _____
- c. Frequently - How many times a week? _____

For answer b or c above, also check if the child was singled out for such work or was it given to every student with same frequency.

14. Do you think your child was usually very nervous during examination?

15. Were the tests or exams too difficult?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Was the child taught in local dialect in school?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. Did the school organise Parent Teacher Meeting on a regular basis and

- a. Yes
- b. No

18. Did you attend the same?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, then anything about irregular attendance or drop outs ever discussed in it? Please provide details

19. When your child stopped going to school, did anyone from school contact you?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, what sort of contact was it (enumerator to understand the process post drop out)

- a. Telephonic
- b. Household visit
- c. Other please specify _____

Additional questions if drop-out is a girl child

1. Was there a separate toilet for girls in the school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. If answer to Q.1 above is no – would you have continued sending your child to school if there was a separate toilet for girls?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Did this school have female teachers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Was your child taught by a lady teacher?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. If answer to Q.3 above is no, would your child have continued to study if she was being taught by a lady teacher?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Were there any incidents of quarrel or violence against your child or any other girl children in the school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, details _____

7. Were you afraid of sending your child to school because of that?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Section V: Community Related and Other Factors

1. Generally till what grade do the girls study in your community/village? _____

2. At what age are the girls married? _____

3. Do you know of any other students who have dropped out in your village? Please provide details and reasons _____

Would you attribute instances of domestic quarrel or alcoholism to any drop outs that you know?

FGD Checklist – Students

Please use games (ice-breakers) provided in separate sheet before starting the FGD with students.

SECTION I: General and School Related

1. Are the school timings convenient?
2. Do you like your school's building?
 - a. Probe for any infrastructure that is lacking and which creates problem
 - b. Check with girls about the girls' toilet
 - c. Availability of playground, boundary wall and chairs/tables in school
3. What are three best things about your school? (Probe on what makes them come to school daily)
4. What are the things that you do not like about your school

SECTION II: Teacher Related

5. Do you understand the teacher's dialect easily? (Ask this from a number of students separately and do not go by voice vote). Check for any language related problem that they might face. Ask what kind of specific problems do they face, if any
6. What kind of activities do the teachers use for teaching? (Probe if the teachers only use text books or other things like TLM, teaching aids and conduct activities to make teaching more interesting, probe if it is interesting for child)
7. What do you like the most about your teachers?
8. What are two things that you would like to change about your teachers?

SECTION III: Drop-Out Related

9. Are there any students who have stopped coming to school recently? Who are they? (Make a list of drop outs and reasons)
10. Why did these students stop coming to school?

SECTION IV: Observation for Gender Discrimination or CWSN discrimination

11. Investigators are to look out for any signs of gender discrimination in group and school; observe for following:
 - a. Very few girls
 - b. Girls not allowed to answer at all
 - c. Girls not mixing up
 - d. You can also probe about students' sisters and where they study
12. Investigators to look for any signs of discrimination against CWSN in school. Try talking to a CWSN to understand the challenges (to be done separately).

Questionnaire for School Management Committee (SMC)

1. Since when are you a member of this SMC? What is the role of this SMC?
2. Do you know of a student who has dropped-out from school? Why did he/she drop out?
3. Can you provide details of a few students who have dropped out recently?

4. Why do you think the students drop out from schools? What do they do once they drop out?
5. If a student is absenting for a number of days, is there anything that the teachers/SMC do?
6. How does the SMC get to know about a drop out?
7. Is there a role of SMC in preventing drop out?
8. What do you think can be done to prevent drop outs?

**School Dropout Study Chhattisgarh
Questionnaire for State officials**

1. Who does the state define as a drop out?
2. Is the same definition used in practice as well? What are the reasons for deviation, if any?
3. Do dropout rates vary as per community, gender and geography? If yes then why?
4. What communities and what geographic areas are more susceptible to the problem? What are the reasons for it?
5. What according to you are some of the common reasons for children dropping out from school in the districts to be covered under the proposed study and do you feel that there are any particular reasons why the dropout rate in these districts may be higher or lower than the state average?
6. Are there any specific policies, programs or projects that have been initiated to curb dropout rates. If yes then please provide details/literature on the same?
7. Does the state actively track data on school dropout? Please share the data flow and how long after a student has dropped out will it come to the notice of state level offices.
8. For what time period are the drop-out records available?
9. If the state does record information on dropouts, then what is the methodology for computation and has the methodology been held consistent over time?
10. Does the education machinery track dropout rates at the school, block, circle, district and state level. If yes, then does this tracking result in any case/ geography specific action?
11. Are there any specific training programs or workshop modules held for teacher (or at least head teachers) that sensitise them on the issue of school dropout, reasons behind student dropout and ways to check high student dropout in schools. If yes then please provide details/literature on these programs/modules?
12. What role do CRCs/BRCs play in tracking, reporting and curtailing school dropouts in the schools under their purview/supervision?
13. What role do head teachers play in tracking, reporting and curtailing school dropouts at their schools?
14. Even while curbing drop out is high on Government's agenda, the problem continues to persist, what are some challenges that Government face in curtailing the problem?

Questionnaire for DEO/BEO officials

1. Can you tell about a few schools and headmasters who have been managing drop-outs really well? Please give example and elaborate on what they are doing.
2. When is a student considered as a drop out from school?

3. What according to you are some important reasons for which children drop out?
4. What groups are most susceptible to dropping out and why?
5. What is the role of DEO/BEO in preventing drop-outs?
6. How do you connect with BRC/CRC, headmasters to take care of drop -out issue?
7. What steps have been taken so far to prevent drop outs?
8. Are the teachers trained on preventing drop-outs? What kind of training is imparted?
9. How is the data collected and/or maintained by the DEO/BEO?
10. What is the process of validating this data?
11. How and with whom is the data on drop-outs shared?
12. Do we have school-wise data for drop-outs?
13. What is the main highlight of this data and what light does it throw on drop out reasons?