



# SCHOOL DROPOUT AND RE- ENROLLMENT: CASE STUDIES FROM ASSAM

## PRI - CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT



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Cover page: Re-enrolled Students and SMC,  
Rongkhang VDC, West Karbi Anglong, Assam

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RE- ENROLLMENT:  
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## Chapter 1

# ABSTRACT

This report tries to cover an initiative by the PRI CBO Convergence Project in Assam to address the issue of school dropouts in the Panchayat and VDC areas the project works in. It sheds light on the work done in the field to reenroll the identified dropout children. It mentions the process involved since the beginning of the intervention from mobilisation to data collection and finally to re-enrollment. An attempt to thematically categorise and analyse the causes of dropout amongst students has been made in this report. In addition, the report touches upon the major factors that caused the children to drop out and has attempted to show the intersectionalities within it. Finally, the report unwinds the challenges and gaps that came up during the entire process and ends with few suggestive measures that can increase community participation and convergence with local governance systems to reduce the drop out rates among school children.

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AAP	Annual Action Plan
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BC	Block Coordinator
BPM	Block Project Manager
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CLF	Cluster Level Federation
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
DSR	Draft Status Report
CP	Gram Panchayat
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
LRG	Local Resource Group
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NRO	National Resource Organisation
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
RTE	Right To Education
SHG	Self Help Group
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan
SMC	School Management Committee
USAID	United States Action in Development
VO	Village Organisation
VDC	Village Development Committee
VOCC	Village Organisation Coordination Committee



# PRI CBO Convergence Project

The PRI CBO convergence project envisages a mutually beneficial relationship between the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Community Based Organisation in the process of implementing poverty eradication programmes.

Panchayati Raj institutions came into existence in 1993 through the 73rd constitutional amendment with a mandate of addressing rural poverty and ensuring social justice. The SHG network that has emerged alongside has been a huge social capital for the Gram Panchayat to work with in order to facilitate rural development. Recognising the need for an effective functional relationship between PRIs, especially Gram Panchayat and the SHGs of women, in particular the Village Organisations (VO), the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and Ministry of Panchayat Raj (MoPR) came up with guidelines for increasing convergence between the institutions of local government and the organisations of poor.

Kudumbashree NRO with the experience of converging Panchayati Raj Institutions with the SHG network in Kerala was mandated to support states interested in implementing the model. The PRI CBO Convergence project is based on the premise that a synergy between both these institutions can be mutually beneficial in addressing the issue of poverty for the larger goal of socio economic development of the village.

Consequently, Kudumbashree NRO entered into an MoU with Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission with regard to the convergence project in the year 2014. In the pilot phase, the project was initiated in two Blocks namely, Laharighat and Bajiagaon Blocks of Morigaon and Nagaon Districts respectively.

The initial phase of the project had Mentors (community resource persons from Kerala) establish relations with all stakeholders. The mentors also helped in selecting and providing handholding support to the first set of cadres - LRGs. Post the first phase, the project expanded to two other Blocks in Nagaon and Sonitpur in the second phase of 2017. In Nagaon it expanded to Barhampur and Lawkhowa Block and in Sonitpur District, Dhekiajuli and Borcholla Block. The major activities remained the same, but the handholding support from the Kerala Mentors reduced and the Internal mentors took the centre stage. A major achievement in this phase was the active role played by the VOCC

in establishing an efficient and effective relation with the Panchayat and Departments. It spearheaded a range of innovative activities such as model kitchen garden initiative, female Literacy campaign, re enrolment of drop out students, to name a few from the field which gave extraordinary results. In addition, the second phase focused on the GPDP and the preparation of poverty reduction plans by the CBO fold VPRP. For this, more than 3000 SHG members were trained. A large number of demands from the SHG fold were consolidated by the VOCC and submitted strategically during the three GPDP Gram Sabhas. A major portion of the work got incorporated and materialised on field such as demand for roads, culverts, community hall and even Children's park.

As a result, the Project underwent an expansion to 19 Blocks of 10 Districts across Assam during 2019-21. 2 of these Districts are under the purview of Schedule VI. An exclusive part of this year's GPDP were Social Development plans which have been accepted in Gram Sabhas and are in the process of getting incorporated as "No Cost / Low Cost" plans of the Panchayat. The project by initiating many activities with regards to entitlements and schemes, have tried to achieve few of the goals mentioned under sustainable Development Goals-SDGs.

