



Giving Every Child a Fair Chance

Understanding the Challenges in Ensuring Quality Education for Migrant Children: A Case Study of Three Government Funded Schools in Ernakulam District

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Context

The Right to Education Act 2009 ensures free and compulsory education to every child of the age of six to fourteen years. One of the key challenges of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), across Indian states, has been enrolment and continuation of education of children who migrate with their families.

Kerala state over the past few decades has been one of the most attractive destinations for migrant workers from various Indian states. A lot of migrants now come with their families. Ernakulam district, which is the commercial capital of Kerala, has several pockets where migrant workers with families live. Some of the pockets include Vathuruthy, Ayyappankavu, Elamakkara, Binanipuram, Kalamassery, Perumbavoor and Nellikkuzhi.

Access to education for children from such families has been a challenge. Taking cognizance of this, the Ernakulam District Administration requested CMID to undertake a rapid assessment of the top three schools in the district with the largest number of children of migrant workers. The SSA Ernakulam district suggested Govt. U.P. School Kandanthara, Govt. H.S.S. Elamakkara and S.N. H.S.S Thrikkannarvattom for the study. This report summarises the context, methodology, key findings and recommendations from the assessment.



Methodology

Each school was asked to identify and rank three most important barriers the school faced in improving the academic performance of the migrant children. Once the challenges were identified, the schools were also asked to suggest pragmatic and feasible solutions that they think can resolve the issues.

Data were collected from each school through Key Informant Interviews and group discussions. Head teachers of each school was interviewed and discussions were made with other resourceful teachers. The SSA senior officials in the district were also consulted.

In Kandanthara, residential areas of migrant workers were visited to interview parents of children in school and children out of school. A total of five Key Informant Interviews and five group discussions were conducted. The fieldwork was undertaken during 11-14 August 2017. The SSA Ernakulam team also joined CMID for the discussions at S.N. H.S.S. Thrikkannarvattom.

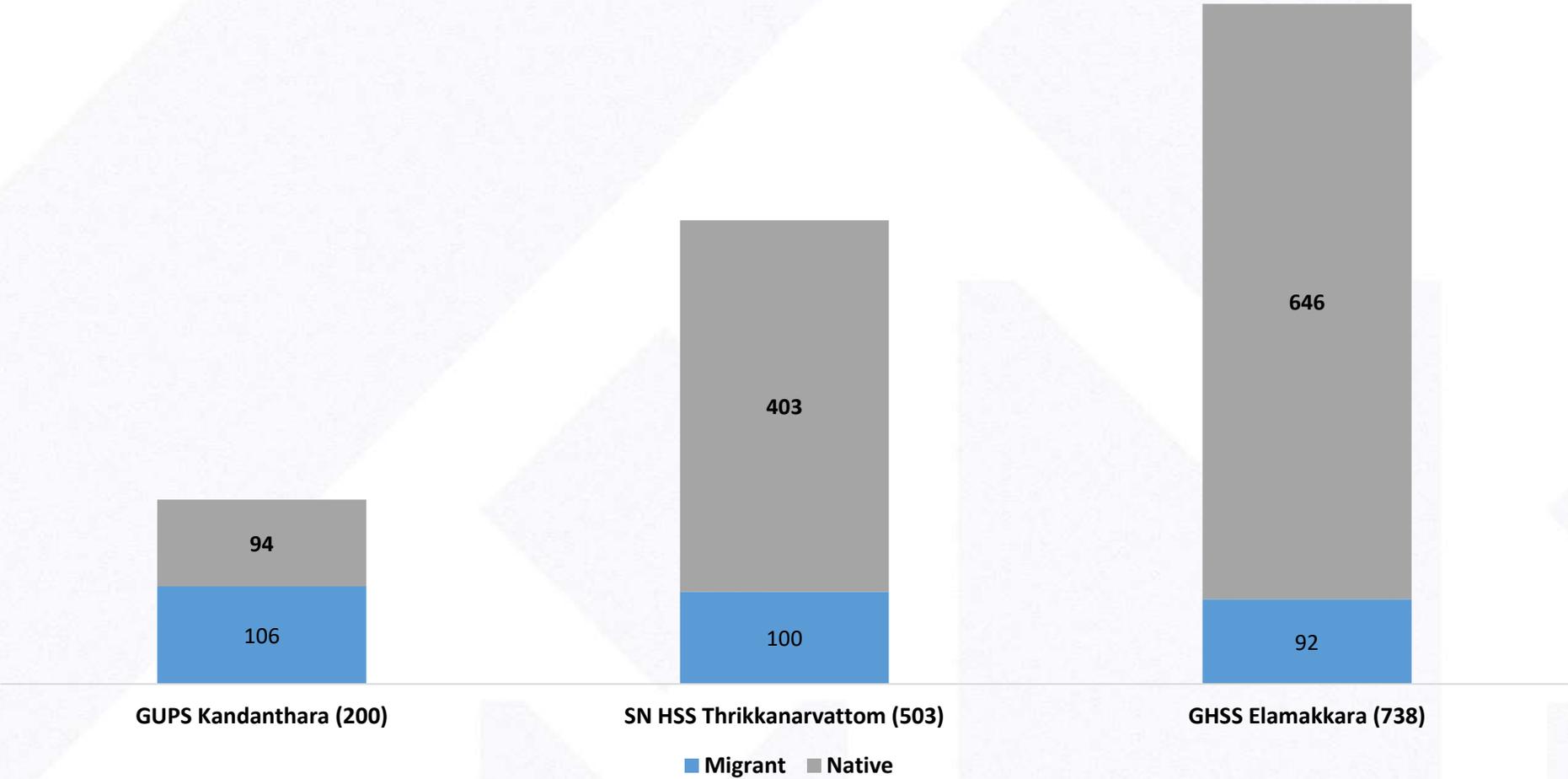
Although there were other schools in the district with larger number of migrant children, the SSA felt that the profile of children in identified schools required immediate attention. Hence the case study does not cover the three schools with the largest number of children from migrant families. Interactions with parents were conducted only at Kandanthara. Children were also not consulted as part of this study.



