



**Fostering opportunities to  
learn at an accelerated pace:**

**Why do girls benefit  
enormously?**



Vimala Ramachandran, 2004

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FOSTERING OPPORTUNITIES  
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## AUTHOR'S PROFILE

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## ABSTRACT

One of the challenges that we currently face in achieving universal education is how do we ensure that girls, who have missed the school bus or simply got off the bus too early, can still realise their right to quality basic education? This paper reviews several key education initiatives implemented in the last decade to reach out to the out-of-school children and young women in particularly difficult circumstances through condensed or short-term residential education programmes – also known as “accelerated learning” (AL) programmes. The review indicates that evidence on the ground regarding the impact of the interventions is rather mixed and fragmented. AL programs have provided a much-needed opportunity to learn in a congenial environment characterised by child-centred learning and a multi-dimensional teacher-pupil relationship. Discussions with young women and girls who participated in condensed programmes across the country is revealing – in one voice they all said that the experience was valuable and it was their only window into the world of education. However, at the same time programmes are often unable to sustain their achievements through forging of effective multiple linkages with the formal education system to ensure continuous learning. The paper asserts that since the demand for such interventions is increasing, the limitations as well as the potential of AL as a strategy needs to be critically engaged with in our quest for achieving universal elementary education.





# FOSTERING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AT AN ACCELERATED PACE: WHY DO GIRLS BENEFIT ENORMOUSLY?<sup>1</sup>

Vimala Ramachandran

## I. INTRODUCTION

The decade of the 1990s, while closely identified with the expansion of children's access to and participation in basic education across India also highlights the challenges of achieving gender and social equity in and assuring quality of education. While female literacy may have exhibited the largest decadal increase ever, it still remains considerably lower than male literacy rates. The improvements in access and enrolment figures diminish in significance when the focus is on retention rates and quality of education. What further confounds the picture is the considerable disparity between educational achievements between and within states, between rural and urban areas, between social groups (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and the poor among others). Girls, yet again, emerge as an extremely vulnerable category cutting across social groups as well as geographical location.

A key lesson from the last decade has been that a generalised expansion of education, while necessary, is not sufficient to achieve universal elementary education for girls. A scrutiny of the profile of out-of-school girls indicates that a significant proportion of them are between the ages of 11 to 18 years: too old to enter Class 1 and at the same time too young to participate in adult education programmes (See Table 1, 2 and

3 in the annexure). Most of them are also from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, often from remote areas/scattered habitation, tribal areas, among migrant groups and urban slums. They are also the ones who share an unfair burden of work at home and in home-based farm and non-farm work. One of the challenges that we currently face in achieving universal education is how do we ensure that girls, who have missed the school bus or simply got off the bus too early, can still realise their right to quality basic education?

This paper reviews several key education initiatives implemented in the last decade to reach out to the out-of-school children and young women in particularly difficult circumstances through condensed or short-term residential education programmes – also known as “accelerated learning” (AL) programmes. This paper attempts to provide an overview of the concept of AL: its evolving methodology, scope, and content within the Indian context.

Reviewing a range of AL initiatives it becomes evident that the approach implicit in AL is that learning at its core is individual and at the same time the epistemology of learning is social; i.e. that what we can know and our ways of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a working paper compiled from research studies and evaluations done over the last 8 years. This paper is the first step towards understanding and gauging the impact of accelerated learning programmes in the country. I look forward to comments and suggestions.

knowing are situated in the contexts of our social lives. Hence, it is not merely about classroom transaction techniques or an accelerated curriculum; it is also embedded in the social dynamics of the family, school, and community of the learners and teachers. This holistic process is critical for building learning communities; creating an enabling environment to understand and address the context specific barriers that keep children, especially girls from attending school.

The objective of the working paper is to critically collate the existing evidence on the ground and initiate a debate regarding the relevance of AL for the education of children at risk in general and girls in particular. The analysis indicates that evidence on the ground regarding the impact of the interventions is rather mixed and fragmented. AL programs provide a much-needed opportunity to learn, however they are often unable to sustain the effort through forging of effective multiple linkages with the formal education system to ensure continuous learning. Despite the persistent inadequacies in such efforts across the country, there still is a need and relevance to continue with such interventions while improving, innovating, and strengthening them. The demand for such interventions is increasing and the limitations as well as the potential of AL as a strategy needs to be critically engaged with in our quest for achieving universal elementary education.

## II. SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BASIC EDUCATION: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India is a country of paradoxes. On the one hand, the country is hailed as a staggering pool of technical manpower and yet we are home to the largest number of non-literates. In 2001, close to 296 million people were classified as being non-literate, some 190 million being women and girls. The official estimate for out-of-school children between the ages of 6-14 was 35 million in 2000, the majority of which are girls (National Plan of Action: India 2003). Periodic surveys, like the NFHS-2 reveal that nearly 40 per cent of the girls in the 11 + group in rural India were not attending any educational programme in 1998-99. Further, even if they are attending school, a vast majority of them drop out before completing the requisite eight years of education. Although the gross drop outs rates have been decreasing over the years, it is still 42 per cent at the primary level for girls; and this increases to 58 percent at the upper primary level (Select Educational Statistics, GOI, 2002). Further, evidence also shows that if children do complete elementary school, a majority of them do so without learning much.

The larger development community is familiar with the litany of poor statistics and therefore these need not be repeated at length in this paper (See Appendix, Tables 1 to 5 for key indicators). What is significant is the debate that invariably follows

presentation of these statistics. Yes, we all know that the issues of non-enrolment, non-participation and poor quality have been with us for several decades now. Yet most policy debates on girls' education tend to revolve around the school system, *a system where, to a large extent, age is correlated with grade*. If one were to scrutinise the profile of girls who are not in school then it becomes quite apparent that a significant proportion of them are too old to enter grade 1 in primary schools and are from the more disadvantaged communities and location.

The situation gets complex as we dwell deeper. It is now widely acknowledged that there is a steady growth in social demand for education and skills, especially in those very regions/communities that were considered resistant to girls' education. Schooling has emerged as a social norm in most parts of this diverse country. A bewildering variety of schools also coexist in the country – government schools, private full time schools (aided and unaided), Education Guarantee Scheme Schools (MP Model) and EGS of the GOI model with a focus on non-formal and alternative education (government and non-government) – each offering a different package and catering to different strata of the population. However, the tragedy of today is that despite the desire and demand for education and the mushrooming of schools (private, aided, government, and alternative), good quality education that is relevant remains elusive. A large number of children go through schooling learning little.

While part of the reason for poor learning achievements could be attributed to poor quality teaching and inadequate teaching time, irregular attendance, inability to revise lessons at home, lack of access to any written matter – storybooks, magazines etc – the work burden of girls at home also contributes to poor learning. When girls from very poor families do get a chance to attend school, the burden of work before and after school and the sheer drudgery of supporting their parents who eke out a living from daily wage work or hard agricultural work or through collection and sale of minor forest produce is a deterrent. The situation is particularly severe in reference to girls in the 9+ age group – a period in life when they are catapulted into adult responsibilities – and has important implications on their learning achievements and educational outcomes. This has been captured in a recent qualitative study of factors facilitating and impeding completion of primary school among children in diverse poverty situations. Among girls the burden of the first-born was particularly worrisome (Vimala Ramachandran, et al 2004b).