# Introduction

This report attempts to highlight how the Project tried to intervene in re-enrolling the students who had been dropping out from schools by activating the CBO, the School Management Committee and the Panchayats. It will also touch upon the factors that the team observed while consolidating data, the reasons for dropout and the intervention plan adopted for each student. While charting out the intervention process, key gaps, which made it difficult to work, have also been highlighted. Towards the end of the report, few suggestive measures with regards to convergence between the CBO network, Gram Panchayat/VDC and the education department in filling the gaps have been detailed.

As we know, education is the key to accelerate economic growth and social well being. In India, under various constitutional provisions and five year plans, educational facilities have been expanded to all levels. According to article 45 of the constitution of India, “the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” As per the 93rd amendment the constitution, elementary education has become the fundamental right of every child, but still millions of children are out of school.

The District Institute of Secondary Education (DISE) data states that Grade 5 records the highest dropout (15.9%). Grade 5 dropout exceeds dropout in other primary and upper primary grades by 53% (grade 1) to 60% (grade 6). Grade 6 and 7 dropout rates (5.5% and 5.8%, respectively) are lower than those of the primary grades, suggesting that students are less likely to dropout at higher grades. A number of studies conducted by USA ID have stated that the leading causes of drop outs involve economic factors, academic factors, chronic absenteeism, disease, migration, conflict to enlist a few. A recent report tabled in Rajya Sabha also highlighted that Assam has the highest rate of drop out with 33.7% children dropping out in secondary schools in Assam and out of them a record 35.2% being girls.

Thus, this report, based on the field interventions done in Assam across 8 districts : Biswanath, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Hojai, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Tinsukia and West Karbi Anglong, will try to add to the existing knowledge on the factors of drop out in rural Assam and will suggest how it can be tackled at the local level.

The interventions conducted under the Project were completely community led, with mentoring and suggestions from the existing resources of the Project. In this report the factors contributing to drop out and interventions in the field will be looked through five themes.



*Image 1. Discussion about reenrollment with SMC in Raidongia GP, Nagaon District*

# Process Adopted

Keeping in mind the aforementioned premise of the Project, during the inception of the third phase in Assam, it was decided that this phase will give emphasis to uplifting the social development indicators in the intervention Panchayats and VDCs.

The discussion of social issues among SHG women initiated a conversation about concerns such as drop outs, illiteracy, violence against women and the need for a strategy to work around these issues. A prominent issue that emerged was that of school dropouts and the vigour with which the community followed it up, helped activated the School Management Committee. Moreover, many CBO federations also enjoyed taking up the responsibility of following up with these students and undertaking resource mobilisation to re-enroll students who had dropped out solely due to economic reasons. It is essential to understand the rationale behind initiating a data collection process to identify students who had dropped out. Only concrete data can enable effective interventions at the local level and this process of data collection roped in several stakeholders including SHG Members, VO Members and School Management Committees.

However, the larger question of bringing Panchayats in the loop and its convergence with education departments and CBO federation was left unanswered due to lack of time and resources in the second phase of the project.

Thus, since the beginning of the third phase, a conscious step was taken to mobilise the CBO network to help identify the students who had dropped out. Once the cadres were selected across all Panchayats and VDCs, it was decided that a campaign within the Gram Panchayat and VDCs focusing on social development indicators and school dropouts be conducted from the month of October to December 2019 and subsequently in 2020.

This was also done to ensure that the cadres as well as the SHG network understands their responsibility not only as community cadres and members of the CBO network but also as citizens of their respective Gram Panchayat and VDC. As a result, the LRGs along with the CLF and VO leaders were assigned the task of collecting data on the drop out students within the age group of 6-18. It was done after orienting the CLF Executive Committee members on the roles and responsibilities of CLF as well as VO subcommittees. In a month's time, with the support of LRGs, data were compiled and prioritized. Emphasis was laid on immediate dropouts i.e. students who had dropped out within

the previous 1-3 years from then. The data collection was planned in such a manner that ready data be available by the first GPDP first Gram Sabha of 2nd of October 2019. For the collection of these data, the VO leaders were entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring and supervising the activities in their SHG. In few GPs the VOs came upfront and helped in the collection of these data. In most of the GPs, lack of awareness in SHG members towards collectivisation resulted in weak support. The LRGs nevertheless went forward with collecting data and to their bewilderment, there were large number of drop out students in the intervention GPs and VDC.

The LRGs along with leaders of the CBO network negotiated for placing an agenda in the Gram Sabha. They decided to discuss the submission of data on social issues in the first GPDP Gram Sabha, scheduled on 2nd October,2019. At a few places, the GPs/VDC agreed eagerly while in other places, the LRGs had to face a backlash the response being that a Panchayat does not have much say in a school's functioning, nor do they have any budget to assist them. Finally, with the support of Kerala mentors and constant negotiation, the data was presented and submitted in all the GPs/VDC in the first Gram Sabha. It was a major dent in the existing governance system where agendas are generally fixed at the top most level.