Key Findings

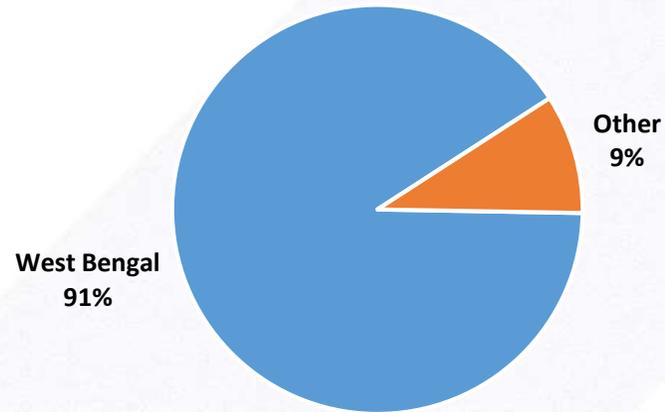
The proportion of migrant children to total children varied from 12% to 53%

Distribution of Children in Schools by Number and Nativity, 2017-18

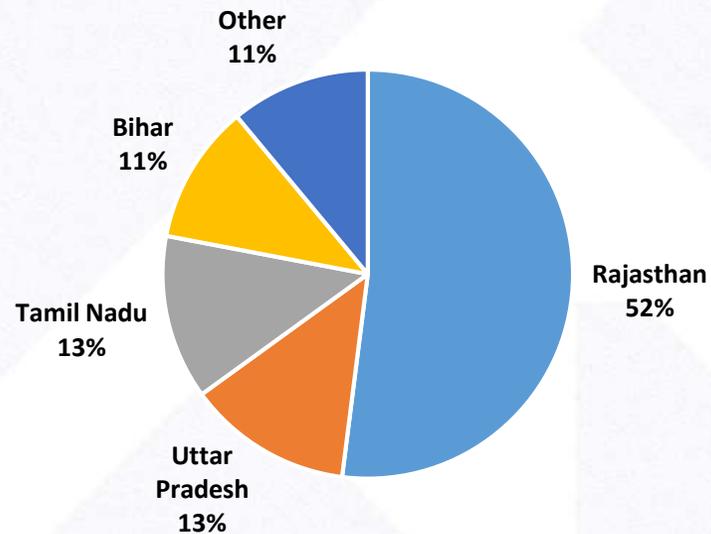


The profile of children also significantly differed from school to school

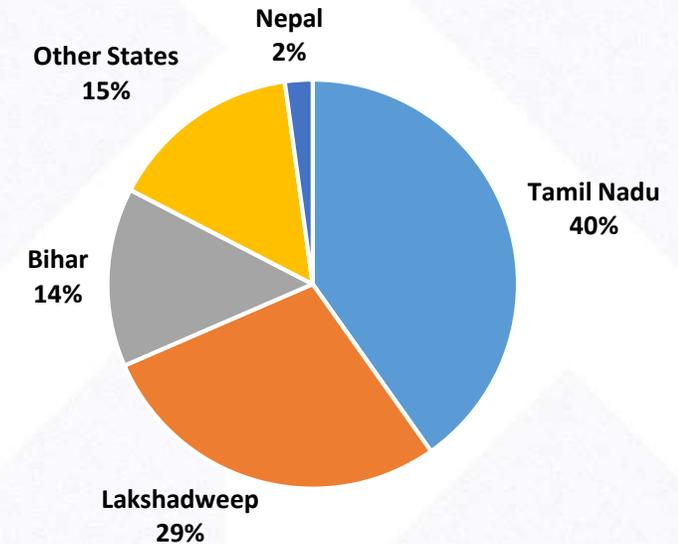
Migrant Children by Native State, G.U.P.S Kandanthara, 2017-18, N 106



Migrant Children by Native State, S.N.H.S.S. Thrikkanarvattom, 2017-18, N 100



Migrant Children by Native State, G.H.S.S. Elamakkara, 2017-18, N 92



Students in Grade XI and XII not included in Thrikkanarvattom and Elamakkara



G.U.P.S. Kandanthara

More than half of the students at G.U.P.S. Kandanthara were children from migrant families. Over ninety per cent of migrant children belonged to West Bengal. Their parents worked either in the plywood factories or in the construction sector. In order to ensure that the children from migrant families get breakfast, the school provides breakfast to all children in the school with the support of the Gram Panchayat. SSA had engaged two Bengali speaking resource teachers in the school during the academic year 2016-17. However, both the teachers discontinued during 2017-18.

S.N. H.S.S Thrikkannarvattom

Children from migrant families constitute one-fifth of the students in the school. More than half hail from Rajasthan and three-fourths of all migrant children were from the Hindi speaking regions. Parents of majority of these children are engaged in various businesses in Kochi. The school does not have any special intervention for children from other states.

G.H.S.S. Elamakkara

Only 12 per cent of the students of G.H.S.S. Elamakkara were migrants. Majority were from Tamil Nadu, followed by Lakshadweep. Seamen from Lakshadweep whose families live in Elamakkara send the children to the school. Parents of Tamil children were small entrepreneurs in Kochi city including street vendors. The school does not have special interventions for children from other states.

Challenges of Schools and Perceived Solutions

No	School	Rank	Challenges	Suggested Solutions
1	GUPS Kandanthara	1	Language constraints - Bengali	Additional bi-lingual teacher (Bengali-Malayalam)
		2	Absenteeism of students	Hostel facility for migrant children
		3	Lack of Aadhaar Cards	Special Aadhaar enrolment drive
2	SN HSS Thrikkannarvattom	1	Language constraints - Hindi	Additional bi-lingual teacher (Hindi-Malayalam)