The same study also reveals that while the mean age of marriage in the state as a whole is 19 (Uttar Pradesh), 20 (Karnataka) and 18 (Andhra Pradesh), the mean age of marriage in the profiled households is much lower at 13, 15 and 15 respectively. Clearly, very poor households in all the three states record a much lower age of marriage than the state average (Vimala Ramachandran, et al 2004b).

Further, the long term educational and health consequences are quite alarming. Poorly nourished and over worked young girls are the ones who are married off early and have babies quickly – thereby perpetuating the intergenerational spiral of ill-health, low self-esteem and low awareness.

A great deal has been written about problems, bottlenecks and rigidities of existing education schemes/programmes on the one hand and the inability of planners and practitioners to customize the services to better serve a more differentiated market. Recent research and documentation of alternative approaches emphasize the need to strengthen both the backward (in the form of crèches, *balwadi*, early childhood nutrition) and forward (upper primary/middle schools, skill providing institutions linked to the employment market) linkages – if the relevance of and interest in even basic education is to be retained. A rich body of research convincingly argues that quality and relevance is the key and that one can turn the system around if we can ensure every single child who enters school has an opportunity to learn and grow without want, fear or prejudice. There is a lot of value in these arguments and a broadened understanding of AL can greatly contribute to it.

### III. RECENT HISTORY OF “ACCELERATED LEARNING” PROGRAMMES

Way back in the 1950s Durgabai Deshmukh and Soundaram Ramachandran (two eminent social reformers and freedom fighters) and various units of the Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust introduced the idea of a “Condensed Course”. The original concept was to provide young women/adolescent school-dropouts a means to complete their primary education and prepare them to enter the world of work with greater awareness and skills. Though this scheme continues to be implemented by the Central Social Welfare Board, it did not attract much attention. In 1988 this concept was rediscovered by the education department, not as a welfare programme, but as a means to enhance the pool of educated and articulate women in rural areas (See Box 1 for an illustrative list of AL programmes).

The Mahila Samakhya programme, initiated in 1988, tried to redefine the concept of condensed courses. Their planning document states: ‘In recognition of the extreme dearth of innovative women-centred educational facilities in rural areas, Mahila Samakhya will try and set up Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK - Women’s Education Centres) in each district. These are residential education programmes and their main objectives are:

- Provide adolescent girls and women opportunities for learning in the shortest period.

Fostering opportunities to learn at an accelerated pace:  
Why do girls benefit enormously?

**Box 1: Ongoing “accelerated learning” programmes for girls**

Name	Programme	Scope	Scale
Balika Shikshan Shivar	Lok Jumbish Programme in Rajasthan (Project concluded in June 2004)	7 months residential programme for out of school girls in the 9 to 14 age group – geared to enable girls to reach age appropriate grade so that they can make a transition to formal schools – primary/ upper primary	Introduced in 2000 on a pilot basis and up-scaled in 2002. Approximately 141 BSS were organised in 2002–03 and 2003–04. Approximately 50 per cent of the girls make a smooth transition to formal schools
Mahila Shikshan Kendra	Mahila Samakhya Programme Government of India	Residential condensed educational programme for out of school adolescents to complete either primary or upper primary level of schooling and/or a 12 to 18 month programme for overall education and development of adolescent girls and young women	Introduced in 1989 as an integral part of Mahila Samakhya – there are Approximately 70 MSK operational in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat
Mahila Shikshan Vihar	Lok Jumbish Programme in Rajasthan (Project concluded in June 2004)	Residential 7 month programme to enable girls in the 9–11 age group to reach the age-specific grade in order to facilitate transition into formal primary or upper primary schools	Introduced in 1999 and taken to scale in 2001, Lok Jumbish is currently running 141 such camps in the last phase of the project – which comes to a close in June 2004
Muktangan	Lok Jumbish Programme in Rajasthan (Project concluded June 2004)	Open school located in a tribal area open to girls to come as and when they are free. This is not a residential programme for the students but a group of teachers live in the school campus and are available to the students during three time-slots decided in consultation with the community	Introduced in 1998 to specifically address the educational needs of girls from primitive tribes (Sahariya) and enable them to acquire a basic education. There are 17 Muktangan schools running in the Baran and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan. This programme will also come to a close in June 2004
Namma Bhoomi – residential education cum vocational training	The Concerned for Working Children, Karnataka	An 18 month course for girls and boys that combines formal full-time education with life skills – in the form of intensive vocational training and internship programme	One centre catering to around 100 girls and boys in the 14+ age group being run in Kundapur, Karnataka

Residential Bridge Courses (Bridge to freedom)	Integral part of UEE strategy in DPEP and now SSA	Conceived as a short-term residential programme to enable child-workers to make the transition to formal primary schools. Apart from enabling children in the 6–14 age group to reach age appropriate grade, the bridge courses train and support children to become agents for elimination of child labour in rural areas	Pioneered by M V Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, this was adopted by the Governments of AP and Karnataka on a wide scale and is also considered as part of SSA in many other states
Residential Schools for erstwhile child workers	National Child Labour Programme	Residential schools that cater to children who have been rescued from specific industries – carpet, match, glass, copper works etc	Twenty districts spread over the states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh – targeted specifically for rehabilitation of child workers
Residential Schools for girls	The Kasturba Gandhi Shiksha Yojana, GOI (2002–03)	It is positioned as a residential school programme for girls in educationally backward areas – no further details are available as yet	New programme announced by the government to establish residential schools for girls in districts that have a particularly low female literacy rate
Residential Camps for adolescents	Doosra Dashak	3–4 months integrated education, literacy and numeracy skills combined with issues of relevance to a person’s life-such as health/reproductive health, democratic and civic education and life skills followed by rigorous follow-up activities/training based on participant wise assessment of progress called micro-planning	Introduced in the year 2002 for the integrated education and development of the rural, largely illiterate boys and girls in the age group of 11–20. Currently being implemented in four blocks of Rajasthan. Uses residential training as a strategy for the education and empowerment of adolescents

- Create a pool of trained women who can work both within this project and other education and development programmes.
- Provide a facility where women who have been marginalized by society (single women, widows, deserted, divorcees) can pursue education in a secure and stimulating atmosphere.

In the first three years of the project, ground level response to the concept of MSKs was lukewarm and at best warm. The general feeling was that such an institution would be of relevance only if it grew out of the articulated needs of women. The enormous investment in curriculum development and teacher training was also acknowledged. By 1992-93, women in the Mahila Samakhya districts started demanding MSKs. Mahila Samakhya's policy of waiting for the right time and a belief in not forcing the pace paid off. It was almost as if the floodgates had opened. The main bottleneck was the non-availability of sensitive and skilled educational resource support for planning, designing, curriculum development, training and so on. Notwithstanding the challenges, over 70 MSKs have been set up and are working in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. The MSKs are particularly vibrant in Bihar, especially among tribal girls. Linked to adolescent girls forum and alternative learning centres in villages (known as Jag Jagi Kendra) there is an insatiable demand for MSKs across the state.

