

## VILLAGE REPORT CARDS FOR SCHOOLING & LEARNING

Enrollment in elementary school is well over 90% in most states in India. The real challenges that lie ahead include ensuring regular attendance in school, effective school functioning and strengthening of children's learning.

Before starting any kind of work in a village, it is important to understand the situation with schooling and learning. Are children enrolled in school? Do they go to school regularly? Can they read basic text? Can they do simple arithmetic operations? What do parents and others think about schooling and learning? This note describes the activity of creating a village report card for schooling and learning.<sup>1</sup>

### MAKING A MAP:

The first step: Walk around the village, talk to local people and begin to create a map with their help. In particular, if the village is divided into hamlets, it is helpful to know the number of hamlets and the socio-economic composition of the households in each hamlet.<sup>2</sup>

### HAMLET LEVEL DISCUSSIONS AND TESTING:

पढ़ने का टेस्ट

<p>कहानी</p> <p>मैं और मेरी बहन छत पर खेल रहे थे। अचानक आसमान में बादल गरजने लगे, बिजली कड़कने लगी। बड़ी-बड़ी बूँदें पड़ने लगीं। हम जल्दी से भागकर नीचे आ गए। तभी भैया गरम-गरम समोसे और पकौड़े ले आया। हमने खिड़की के पास बैठकर समोसे-पकौड़े खाये और बारिश का मजा लिया।</p>	<p>अनुच्छेद</p> <p>सोनू बाग में खेल रहा था। वहाँ आम के बहुत पेड़ थे। सोनू ने एक आम तोड़ा। आम बहुत मीठा था।</p>
<p>अक्षर</p> <p>ल प स क र ट</p>	<p>शब्द</p> <p>लाभ दूध पैर चाकू कूड़ा छोटा</p>

Step two: Start with one hamlet or a section of the village. Talk to people. Everyone knows which child is enrolled in school and who is not; but what gets the attention of children and adults alike is when children are asked one by one to read simple text or do basic arithmetic sums.<sup>3</sup> Often parents do not know exactly how much their own child can do. Families begin to call their children to make sure that they are tested. Parents, siblings and children get very involved in the actual task of reading or doing sums. New information about children is generated on the spot, right there and then, on an issue that so far had been invisible or not at the forefront of discussions on education in the village.

<sup>1</sup> This process with some variations has been used extensively by Pratham teams in several states in order to catalyze village communities and schools to focus on learning. Pratham is the organization that facilitates ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) in India.

<sup>2</sup> In different parts of India, hamlets are called different names; for example "tola", "purva", "dhani", "pada".

<sup>3</sup> A sample reading test is shown here. A simpler version could have only the four sentence paragraph which is at Std 1 level. Children could be categorized as "can read" or "cannot yet read". Similar simple tools can be created for arithmetic as well.

To begin with, the team assesses children one by one. Soon there are interested observers who are watching the process. Such people are invited to participate. With local help, all children in the age group 6 to 14 in the hamlet are assessed. Care has to be taken not to scare children so it is important to ensure a friendly and fun environment.

While children are trying to read or doing arithmetic sums, there is a lot of conversation among adults about the status of learning and schooling in the community. Such conversations are natural and are directly linked to the assessment activity that they see happening in front of them. The conversations also lead to discussions about possible ways to improve attendance and strengthen learning. The level of each child in reading and in basic arithmetic is noted down in a format that is easy to aggregate on the spot. As soon as all children have been tested, the results are announced. This way, everyone sees the assessment happening; people are able to discuss the results and collectively think of possible solutions.

The hamlet or a particular neighbourhood within a village is a good place to begin because usually such habitations are relatively homogenous and people know each other. The village is often either too big or too diverse to be the starting point.

#### **DISCUSSIONS ABOUT VILLAGE REPORT CARD:**

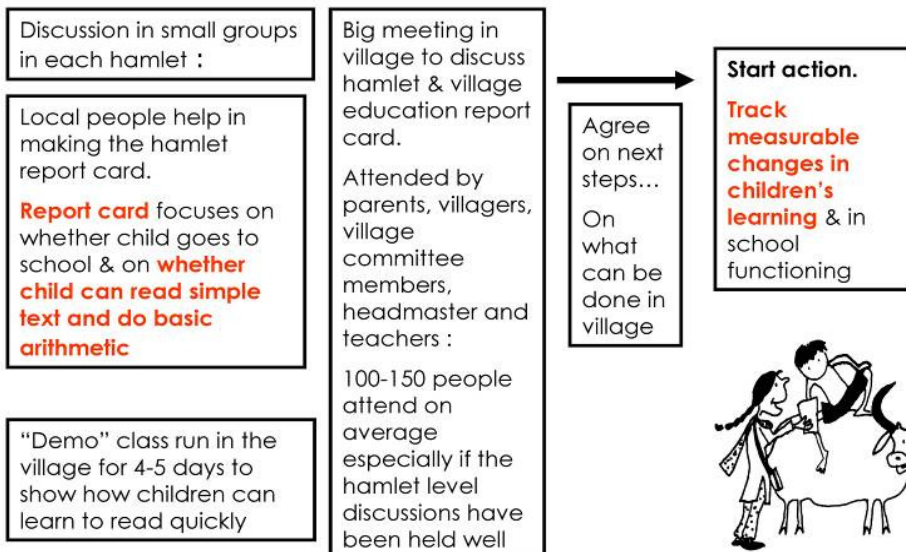
The village report card process is a powerful mechanism for facilitating discussions and awareness on an issue that is of key importance but is usually not at the centre of local discussions and debates.

This process is done in every hamlet or in every section of the village. The exercise has a number of advantages: first, there is complete information on enrollment, attendance and basic learning for all children in the village. But more importantly, the process facilitates conversations among all adults in the village about the current status and what can be done to improve it. The figures that are generated are authentic, complete, current and real. Local people can relate to the findings as they have been involved in it and seen the entire process happening in front of them.

The final step in the process is a big meeting to which people from all hamlets are invited. The date and time is set several days in advance and told to everyone. Members of the village education committee are met in advance and the hamlet report cards are discussed with them.

In the big meeting, the results are discussed hamlet-by-hamlet and also for the village as whole. Local people who have participated in the making of the report cards also participate. It is very helpful to have the head of the panchayat (village government), school teachers and parents present so that a positive and productive step wise solution to current problems can be designed. Strategies for improving attendance and school functioning and strengthening children's basic learning are discussed. Wherever possible the village education committee is made responsible for follow-ups. Often local youth who helped in making the village report cards also volunteer to help in the school or/and in helping children learn.

## Engaging attention & focussing on learning: Making village report cards



In short, the "village report card" approach attempts to engage people directly on the issue of children and learning. The central activity of assessment (in this case the activity of getting children to read or to do arithmetic) generates new information, since often parents do not know whether children can do these tasks. The participatory nature of the assessment is critical to the engagement. The information is useful to individuals and families and it is also aggregated to the level of the hamlet. Since the data has been generated in front of people and with their help, they find it easy to relate to and understand the aggregated "hamlet report". Key elements of the process include the simplicity of the tool, the ease with which it can be administered and results understood. The participation and engagement of villagers helps them to think about next steps, strategies and solutions.

## SUMMARY OF THE VILLAGE REPORT CARD PROCESS