3	GHSS Elamakkara	1	Language constraints – Mahl (Students from Minicoy Island)	Additional bi-lingual teacher (Mahl-Malayalam)



Other Observations

Migrant families with children come any time during the academic year.

Mallika (in the picture) arrived at Kandanthara from Assam with her parents a week ago. Both her parents got work in a plywood factory. Her mother takes her along to the workplace as there is no other place to leave her. Mallika who was in grade II in Assam does not have an Aadhaar card. The parents wish to admit the kid to school. They have been waiting to glean some money for her books, dress, etc. before she can be admitted to the school.

Children from migrant families, particularly those in high school although enrolled in school drop out and stay at home. However, this varied by the profile of the parents.

In Kandanthara, three children (two boys and a girl) from migrant families who dropped out from various high schools in Perumbavoor, were found. Parents of two of the kids explained that they are hesitant to send the children to the school in the busy city as it is difficult for them to navigate and cross the roads. Absenteeism was not reported as a major issue by schools other than G.U.P.S. Kandanthara



Conclusions

There is a silent exclusion of migrant children in the absence of measures to bridge the language barriers of both the children as well as the teachers.

However, this is minimal when the child is enrolled at young ages, at pre-primary or Grade I.

It is ideal for the children to learn in their mother tongue. In the absence of such opportunities, integration of children coming from other states is a challenge, particularly in the case of children enrolling in Kerala from beyond grade I. Such children tend to get silently excluded in the absence of special efforts to teach them Malayalam language. When the child is enrolled at Grade I or below, he/she along with the native children gets an opportunity to get introduced reading and writing the language.

The visits of migrant families to native place result in long absenteeism which significantly limit the learning outcomes and educational attainment of children.

The trips of migrant families to native place are longer for migrants from beyond south India. Such long gaps during the academic year significantly limit the learning outcomes of children from migrant families. This, coupled with the other constraints of children from migrant families eventually increase their chances of dropping out.