Similarly, in early 1990 M V Foundation started working with child workers and bonded children

with the objective of pulling them out of employment and bondage and enabling them to get back into schools. They were confronted with a problem – slightly older children were not happy joining Class I. Given their background, their educational and counselling needs were not being met by the formal school system. As a result, they hit upon the idea of organising camps to help the children catch up with their peer group in formal schools. These camps were also necessary to help the children make the transition from work to schooling and motivate their parents to acknowledge the right of every child to basic education. The first camp was organised in 1991. Using the existing textbooks of formal school curriculum, the first time-bound camp plunged into engaging the children in an intensive teaching programme. They were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and learning pace of the children – most of them in the 9-15 age group. Most of the children were determined to catch up with their peers in formal schools and acquired grade 5 or grade 7 competencies in a record time of six to ten months. There was no turning back. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has adopted this as a viable bridging strategy to enable working children to get back into the formal education stream.

This successful experience soon became a part of the ongoing primary education programmes. The Karnataka government adopted the bridge course strategy to get out of school children back into the formal stream. The National Child Labour

Elimination Programme officially acknowledged this as a viable strategy to eliminate child labour. As a result a number of NGOs across Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh started residential and non-residential time-bound camps to help child workers catch up.

The trajectory taken in Rajasthan has been slightly different. The Lok Jumbish (LJ) Project started Mahila Shikshan Vihar in Jalore to cater to the educational needs of young women and adolescent girls. Gradually there was a realisation that young girls aged 9 to 11 are not in school and the only option available to them was the night schools known as Sahaj Shiksha Kendra. As the second phase of the project was coming to a close, UNICEF supported LJ Parishad to start 14 residential bridge camps for out of schoolgirls. These camps have now come to be known as Balika Shikshan Shivir. These seven-month camps are especially meant for girls in the 9 to 11 age group and are run with the specific objective of enabling out of schoolgirls to get into formal schools.

Thus, over the decade of the 1990s bridge courses have come to be accepted as a viable intermediate strategy by the government to get children back to school. An interesting range of bridge courses are today run right across the country – from programmes that run for a few months (in the summer) to those stretching from 7 to 12 months. People who manage/run these programmes tell us that indeed older children learn at a fast pace and are able to cover almost 4 to 5

grades of education within a short duration of 7 to 12 months! While there are sceptics, people who visit these centres admit that children not only learn fast but also become more confident and also acquire social skills. They all emphasise that these models are particularly effective for girls and that the value addition is in terms of overall self-esteem and self confidence, social and health related awareness and most important, it is seen as a rare chance for girls to reclaim the joys of childhood. Recent qualitative studies also confirm this impression.

Hence there is an urgent need to explore these alternative approaches and their potential in enabling girls to reach out to good quality and meaningful education, catch up with their peers in the formal school system and most important – break the intergenerational spiral of illiteracy and powerlessness.

## IV. WHAT IS ACCELERATED LEARNING?

What is accelerated learning? In layman's language it essentially means that a child is enabled to learn at a fast pace covering several grades in a short period of 7 to 18 months. This method, evolved over the years in different educational contexts, starts by acknowledging the experiential and cognitive development of older children and creates an environment where they pick up reading/writing and numerical skills. The grade-



wise curriculum that is used in the formal system is set aside and basic competency levels are identified for each level. Most of the AL programmes use the formal textbooks and prepare children to take formal examinations. Starting with basic skills, children are brought together in homogeneous groups and gently introduced to the world of numbers and alphabets – and propelled into self-learning. The teacher works as a guide, a facilitator, a friend and most significantly, as someone who keeps up the momentum and helps

children learn at a fast pace, depending on the ability of the child.

*The real magic in the condensed residential programme is in the holistic method of AL.* The common thread that runs across a wide variety of accelerated learning programmes is the unique role of the teacher – not as a disciplinarian but as a care giver, a person who nurtures and helps children grow at their own pace (See Box 2 on what teachers say). The motivation of children

## Box 2: How children learn? What teachers say...

*Why children in BSS learn faster than their peers in formal schools:*

- Children who come to the camp are more serious about their studies
- Older children have '*better catching power*' than younger children
- This is the only opportunity for receiving formal education
- Teachers communicate with the children in their language
- We teach them 24 hours . . . they are constantly studying
- When children come to the camps they already have been to schools, even though it is for a short period . . . we just have to push and motivate the children . . . our role is like a facilitator
- Peer learning takes place especially in the night, children help each other with their homework
- Teachers live in the camps and are always available all twenty four hours to the children . . . we are like a friend, a mother and elder sister to the girls
- In camps teachers also focus on developing self-confidence and articulation
- Children are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities
- Teachers pay a lot of attention in grounding the girls with basic knowledge; 'if the foundation is weak' then children lag behind in subjects. Lot of attention is paid to slow learners
- Government school teachers are irregular, they do not come to school on time and the actual teaching time is very brief
- It is not right to compare camps with government schools as we try to cover five years course in seven months

*Excerpts from group discussions, Madhumita Pal, 2003*

who have always wanted to go to school, but were denied that opportunity, is also a significant factor. Having got a chance – almost all the children, especially girls, want to turn their world upside down – packing in almost 16 hours of activities in one day. Another important element of this approach is enabling children to set their own pace. Most programmes recognise the agency of children in the learning process and it is the proactive involvement of children in their own learning is what sets these residential programmes apart from conventional schools. Thus, approaches that strengthen all students' learning by building on students' strengths are the foundational premises of AL.

## V. WHAT ENABLES CHILDREN TO LEARN AT AN ACCELERATED PACE<sup>2</sup>?

Common elements across successful AL programmes include:

### **Intensive social mobilisation to prepare the ground**

Almost all the AL programmes listed in Box 1 start with intensive social mobilisation activities in the community. Parents and children are engaged in dialogue on the value of education in the lives of children, the fundamental right of every child to get basic education, the problem of child labour and the rights of children. This process also helps generate confidence among parents that their children, especially girls, will be well looked after.

### **Motivation level of the learner**

What distinguishes the AL programmes from formal schools (even residential schools) is the high level of motivation among the learners. Many of them have gone through periods of denial, deprivation and struggle before they reach the accelerated learning programme. This is particularly true for child labourers, girls who were kept at home to look after siblings and do domestic chores, children in particularly difficult circumstances like the children of commercial sex workers, bonded labourers, young widows and girls who were subject to abuse.

- For example, children in the MVF camps, come to the bridge course after a prolonged struggling at home. Some of them come against the wishes of their parents. Given the larger social mobilisation activities of M V Foundation, children who came to the bridge courses had participated in some form of cultural activity centred on the right of every child to education. Music, theatre, role-play and impromptu folk dances – all these were part of social mobilisation activities that were carried into the bridge courses. Most importantly, the children are aware of their rights.

### **Acknowledging the agency of the learner**

Most participants in accelerated learning programmes are older – most of them in the 11 + age group. They come with a wealth of experience and knowledge. There is a common misconception that the illiterate are ignorant. Most of these

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<sup>2</sup> All the examples are drawn from documentation/evaluation/research of Educational Resource Unit research team, see references for details.

young women have a wealth of knowledge and information – they can recognise plants, trees, animals, seasons and are very much in tune with nature. They manage themselves and are highly responsible. Like most young people, they have a curious mind that is constantly questioning. Coming from the school of life where they learn to cope with the daily battle for survival, many of the young women have experienced the ups and downs of poverty and social discrimination. A significant proportion of these adolescent girls in residential programmes are married, some of them even have children of their own, some widowed, deserted or even abandoned. They never imagined that they would someday get a chance to go to school and join the ranks of the educated.