To address challenges and resistance to the initiative, the CBO prepared a social development plan proposal that clearly stated the role of each stake holder involved. This effort by the CBO was well appreciated by the officials in the intervention GPs / VDC. It was submitted under the "Low Cost No Cost" heads of the GPDP plan. This was done to ensure that both the GPs/VDCs and the CBO network can work around this issue which deeply impacted the social development indicators of a Panchayat or VDC. These plans were presented by the VO members who were trained by the cadres of the Project. The consultative meetings between the Panchayat/VDC and the CBO acted as a platform where further discussion on such social development issues could take place. Though all the 78 GPs 3 VDCs submitted the proposal, it got accepted and supported in 50 GPs and 3 VDCs. The SHG federation, saw it as a major achievement but it also highlighted the GPs and VDCs low interest and initiative towards working on developmental issues with the CBO. Once this data was shared with the GP committee and SHG members during Gram Sabha and other informal meetings , it came to light that the GP and SHG members were either unaware about the existence of drop outs in such large numbers or did not know how to support such students. The way forward for the LRGs and CBO network was not easy.



Image 2: Introduction of the newly enrolled students, Khalisavita GP, Goalpara District



Image 3. Submission of Drop Out Proposal on 3rd December 2019, Third GPDP Gram Sabha, Mukthivar GP, Dhemaji District

## Process Flow

# Re-enrolling School Drop-Outs

## A step-by-step guide (1/2)

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Orientation to Local Resource Groups through Internal Mentors on the issue of School Drop Outs and its significance

Discussion with the CBO Network - especially the CLF about the school drop out status and consequent interventions

Data collection and Compilation of School Drop Outs by Local Resource Persons and Village Organization leaders

Mandatory Inclusion of this data in the Village Poverty Reduction Plans of 2020-21 as Social Development Plans

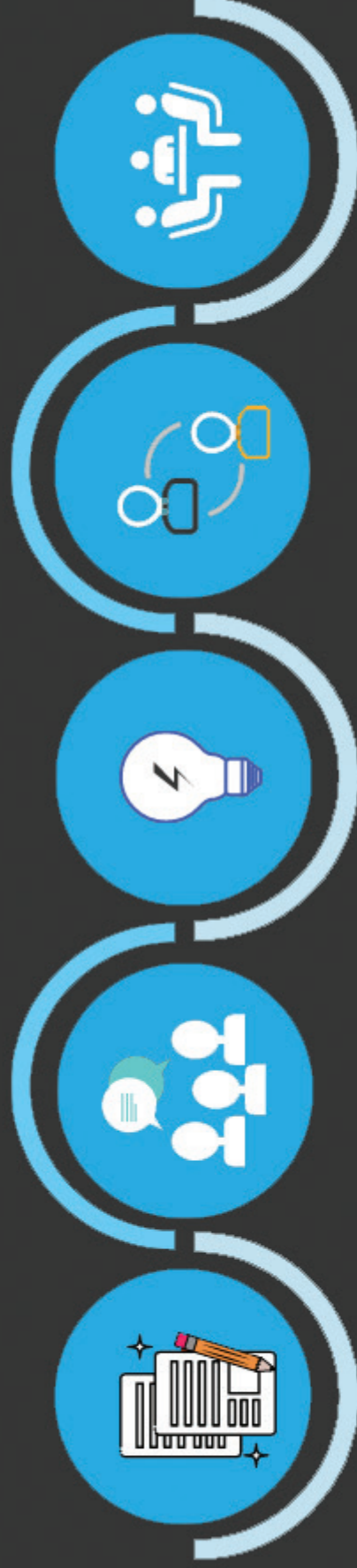
Making A Project Plan for Drop Out Students and submitting it in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Gram Sabha



## Process Flow

# Re-enrolling School Drop-Outs

## A step-by-step guide (2/2)



Integration of Drop Out Plan under "Low Cost No Cost" Plans of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)

Meetings with Panchayat Members about dealing with Drop Outs as an issue and allocation of resources to work on it

Planning of targeted interventions for immediate drop-outs with the VO and CLF Members

Meeting with parents of dropped out children to ensure the sustainability of readmission

Meetings with School Management Committees for the Re-enrollment of targeted status

