

## Addressing the Covid Learning Gap

### One Day Consultation on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022 in Guwahati

On April 27<sup>th</sup> a Consultation Meeting on Addressing the Covid Learning Gap was organized by the German foundation Childaid Network in Guwahati. Representatives from more than 20 government departments, academic institutions, training agencies and NGOs participated. The participants discussed the impact of the pandemic on education and steps to be taken to address the learning loss.

In the last two years due to two long term lockdowns many students lost nearly two years of schooling. E. g. a child now admitted to class III will have gained only a small percentage of the expected learning outcomes according to the curriculum. Especially children from underprivileged and rural backgrounds struggled to continue learning due to lack of access to digital devices and the severe financial situation of their families.

Especially competencies in foundational literature and numeracy need to be build up quickly to ensure, that children have the chance to follow the content of the next classes. The risk of high school dropout rates is imminent. In line with this, Dr. Martin Kasper, president of Childaid Network who addressed the participants virtually from Germany said: “We need to work hard to avoid a lost generation.”

In two panel discussions participants expressed their advice, that from both sides government and civil society significant efforts need to be made, to address the Covid learning gap.

As nobody can ensure, that the time of lockdowns is over an exchange on experiences from teaching during the pandemic was initiated. Due to the digital divide the stakeholders needed to develop and distribute worksheets, perform extra school open air classes with small groups in rotation and recruit community volunteers. Some of these efforts will be continued even now.

Several participating organizations pointed out, that there is not only a learning gap because of the pandemic. Mr. Ajit Choudhury from Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) emphasized that a learning gap has always been there: “It is inherent to the school system.” However, the situation deteriorated significantly due to the pandemic and now some students forget even what they have learned before. Surveys show that great efforts are needed to improve i. a. foundational literature and numeracy (FLN). Dr. Nirada Devi, the director of the Assam State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) presented material, which will be used soon in all Lower Primary School to improve FLN skills. This will be an ambitious endeavour and to do so, she mentioned: “We are looking forward to support by civil society organizations to implement it on the ground.”



***Dr. Nirada Devi, director of SCERT presenting newly developed learning material***

An alternative academic calendar is already published, which will be followed in a three-month intensive teaching starting with class III. While all agreed that extensive measures must be taken to compensate for the loss of learning, there were differences in strategy: while the government has ambitious plans to catch up within 3 to 5 months, civil society representatives believe that at least a two-year program is needed to bring children back to age-appropriate learning levels.



*Mr. Deep Jyoti Sonu Brahma from F2F, Mr. Md. Azim Ud Doula from Quest Alliance, Mr. Meraj Ahmed (NEAID), Mr. Prithibusan Deka (GVM) and Mr. Atanu Sain (Vikramshila) during the first panel discussion (LTR).*

Similar Mr. Atanu Sain from the Kolkata based training agency Vikramshila presented a model, how to integrate learning gap orientated approaches in the coming years curricula.

Mr. Nilutpal, OSD for Education from the Bodo Territorial Region informed about a long-term initiative in the BTR districts to mentor teaching practise.

Mr. Ajit Choudhury (LLF) pointed out, that to ensure sustainability of efforts a multiannual teacher training process should be discussed.

After the panel discussions the NGOs Aide et Action (AeA) and the Action Northeast Trust (the ant) presented their current projects on learning gaps. Financed by the German government AeA runs a project for 100.000 students in seven districts of Assam. The ant initiated a quality learning program in lower Assam with more than 150 government schools and learning centers.

At the end of the conference participants worked in groups and presented their findings and suggestions to the auditorium.



*Representatives from various agencies and government bodies discuss possible ways to tackle the learning loss of primary school students.*