- For example most of the young women studying in Mahila Shikshan Vihar, Jalore had to struggle hard and convince their families to send them. Given the prevailing status of women in rural Rajasthan – it was almost unthinkable to send adolescent girls and young women out of the confines of the home and community to study. Therefore, when they do get the rare opportunity – they bring tremendous energy and a resolve to show their families that they can do it. They were determined to prove themselves and show their families that their investment (in letting them go and taking on the work burden) was well worth it.

### **Teacher-pupil ratio**

The fundamental difference between formal schools and residential condensed educational programmes is the teacher-pupil ratio. Given the intensity of the programme, every teacher needs to work with small groups.

- For example in BSS Lok Jumbish the ratio was 1:15 and it was around 1:20 in most of the MSK of Mahila Samakhya. Teachers explain that continuous assessment of the girls' learning levels by formal and informal methods was a common practice in the BSS. Given the small class size and excellent teacher-pupil ratios the teachers were able to regularly monitor the learning levels of the girls through weekly tests.

### **Teacher-pupil relationship**

Teacher-pupil interaction is non didactic with the teacher playing multiple roles ranging from being a friend to one who nurtures the child through the learning process. The teacher has to have faith and confidence in the ability and the native intelligence of children. This confidence has a positive impact on learners, enhancing their self-esteem – they begin to believe in themselves. This is particularly important for girls and children from socially marginalized communities. They experience a new sense of self and a new feeling of agency – 'I can do it if I want to'.

- The teacher is a mother, a sister, a sounding board, and a confidant. This multifaceted relationship removes fear from the learning

process. Most of the students in Balika Shikshan Shivir (BSS) of Rajasthan saw their teachers as role models, someone they could reach out to and someone who believes in them. Equally, the teachers in BSS were sensitised to the social and economic situation of the students. As a result they do not exhibit caste/community prejudices, do not push girls into stereotypes. For example, in Jalore (Rajasthan) the teachers encourage girls to learn cycling, play any game they like and encourage them to dream. In BSS of Jalore, Jaisalmer and Ajmer the teachers had a lot of empathy with the students as they came from similar backgrounds. Many of them were from poor families and were supporting their parents/husbands.

#### **Training and academic support to teachers**

Intensive induction training – for almost 30 to 40 days, followed by continuous academic support from a resource agency was introduced in BSS. The MSK teachers in some districts of Uttar Pradesh were given an intensive induction training of 30 days followed by monthly academic meetings organised by Nirantar, an educational resource agency. Similarly, a recent evaluation of Balika Shikshan Shivir revealed that learning levels of children in the BSS camps of Jaisalmer was noticeably better because the teachers were supported by a Block level resource group who visited the camp regularly and held intensive workshops with teachers.

#### **Curriculum**

Most of the bridge courses of Andhra Pradesh and the BSS of Rajasthan follow a shortened and adapted version of the formal school curriculum. Discussions with programme managers revealed that this was done consciously with a view to enable the children to make a smooth transition to the formal system. However AL programmes run under Mahila Samakhya specifically design curriculum and textbooks.

- For example Nirantar – a educational resource group based in Delhi, developed the curriculum and teaching-learning material that broadly adhered to grade specific competency levels in language, mathematics and environmental sciences – but the material was prepared keeping in mind the specific learning needs of adolescent girls. They tried to integrate life skills, health and hygiene and gender issues into the curriculum.
- The experience of BSS is somewhat different. A teachers' handbook provides a weekly syllabus that consists of select chapters from the textbooks – with time allocated for completion of each level. A major concern expressed by the teachers and some of the programme managers was the short duration of the BSS programme. Its duration (7 months) was considered insufficient to cover the course content up to class V. Most teachers felt that the concepts and subject content of class IV and V didn't get the required time and could not be satisfactorily covered.

### **Textbooks, workbooks and other TLM**

Another important dimension of accelerated learning is the availability of textbooks, workbooks and a range of teaching-learning material.

Unfortunately, given the resource constraint this aspect has received less attention. While every child is given textbooks, other TLM are in short supply in almost all the condensed programmes visited. Teachers make do with what they have and create TLMs as they go along.

- A notable exception was Namma Bhoomi (The Concerned for Working Children, Kundapur, Karnataka) where considerable attention was given to generating good quality TLM and provided children access to books and charts.

### **The teaching and learning process**

While there is considerable variation across different models, some generic processes were observed, namely:

- The first two weeks are devoted to enabling children to settle down, get used to living in a community of learners, learning the rules of community living with respect to use of common facilities, personal hygiene, keeping the place clean, getting to know each other and getting used to the schedule. This is also the period when children are grouped according to their learning level – for example children who dropped out of school have some familiarity with the written word and some are even able to recognise alphabets and numbers. Children who were workers in match factories/hotels/

shops or street children are good at counting and can do simple arithmetic. The knowledge and experience levels of children who worked outside their home are different from those who worked within the house. Grouping children into different learning levels without making any group feel disheartened is important, especially because motivation is the key to accelerated learning.

- Basic knowledge of alphabets/numbers and reading small words, mathematical concepts are covered in the next two weeks. Essentially – the first month is devoted to getting into the rhythm of the accelerated learning programme and becoming familiar with alphabets and numbers.
- Subsequent weeks/months are devoted to enabling the children to attain grade specific competencies – moving gradually from one level to the next. Most of the condensed educational programmes that have been documented in the last five years use text books of the formal system and keep their sights on minimum levels stipulated by the government for each grade. Children work in small groups with the support of a teacher and also by helping each other hone their skills.
- Each teacher handling a group organises regular tests and ascertains the competency level as they move along. Continuous assessment is the key to keeping track of what and how much children are learning. As of now – most of the residential programmes seem to focus on

mastering the textbook. With the exception of some Mahila Shikshan Kendra most others use the traditional rote learning method – which is most intense in the concluding weeks of the programme.

- As they near the end of their programme children are introduced to the world of examinations – building up their ability as well as their confidence to take a public examination. Certification through public examinations enable children to make a transition to formal upper primary or middle school. For example the last four weeks in the Balika Shikshan Shivar is devoted to intense preparation for the Class 5 examination – which is organised by the District Education Office.
- Morning exercises (yoga, judo and karate, simple exercises), games, regular health check-up, health education (know your body), balanced diet and proper nutrition and most important – working and playing together – all of this contribute towards creating a learning environment. Almost all the Mahila Shikshan Kendra enable girls to learn cycling and some of them even learn how to drive a tractor or auto rickshaw! For most of the girls this is perhaps their first chance to experience the joy of childhood and adolescence.
- In a recent research study of BSS of Rajasthan researchers noted that the girls were teaching each other – before and after formal classes. It is a continuous learning process: reciting multiplication tables while washing clothes or playing hopscotch. The girls write short notes to each other, scribbling on the walls/in the sand and reciting poems to each other. They practiced their skills with each other, converting almost any and every activity to make use of their newly acquired skills. Many games they play were improvised to hone these skills. The brighter ones were helping out those who had trouble coping (See Box 3).