# Glance through the Re enrolled Students

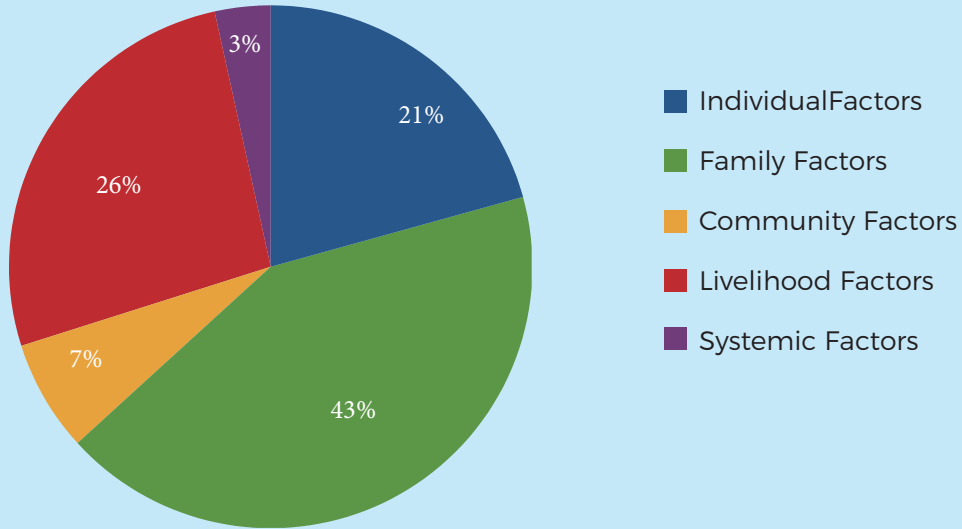
This particular section focuses on the district wise re enrolment data of the children as well as the underlying factors of their drop out. The data furnished in this section are with regard to the total number of children re enrolled by the month of March 2020.

Table 1: District Wise detail of re enrolled Children

District	Drop Outs re enrolled
Biswanath	7
Dhemaji	14
Goalpara	15
Hojai	8
Karbi Anglong	13
Nagaon	24
Tinsukia	29
West Karbi Anglong	17
Total	128

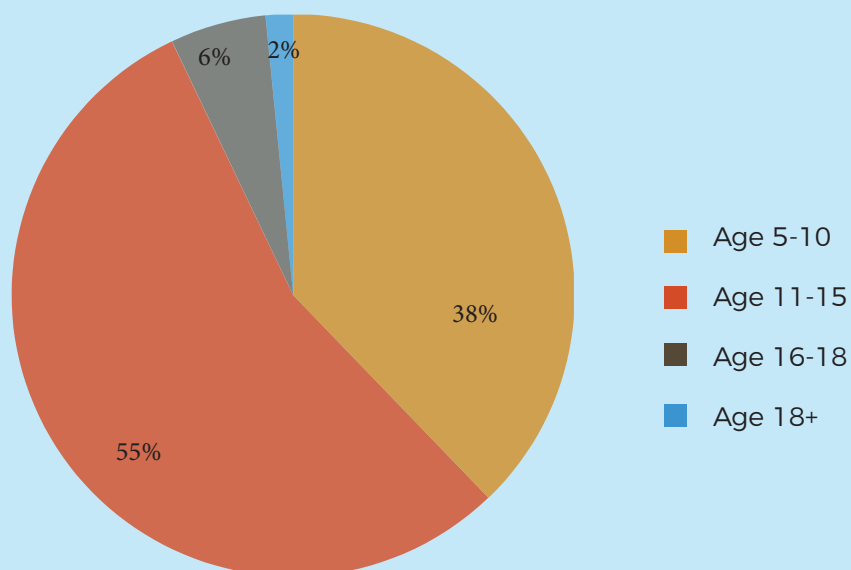
Before understanding the explanation of the causal factors and interventions planned in the field, a pie chart below will try to depict the five themes individual factors, family factors, livelihood factors, community factors and systemic factors due to which the children dropped out at the first place. All these themes are explained in detail in the forthcoming sections.

**Diagram 1:**  
Thematic division of reasons for drop out



As the diagram clearly depicts, the main cause identified for the children dropping out of schools has been family related factors. A total 128 children were reenrolled and 43% of these children have dropped out due to problems within the family such as single parents not being able to dedicate time towards investing in their child's education or educational needs, the burden of household chores falling upon the children or even the fact that the sudden death of the immediate family member has resulted in the child being the sole bread winner. Similarly, 3% of the cases have come about as a result of systemic faults such as complete lack of knowledge with regard to admission procedures, teacher absenteeism and even low student teacher ratio.

