

THE SOONER THE BETTER

EVERY MORNING, SONI'S MOTHER PREPARES WATER TO BATHE HER DAUGHTER BEFORE SHE TAKES HER TO SCHOOL. SHE IS CLEARLY PROUD OF THE FOUR-YEAR-OLD. LIKE MANY OTHER DALITS, SONI'S FAMILY CAN'T TAKE EDUCATION FOR GRANTED. SONI IS THE FIRST IN HER FAMILY TO LEARN TO READ AND WRITE.

In India, the members of the lowest caste are marginalised and excluded, particularly in the countryside and in poor urban areas. This is the case in Mirzapur, in the south east of the state of Uttar Pradesh, where Soni and her family live. Child labour and the lack of educational establishments make school enrolment difficult. Classes are too full, with up to 90 children learning together in one classroom. There is a lack of sanitary facilities, and corporal punishment is common practice. The learning environment requires pupils to have a lot of strength and resilience, things that children from disadvantaged backgrounds lack. One in four children leaves primary school early.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FOR A GOOD START TO SCHOOL

International studies show that early childhood development has a lasting positive effect on educational achievement – particularly for children who have a difficult start because of poverty, discrimination or illness. It is between the ages of three and six that children develop the skills that are necessary through life. Movement and stimulation promote brain development in young children. Neglect, stress and malnutrition lead to developmental delays, which are difficult to compensate for later in life. Early childhood development lays the foundations for later success at school, and contributes to breaking the vicious circle of poverty and disadvantage.

The Indian government has recognised the potential of early childhood development. Since 2005, it has been building early childhood development centres, which also offer government services such as health

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BABBU'S TEACHER AT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE



SNAPPY THE CROCODILE

All the children sit in a circle with their feet under a big blanket. One child, the “crocodile”, hides under the blanket and “bites” the other children’s feet one after another. When a child is “bitten”, they must move their feet away. With this game, the children learn to listen and follow instructions, as well as improve their reactivity.



checks, vaccinations and nutritional advice. Although the number of children attending the programme tripled between 1999 and 2010, disadvantaged children are still significantly underrepresented in the centres. The children who would potentially benefit the most from early childhood development are excluded. The government does not have the tools to address this.

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT AND PLAY

In a joint project with the local Centre for Rural Education and Development Action (CREDA), SAD has set up 50 early childhood development centres in disadvantaged municipalities that do not have any government facilities. SAD is thereby filling a gap and preparing children for starting regular school. We are using our proven sport and play-based approach. Through playful lessons, children from families with no educational background develop curiosity and the motivation to learn. The aim is to promote children's holistic development and to support their cognitive, physical, emotional and social development. Through playful lessons, children get a feel for quantities and sizes with ease, and increase their vocabulary. Through movement and dexterity games, they improve their body awareness and balance. They also develop emotionally. The protected environment gives them the opportunity to win and to lose, to express frustration, to learn to deal with it and to express their emotions. By playing with other children they also develop their social skills. They learn to share, to work together, to resolve conflicts and to confidently stand up for their opinions.

BABBU

Babbu has been going to one of the 50 early childhood development centres for a couple of months. The 5-year-old is slightly disabled, and has often been teased about it by other children in the past. His teacher said: "Babbu has really suffered. When he started school here, he was very insecure and didn't want to play with the other children. But with the games and the songs that we sing together, he has become more self-confident and opened up." Now, Babbu has made lots of

new friends at the centre. His parents are pleased: "We are very happy that Babbu has developed thanks to the lessons," said his father. "The project has changed his life for the better."

The first results show that the quality of the classes has continually improved since the project began. So far, over 2,000 children have attended the early childhood development centres. Of them, 125 have already moved on to primary school. At 1 percent, the school dropout rate is very low. According to a United Nations study, an average of 12 percent of children in Uttar Pradesh drop out of primary school.

2,028

Children

1,131

First generation learners

125

Transitions into primary school

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH COOPERATION WITH THE AUTHORITIES

Sustainability starts with project planning. In Mirzapur, SAD has sought to cooperate with authorities, municipalities and government agencies from the beginning. The 50 centres should neither undermine the authority of the government in early childhood development, nor absolve them of their responsibility. SAD and CREDA do not want to develop a parallel system with this joint project, but rather to complete state-run services and to



MIME

Without saying a word, the teacher mimes an activity that is essential for hygiene, for example, pretending to wash the face or clean the teeth. The children copy the teacher and try to guess the activity. That way, they learn to concentrate and acquire basic knowledge of daily hygiene.



establish sport and play based education as part of the curriculum. The integration of the centres in the existing system is also the stated aim. To achieve this, teaching materials and plans are adapted to the government's education priorities. Existing government programmes, for example, health services, are offered directly in the early childhood development centres.

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AND MUNICIPALITIES

By informing parents and members of the municipality about early childhood development, and raising their awareness of its importance, SAD is aiming to promote ownership and responsibility within the municipalities. Self-government committees are taking on various tasks, such as quality assurance through regular lesson visits, and coordination of various tasks. A large proportion of the sport and play materials are made by the teachers themselves. On courses, they learn to make balls, hand puppets, cloth animals, building bricks and puzzles out of locally available materials. When Soni and Babbu start primary school, more children will be able to access school and education through sport and play.



PROJECT

Move & Improve – Sport and play based early childhood development for disadvantaged children in India

DURATION

2015 – 2018

PARTNERS

Centre for Rural Education and Development Action (CREDA); Canton of Basel-Stadt, Canton of Bern, Canton of Obwalden, U.W. Linsi-Stiftung