#### **Actual time spent in teaching and learning**

A number of studies and process documentation of residential programmes reveal that the actual teaching time in AL programmes is 6 to 8 hours a day! In addition students read, revise lessons, help each other for another 4 to 6 hours. The actual time spent on teaching and learning could be as high as 10 to 12 hours a day! This is indeed a far cry from formal schools where teaching time is just about 3 hours. This is in fact one of the important factors that contribute towards an accelerated pace of learning.

- For example in BSS and also in several MSKs the children used holidays and other off days to catch up with their lessons. It is not uncommon to come across teachers working with small groups to help the slow learners catch up with their peers. Apart from the days when children

#### **Child to child learning**

While the teacher does indeed play a significant role in the teaching learning process, children learn a lot from each other.

go home for festivals, there is really no holiday in the residential camps.

### **Cultural and extra-curricular activities**

Respecting the culture / practices of children and also enabling them to learn about other cultures, introducing them to the concept of rights – right to education, right against exploitation, legal rights and so on. The most striking aspect of the M V Foundation camps was the accent on theatre, songs, role plays and other modes of creative expression used to depict the problem of child labour, reinforcing knowledge of child rights and most significant an awareness of the fundamental right of every child to education.

### **Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence**

Most of the residential programmes lay special emphasis on enhancing the self-esteem and confidence of participants. For example Mahila Shikshan Kendra run in Mahila Samakhya encourages the girls to talk about social and gender discrimination and uses folk music, theatre, role plays and other means of creative expression to develop critical thinking abilities and help them move from a state of passive acceptance of their life situation to one where they take greater control over their lives. Children are also encouraged to learn to ride a bicycle, a tractor or a scooter rickshaw, stage street plays, write poems and songs and explore the world outside their immediate environment through the world of books, excursions and multi-media.

### **Overall environment, health, hygiene and nutrition**

The correlation between health and education is important. It is now widely acknowledged that poor health and nutrition can be a barrier to attendance and educational attainment and achievement. This issue assumes a degree of urgency in a camp where most girls have attained puberty. Teaching them about menstrual hygiene and helping them manage themselves is important.

- The loudest message from an in-depth evaluation of Balika Shikshan Shivirs of Rajasthan (2003) was that the infrastructure, cleanliness, hygiene and nutrition exert a significant influence on cognitive as well as non-cognitive outcomes. Creating a congenial learning environment is as important as the actual teaching-learning process. We found that the learning levels and overall development of the children was very poor in BSS that were run in unhygienic surroundings with poor quality food, poor sanitation and little attention given to the health and nutrition of children. The difference between two sets of BSS were striking: In Jalore, Jaisalmer and Ajmer – the overall environment was good and great care taken to ensure good hygiene and nutrition, while the BSS in Udaipur district – where the camps were dirty, food inedible and the overall environment utterly uninspiring. Way back in the mid-1990s we found similar differences in outcomes between different MSKs, between those that took special care to ensure health, hygiene and nutrition and those that neglected it.

### **Continuous and connected learning in an environment of freedom**

Learning has a lot to do with the kind of environment in which the children learn. Sense of freedom and togetherness, opportunities to unleash one's creative hidden potential, makes an enormous impact on the way a girl is able to grasp new concepts and explore their creative potential. Uninterrupted learning – even for a few months – makes a big difference. Children are able to learn and practice basic reading and writing skills. Discussions with people working with Doosra Dashak of Rajasthan revealed the following:

- There is no break in the learning process. Children are not pulled away to do household chores or farm / non-farm work. It is well known that regular and prolonged absenteeism leads to low learning levels and children who cannot catch up eventually drop out..
- It is well known that the socio-cultural milieu can be stifling for girls especially in an environment where girls are expected to conform to strict behaviour codes.
- Constant fear of ridicule (“so now our daughter of a sweeper will now become a district magistrate”) and being judged at every step can be a disheartening experience. Gender stereotypes when coupled with caste and community prejudices can be a formidable barrier to learning.

### **Rewards, recognition and appreciation as a source of motivation**

Young women who went to AL programmes recollect small instances where the teachers appreciated their work, gave them small rewards (may be a colour pencil), praised them to their parents and recognised their leadership qualities. As female children most young girls are invariably neglected, adults treat them with indifference and in many situations they are made to feel unwanted and a burden on the family. When teachers in the AL camps praise them, appreciate their work and give small rewards – girls respond enthusiastically. Their self-esteem gradually improves and they become more confident every day. They sing and dance with abandon, participate in role-play, learn new games, ride the cycle and experience the joys of childhood. They start dreaming of becoming a teacher, a panchayat leader, a nurse, a doctor and even a policewoman! It is this change in self-perception that makes a difference – they learn faster. Every minute is precious and not to be wasted. The sheer energy in an AL programme is heady – it can leave a visitor speechless.

While each of the above give us some insights into how and why children are able to learn at such break-neck speed, it is possible to distil some generic principles that frame successful innovation, as depicted in Box 4.



Fostering opportunities to learn at an accelerated pace:  
Why do girls benefit enormously?

### Box 3: Jayshree of Doosra Dashak

Fourteen year old Jayshree came in the first residential programme organised by Doosra Dashak with a stamp of a 'mentally disabled' girl. Her parents sent her to study, as they were unable to find ways to deal with her. In her early days she was difficult to handle. She was barely able to speak a sentence in any lucid manner. She would leave the group whenever she wanted and suddenly reappear without any notice and would be a nuisance in the class. It was hard to make her sit still for even a few moments. She would not attend to any assignment the teacher gave her in class. It seemed she might have to be sent back in order to avoid any mishap in the camp. However, Rajni (her group teacher) was determined to work with Jayshree. She would sit with her for long hours helping her hold a pencil and write and her comments would be filled with appreciation. Jayshree was fond of dancing and Rajni made a point to make her perform whenever there was any occasion. Gradually the whole group turned out as a facilitator-helping Jayshree to complete her work, to keep her place tidy and strangely impart words of appreciation as she spoke. At times even if in a moment of irritation any of the teachers tried to censure Jayshree on her expression, the other girls would say – 'didi, first let her finish. She has just started speaking'. Their attempts were rewarded. Everybody present at the closing ceremony of a 3 ½ month long camp, witnessed Jayshree spontaneously raising her hands to speak in front of the huge gathering, holding a mike and describing her 'experiences' during the camp – though brief, it was a fairly comprehensible voice with confident gestures. She could just complete Class I but became successful in removing the stamp of a mentally disabled girl from her personality.

Source: Shubhangi Sharma, Doosra Dashak, April 2004.