Conclusions

The retention of children from migrant families in school appears to depend on the initiatives of the school as well as the motivation of parents. Older children from poorer families tend to drop out more.

The more the children are enrolled in a government funded school beyond an optimal limit, the less will be the per capita attention from teachers. Children with language constraints, in the absence of supplementary teaching coupled with the inability of parents to help the kids, lag behind and find it difficult to cope with the studies as they move to higher grades. Experience from G.H.S. Binanipuram demonstrates that the special efforts of the school can significantly improve the learning outcomes of children from migrant families. Parents from select regions where dropping out of school at older ages is perceived as normal, are less likely to take steps to bring the children back to school without interventions.

There is only limited information about the barriers of migrant children in the district in accessing education. Comprehensive interventions are yet not in place.

Despite the significant presence of children from migrant families in the district for the past several years, a comprehensive plan to ensure inclusive education for children from migrant families is yet not in place. In the absence of such a plan, resource allocations and programmes have been limited beyond the routine survey of out of school children and appointing resource teachers. It is hoped that the study commissioned by SSA in Ernakulam district to understand the challenges of children of migrant workers will plug these evidence gaps.



Recommendations

Setting up a district level committee to monitor the inclusion of migrant workers: Sustainable actions are imperative to ensure that issue of migrant workers are comprehensively addressed. Setting up a district level committee to monitor the inclusion of migrant workers, with the District Collector as Chairperson and representation from various departments, the private sector as well as the Civil Society can bring in sustainable solutions. The committee can review periodically the status of education, health, digital, legal and financial inclusion of migrant workers and their families and take necessary steps to mainstream the migrant families.

Periodic surveys by Department of Social Justice and SSA: Early interventions have long lasting impact on mainstreaming children of migrant workers. Ensuring that all eligible children of migrant workers, without discrimination, reach Anganwadi or Grade I will not only significantly enhance their likelihood of retention and educational attainment, but also improve their health and wellbeing. In major pockets where migrant workers with families live, the periodic surveys of Anganwadi workers should cover migrant families and ensure that the children reach the Anganwadi or Grade I. Since children come at any time during the academic year, SSA should also undertake quarterly surveys instead of one time survey at the beginning of the academic year.



Recommendations

Learning Malayalam has a pivotal role in enhancing the learning outcomes as well as their larger inclusion in the society: Children's learning Malayalam, beyond enhancing their learning outcomes, can even bridge the communication challenges of parents. Many such children help elders communicate with the natives. Hence, special efforts to teach the children Malayalam may be undertaken by SSA. However, there should not be special schools or exclusive classrooms for children of migrant workers, which can further marginalise these children. Special periods, like the current practice of Arabic classes may be adopted. It is ideal for Kandanthara GUPS to have a teacher who can help the children learn both Bengali and Malayalam. Similar support is required for Hindi-Malayalam communication in S.N.H.S.S. Thrikkannarvattom and Mahl-Malayalam in G.H.S.S. Elamakkara.

Define the scope of work of the additional teachers and provide them decent wages so that they stay:

There is a tendency of entrusting the responsibility of children from migrant families to the additional teachers. The additional teachers should not replace the regular teachers. The role of additional teachers should be teaching the children Malayalam and if necessary the mother tongue of the children. Providing a decent pay to the additional teachers and ensuring timely payments help retention of the teachers. Seeking support from non-profit agencies which can place well qualified and well paid fellows available for one or two years to work in Government funded schools may be a good idea.



Recommendations

Sensitise the teachers to be responsive to the circumstances of children from migrant families: The teachers in these schools have a major role in the inclusion of children from migrant families. Not all teachers are sensitive to the issues of migrant children. A sensitization programme for teachers may be undertaken so that the teachers are more empathetic to the constraints of the children from migrant families and act accordingly.

A district level stakeholder workshop to discuss the findings of the study being conducted by SSA : The SSA has commissioned a study to understand the issues of children from migrants families in the schools in Ernakulam district. This study is expected to plug major knowledge gaps in this area. Based on the evidence from the study, a comprehensive work plan, including further in-depth studies may be developed to address the barriers in accessing quality education for children of migrant workers.

Piloting a bridge classroom and exploring the feasibility of a hostel for disadvantaged children: A bridge classroom to teach the older children arriving with families from other states may be piloted by SSA. This will equip the new comers to pick up the local language and prepare them to enter age appropriate grades after a period of training. The feasibility of a hostel for children from disadvantaged communities, irrespective of their nativity, may be considered.

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