### Box 4: Generic principles that frame successful initiatives

- The process is decentralised, it is planned and executed in partnership with the community, Panchayat, government authorities and NGOs
- The programme is learner centred and in exceptional cases learner controlled
- The role of teacher is that of a facilitator – and one who understands the economic, political, social and cultural context of the learners
- The programme is evaluated in a holistic manner and not dependent on whether graduates have cleared the examination or have been mainstreamed into formal school
- The framework is normative but without overloading the education aspect. The central theme of the intervention is empowerment – everything else flows from it
- The intervention is a balance between ideal and realistic, between the educational needs as articulated by the participants and the planners/implementers; between academics and non-academic; between the 3 'R's and development of self-confidence and esteem. The inputs are aimed at enabling the participants to face the challenges in their daily lives from a position of strength and make informed choices
- The culture and language of learners is respected and taken as the point of departure – within the framework of universal values of human rights and dignity and the fundamental tenets of the Constitution of India of equality and non-discrimination based on caste, community, religion and gender

## VI. SUSTAINING THE BENEFITS OF ACCELERATED LEARNING

Almost all the girls we interacted with over the last eight years emphatically state that the 7 to 12 months experience was extremely valuable. The vignettes from the daily lives of girls in AL camps shared above are particularly illustrative of the transformation taking place. Discussions with young women and girls who participated in condensed programmes across the country is revealing – in one voice they all said that the experience was valuable and it was their only window into the world of education (See Box 5). Parents queue up at BSS in remote districts of Rajasthan to enrol their daughters, while MSKs have a tough time limiting their batch to 100 students. The hunger for education is so immense that even a badly run programme is flooded with eager aspirants.

There is another dimension too. Critics of short-term residential camps argue that these programme perpetuate inequality because it is cost effective for parents to send their daughters for 7 to 12 months instead of sending them to formal school for 5 to 7 years! Further, the accelerated nature of the programme also reduces the social risk associated with sending girls to school every day without changing social attitudes. There is an element of truth in this argument – group discussions with parents in Jaisalmer and Jalore were quite revealing. They were happy with 7

month camps where “everything is really free” and that their girls will get a primary school completion certificate in 7 months instead of 5 years.

Notwithstanding the criticism, the hard reality is that there is really no other option for older girls who have already missed the bus. The challenge is to ensure that parents do not pull out their girls from formal schools and wait to send them to a residential camp.

Recent field visits to Balika Shikshan Kendra’s run by Lok Jumbish and interaction with former students reveal that approximately 45 to 50 per cent of the girls move on to formal schools. The others are enrolled, but dropout because the middle schools are far from their village. Many of them admit that they lost interest in formal schools where very little learning happens. High student-teacher ratios, absenteeism of teachers, very low teaching time – all these are known to lead to very low learning outcomes among children in government schools. Compounding the problem is the issue of safety of girls in an environment where there are very few female teachers. Recent qualitative studies reveal that in the absence of teachers, parents are afraid of security for their girls – especially at the upper primary/middle school and higher levels. Similar experiences were narrated by girls who graduated from programmes in other parts of the country – albeit to a lesser extent in areas where upper primary and high schools are not only easily accessible but where the transport system is good enough for the girls to commute in safety.

Another important dimension that emerged through discussions with former students of such condensed programmes is the question of relevance of education in their lives. Ambiguity about the value of education was reflected in

almost all interactions. At one level people agree that education is important, it is valuable in itself and enhances self-worth and dignity. Yet, when they see young girls/boys who have dropped out midway, those whose lives have not changed

**Box 5: What adolescent girls want and what they get**

What girls want to learn / know	Situation in existing programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Language and mathematical Skills</li> <li>■ English</li> <li>■ Certification of Education</li> <li>■ Learn to ride a bicycle, moped, scooter, and tractor</li>   <li>■ Skills for Economic Self-Reliance and livelihood opportunities (How can I start my own business, where can I get a loan, can I start a pre-school? Can I start a weaving unit?)</li> <li>■ Functioning of Government systems/PRI/ knowledge about schemes for women</li> <li>■ Understanding our bodies – menstrual cycle, child birth, diseases, being healthy</li>   <li>■ Responsible sexual behaviour – especially among boys</li>   <li>■ Knowledge about HIV and AIDS</li>   <li>■ Knowledge about addictions (drugs, cannabis, liquor)</li>   <li>■ Folk theatre/music, dance, role play, theatre etc. Mahila Shikshan Kendra, Mahila Shikshan Vihar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In most cases up to Class 5 or 7 level</li> <li>■ Very rudimentary</li> <li>■ Class 5 or Class 7 pass certificate</li> <li>■ Mahila Shikshan Kendra and the Jalore Mahila Shikshan Vihar made a conscious attempt to enable girls to learn cycling and in a few places to ply scooter rickshaws</li> <li>■ Only in some programmes – Namma Bhoomi, Karnataka</li>   <li>■ Covered in Mahila Shikshan Kendra and Mahila Shikshan Vihar</li> <li>■ Covered in Mahila Shikshan Kendra and Mahila Shikshan Vihar, Doosra Dashak, Rajasthan and in SEARCH (Gadchiroli, Maharashtra)</li> <li>■ Covered in SEARCH (Gadchiroli, Maharashtra) adolescent boys and girls camps and Doosra Dashak, Rajasthan</li> <li>■ Mahila Shikshan Kendra in Andhra Pradesh has done exciting work in this area.</li> <li>■ Covered only in SEARCH (Gadchiroli, tobacco, Maharashtra) adolescent boys and girls camps</li> <li>■ Covered in M V Foundation bridge courses, and Doosra Dashak, Rajasthan</li> </ul>

despite formal education, they are perplexed as to whether education is really a stepping stone to a brighter future – meaningful employment, improved status etc. They see that education does improve self-worth and dignity, yet point out that many children who attended school beyond primary level are not comfortable with traditional occupations – farming, home based work<sup>3</sup>.

What is even more disturbing is that those who attend formal government primary schools are not more competent nor do they have more skills than those who drop out after primary school.

There is no doubt that AL programmes are innovative interventions attempting to condense five years of schooling into 7 to 18 months. It also enables children from diverse background to live together and provide space for children who would otherwise be kept out of schools. Notwithstanding these obvious benefits of AL programmes, some questions remain:

- Are we perpetuating discrimination by giving parents an opportunity to choose between regular schooling and a condensed education programme for their daughters – especially in an environment where older girls are not allowed to study beyond the primary or elementary level?

- Is the accelerated program only acceptable because it allows older girls to catch up without the accompanying social risk or necessary social change?
- What is the impact of the interventions on school attendance among younger girls – will it encourage parents to keep their younger daughters at home till they are old enough to go to an AL programme?
- What are the cost implications of these initiatives?
- What are the management implications of mainstreaming these initiatives – i.e., is this a transitional model to mop-up older out-of-school children or a “permanent alternative” in areas where formal elementary schools remain dysfunctional?

These issues need to be addressed and key elements of AL need to be strengthened in order to ensure a continuous and connected impact in the lives of these girls. While acknowledging the tremendous potential of AL strategies, one cannot but recognise that the weakest link in the chain is the absence of systematic efforts to re-create the formal curriculum and adapt it to the needs of a condensed education programme. As discussed earlier, most AL programmes pick and choose from the formal textbook. This is particularly true

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<sup>3</sup> *Improving the quality and relevance of education acquires an entirely new sense of urgency when we move from primary to middle and high school education. Children do not learn about agriculture or about animals. The curriculum is designed keeping urban children in mind, who wish to move on from school to college and then seek employment. Compounding this problem is the non-availability of vocational/technical education for children who opt out of the formal stream after Class 7 or 10. Most of the training institutions are urban based and are not designed for rural boys or girls. This kind of education does not prepare rural girls to apply their knowledge in their immediate work environment – either in agriculture, animal husbandry, home-based occupations and other related occupations.*

for programmes that look at AL strategies as a bridge connecting out-of-school children to the formal system.

## VII. THE WAY FORWARD: MOVING BEYOND THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

The bare minimum goal of current short-term residential accelerated learning programmes is to provide out-of-school girls in the 11 + group a chance to acquire elementary education and a

chance to experience the joys of childhood. Most of the programmes that are supported by the government limit the scope to enabling girls complete Class 5 and help them enter the formal school in Class 6. Unfortunately they do not have structures or processes in place to monitor the “mainstreaming” processes and find out whether children remain in school.

Further, the strategies that make “accelerated learning” happen – i.e., active involvement of learners, making use of learner’s life and experience, child-centred learning and a multi-dimensional teacher-pupil relationship – also

### **Box 6: The dilemma facing education of adolescent girls**

Whether in school or out of it, adolescents have age-specific learning needs, a commonality that cuts across all groups of adolescents. Certain learning needs of the adolescents – related to issues such as age related physical and emotional changes and concerns about earning a livelihood – are shared by all. However, language and mathematical skills etc., – become a specific concern for out-of-school adolescents because that is their major deprivation.

With respect to girls, the matter is far more complex. The social construct of gender raises expectations from girls to play the role of a woman-in-making who is basically an ‘assistant’, or supportive of what the family does or needs. This brings in an element of conflict. The role expectation is often inconsistent with the girls’ articulated desires to want to know more about the world around them, to be independently mobile and be an equal in the society – an issue relating to educational need for all!

What surfaces clearly are not only a set of well-articulated needs but also a sense of urgency. We need to assess whether the existing systems – formal and non-formal – are in a position to provide the quality of education to adolescents who have been deprived so far. We need to assess whether the existing systems – both formal and informal – are in a position to provide access, relevance and quality of education to adolescents who have now begun to talk about their needs.

*Source: Dr. Sharada Jain et al, Sandhaan, Jaipur 2003.*

have relevance for the formal system. While administrators and teachers admit that the texture of AL programme is qualitatively better than formal schools, it has not influenced the formal system.

Another limitation of this approach is that most of the AL programmes do not cater to older girls (who are 14 +) who cannot go back to formal school in grade 6. The educational needs of this group have unfortunately fallen between elementary education and adult education – with both programmes looking to the other to do the needful. Being out of school, they not only enter the world of work but are also thrust into early matrimony and motherhood. In the process they have little opportunity to grow into self-confident, aware and articulate adults (See Box 6).

The school system is geared to the urban middle-class and the special educational needs of dropouts and out-of-school children between the ages of 10-18 have been ignored by the formal system. Industrial Training Institutions (ITI) and polytechnics also cater to the needs of urban youth. Vocational training for girls is often limited to home science, tailoring, food processing and related skills – which push girls into gender stereotypical vocations. The Open School system is also geared to formal education and examination. Even non-formal programmes cater to the elementary education stage. Interventions designed under the aegis of the Reproductive

Health projects of the government and international agencies focus on fertility, sexual behaviour, family planning and HIV and AIDS. They essentially look at adolescent girls as future mothers. Almost all post-middle school or post-secondary education and training programmes do not pay adequate attention to *real-life* education needs i.e. understanding and critically reflecting on their life, their situation, exploring opportunities for employment or self-employment, skill training (linked to emerging economic opportunities), building self-confidence and self-esteem and other related issues. As a result, the existing system do not respond to the educational needs of adolescent girls – leaving them with no avenues for continuing education.

Creating continuing education opportunities which link literacy and education to self-development and skill training, leading to greater bargaining power and self-esteem is the crying need of the hour (See Box 7). Such a programme will act as a bridge between the children and adults, creating a positive environment for education and also be an instrument for social change. This is very necessary for adolescents belonging to disadvantaged social groups and communities. While affirmative action by way of reservations and special provisions has a role to play, it is more than evident that in the last 50 years people from socially deprived communities (except for a small creamy layer) have remained at the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

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### Box 7: Sarvar from Pugal, Rajasthan

She was a 13-year-old girl, the youngest in a family of 5 brothers and 3 sisters from a SC Muslim family. Two sisters and one brother were married. Her family owns 40 bighas of land. Her village has a female Muslim Sarpanch. Her mother is also a ward-panch. Her father or brother accompanies her mother when she goes to a Panchayat meeting. Her mother has helped in improving the civic services and food distribution from the PDS in her village. She had helped in getting monetary compensation for some families whose houses were damaged in the recent past by the cloud burst.

She said that she didn't go to the village school because she was scared of being beaten up by the schoolteacher. Before coming to the BSS she was helping her mother and sisters in household work. When she heard the positive experience of learning in seven months from 4 girls of her village who had attended the previous BSS she asked her mother to send her to this BSS. She was enjoying her stay in the BSS and seemed to be very social and had formed a close friendship with two girls from another village. She was very keen to complete class V from this BSS. She said, ' I'll take class V exams from this BSS and then I'll attend another BSS and then another one. I'll be able to complete class X.' Otherwise she said that she would like to study up to X class from Bikaner city while staying with her maternal cousin who was also a para-teacher in an alternate school. Her mother has assured her that she would bear the expenses of her studies in Bikaner. She wants to become a teacher and wants to make many more children literate.

She was married three years ago. She now wished to continue with her higher schooling. She said that her mother-in-law was supportive of her studying further because she wanted her to be employed as a teacher or a para-teacher.

Her wish was that all girls should study and they shouldn't be married off at an early age. She had gone home twice for festivals and meeting her family members and her brother feels happy that she has learnt to study.

*Field notes of Vandana Mahajan, 2003*

*Source: Vimala Ramachandran et al, 2004c.*

Introducing short-term residential programmes for out-of-school adolescents that are designed with interest could perhaps infuse new energy into society. Education for survival, education for empowerment and education for social transformation are beautiful concepts that have defied operationalisation. The accelerated learning programmes could perhaps help us grapple with real life education. Allocating adequate resources in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for such short-term

residential accelerated learning programmes could be taken on as a priority – this alone may enable us to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy and non-participation in basic education by a significant section of young people living in rural and remote areas – particularly girls from the most disadvantaged sections of society.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate that the *AL programme is a transitional strategy and should*

### Box 8: One step forward, many steps back

It is 5 pm in the evening. We are sitting in Bhagirath's house in a small village in Shahbad. His two daughters had been to the *shivir*. Despite opposition from his *Sheriya* community and his own people at home, he sent them to the *shivir*. He was very agitated when we met him. He found the experience of sending his girls to the formal schools a harrowing experience. He felt that in the *shivir* his daughters were well looked after. The *shivir* gave them food and clothes. The children had learnt to read and write, were clean and not shy of meeting strangers.

However, life after *shivir* has not been easy. The girls stayed in the hostel for fifteen days, but after '*raksha bandhan*' they were sent back home. The school headmaster told him not to send his children, as they did not have textbooks. Earlier he had saved money from selling his farm produce and doing drought relief work to pay the fees of Rs 115 for each child. Now he does not have money to buy books for the children. He had approached the local Social Welfare Departments and even had gone up to Ganeshpura and Gadora but all his efforts were futile.

*'My girls, can sign their names now because of the efforts of the camp, but cannot move any further in life. They are forced to go back to their old ways...'* Excerpts from parents interview, Madhumita Pal, 2003

Source: Vimala Ramachandran et al, 2004c.

*be treated as such.* The holistic method of AL has a lot to contribute towards enriching formal schooling; however it cannot substitute for formal schooling up to the elementary level, which is the fundamental right of every single child (See Box 8). Educationists and social activists across the country have highlighted the danger of such transitional strategies becoming "permanent" – thereby denying children from very poor families, those living in remote rural (tribal) areas and migrant communities – the right to 8 years of elementary education of acceptable quality. Equally, AL should not become a convenient way of denying girls access to formal schooling and

let parents put the girl to work till she is 11 years and then send her to an AL centre for 7 to 12 months to get a primary school completion certificate. We cannot afford to ignore this warning. While AL strategies are indeed valuable for older out-of-school girls and the AL programme can enable us to break out of an inter-generational cycle of illiteracy – they should not become permanent fixtures in areas where the formal system continues to be dysfunctional. In the immediate term – i.e., in the next five years AL programmes can indeed make a big difference to older out-of-school girls.



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## ANNEXURES

**Table 1: All India Percentage of Out-of-School Girls in the age group of 5–14**

Social group	Dropped out			Never attended		
	5–9 Yrs	10–14 Yrs	5–14 Yrs	5–9 Yrs	10–14 Yrs	5–14 Yrs
<i>Rural Female</i>						
SC	48.4	<b>51.6</b>	49.9	4.3	4.1	4.2
ST	55.9	<b>55.8</b>	55.9	4.0	3.2	3.7
Others	35.6	36.4	36.0	3.9	3.4	3.7
All	40.5	41.3	40.8	4.0	3.5	3.8
<i>Urban Female</i>						
SC	29.0	28.0	28.5	3.1	3.2	3.2
ST	30.8	21.1	25.9	5.2	4.6	4.9
Others	15.1	14.7	14.9	2.9	2.8	2.8
All	17.6	16.6	17.1	3.0	2.9	3.0

Source: NSSO 1997, cited in Vimala Ramachandran 2003.

**Table 2: Gross Dropout Rates**

Year	Primary (6 to 11 age group)			Upper primary (11 + age group)			Classes 1 to 10 (6 to 16 age group)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	56.2	<b>62.5</b>	58.7	68	<b>79.4</b>	72.7	79.8	<b>86.60</b>	82.5
1990-91	40.1	<b>46</b>	42.6	59.1	<b>65.1</b>	60.9	67.5	<b>76.90</b>	71.3
2000-01	39.7	<b>41.9</b>	40.7	50.3	<b>57.7</b>	53.7	66.4	<b>71.50</b>	68.58

Source: Select Education Statistics, Department of Education, MHRD, GOI, 2000-01.

**Table 3: Per 1000 distribution of adolescents by level of education, separately for each age group and sex, NSS 55<sup>th</sup> Round 1999-2000**

Age Group	Not Literate	Literate Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate & above	All
<b>Rural India</b>								
10-14 M	152	351	347	139	10	0	0	1000
10-14 F	267	296	305	123	9	0	0	1000
10-14 T	206	325	328	132	9	0	0	1000
15-19 M	185	101	161	320	176	55	3	1000
15-19 F	343	101	144	237	133	40	1	1000
15-19 T	257	101	153	282	157	48	2	1000
<b>Urban India</b>								
10-14 M	77	268	401	234	20	0	0	1000
10-14 F	108	249	382	239	22	0	0	1000
10-14 T	92	259	392	237	21	0	0	1000
15-19 M	89	68	122	303	262	145	12	1000
15-19 F	114	67	114	277	254	160	14	1000
15-19 T	100	67	118	291	259	152	13	1000

Source: Literacy and Levels of Education in India 1999–2000, NSS 55<sup>th</sup> Round, National Sample Survey Organisation, Sept. 2001, p. 218–220.

**Table 4: Girls Age 6-14 Years Attending School by Sex, Residence and State**

State	NFHS 1992–93				NFHS 1998–99			
	6–10 Yrs		11–14 Yrs		6–10 Yrs		11–14 Yrs	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<b>Girls</b>								
All India	81.8	55.0	75.7	47.9	89.1	75.1	82.8	61.6
M Pradesh	81.7	47.3	81.4	44.5	87.8	73.9	80.0	54.9
Karnataka	85.4	64.8	72.5	46.4	93.0	81.9	82.9	60.7
Orissa	78.8	63.0	78.2	52.5	82.7	81.0	77.0	64.8
T Nadu	94.7	83.6	75.7	62.8	98.0	94.5	87.1	76.3
A Pradesh	82.0	51.9	67.7	37.1	93.8	79.3	79.1	47.0
U Pradesh	70.3	45.4	68.4	38.2	83.3	71.4	80.0	57.1
Bihar	69.3	34.0	65.6	33.0	72.1	53.0	78.2	48.7
Rajasthan	72.4	36.4	71.2	28.6	82.7	66.0	75.5	44.9
Haryana	89.9	71.9	87.3	65.8	92.0	89.3	86.8	77.3
Gujarat	84.4	64.0	78.4	57.9	90.0	74.9	76.5	54.8

Source: NFHS I and II, state and all-India reports; compiled by Shomo Srivastava, cited in Vimala Ramachandran 2003.

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**Table 5: Reasons for Children not attending School (Percentage of children of 6–17 years who have dropped out of school)**

Main reason for not currently attending school (dropped out of school)	Urban		Rural		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
School too far away	0.2	1.0	1.0	5.9	0.8	4.8
Transport not available	0.1	0.2	0.4	1.6	0.3	1.3
Further education not considered necessary	2.4	5.4	2.3	4.3	2.4	4.5
Required for household work	5.7	14.7	8.7	17.3	8.0	16.7
Required for work on farm/ family business	4.7	1.6	9.2	2.9	8.0	2.6
Required for outside work for payment in cash or kind	11.3	3.0	9.9	3.7	10.3	3.5
Costs too much	15.2	17.0	13.3	11.4	13.8	12.6
No proper school facilities for girls	0.0	1.2	0.0	3.5	0.0	3.0
Required for care of siblings	0.2	1.5	0.6	2.3	0.5	2.2
Not interested in studies	42.5	30.2	40.0	24.8	40.6	26.0
Repeated failures	6.0	6.1	5.3	3.7	5.5	4.2
Got married	0.1	4.9	0.2	8.5	0.2	7.7
Other	5.8	8.2	5.3	6.2	5.5	6.6
Don't know	5.7	5.1	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.2
<b>Total per cent</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of children	1,852	1,747	5,475	6,121	7,327	7,868

Source: *Education For All, National Plan of Action, India: June 2003: Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, MoHRD, Gol: p 30.*

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