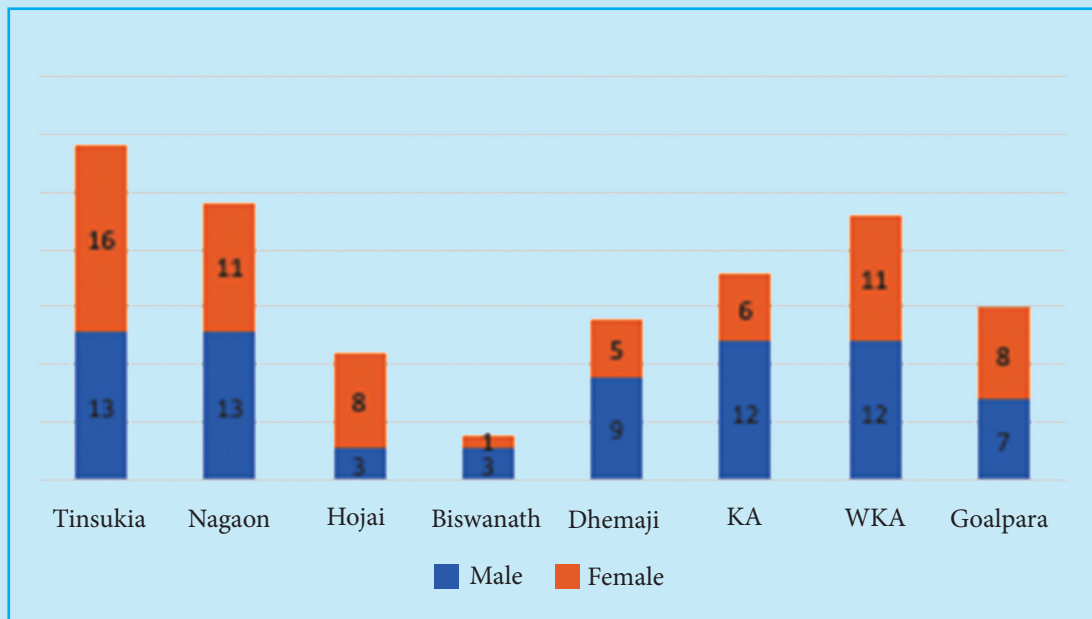
**Diagram 2.**  
Age wise segregation of reenrolled students



In addition to analysing the reasons behinds drop out, it is equally important to understand the age at which the students were re enrolled. As the intervention was planned with immediate drop outs i.e., students who left school in the recent 3 years from when the data were collected, it was evident that most of the dropouts were between the age of 10 to 15 years. Diagram 2 shows that 55% of the children who had been re enrolled were between the age group 11-16 and 38% between the age 5-10 years with only 6% above 16 years. An interesting fact is that 2% of the student reenrolled were 18 years and above. These students, even after dropping out of schools for more than 5 years due to family factors, felt motivated to go back to schools. The students themselves and their parents were unaware about the possibility of re enrolment. The SMC also welcomed the decision of these children to reenroll. While analysing the data, it was also evident that many children between the age bracket 5-10, dropped out when they were 9 to 10 years old.

**Diagram 3.**  
Gender Segregation of reenrolled students

## Gender Segregation of Re-enrolled Students



Thus, such children mostly were drawn to family responsibilities and forms of informal livelihood at a very young age; hindering a child's education at a very young age.

The gender segregation of the enrolled students show that girl child getting re enrolled in schools is much lesser than boys. A total of 72 male students got re enrolled with a total of 66 female students getting re enrolled

# Thematic Analysis through Case stories

When the issue of school dropout was taken up as an area of intervention, a set of factors were kept in mind. This session will highlight the themes around dropping out and the intervention planned for each theme. During the time of consolidating the reports and extracting the themes, it was interesting to see thematic intersectionalities and the way the themes overlapped with each other. The framework used for analysing the factors as well as interventions taken have been broadly categorised into five broad themes under which there are the sub themes. The table listed below has highlighted the broad themes. Each thematic area will be supported by a case story.

**Table 2 :**  
**Thematic areas**

4.1 Individual Factors
4.2. Family Factors
4.3. Community Factors
4.4. Livelihood Factors
4.5. Systemic Factors

## 1. Individual Factors

Case stories where factors for dropping out were intrinsic to the child's preference and interests have been categorised under this theme. Interactions in the field with the children helped us narrow down on a few sub themes which have been discussed below.

- Children not interested in the formal education set up: The formal education system was monotonous for children and was a factor to drop out.
- Difficulty in grasping classes: A set of students, faced difficulty in understanding the classes well, when compared to other students of the class. Their underperformance mostly led to them feeling left out and ashamed, forcing them to drop out.

- Illness or disease suffered by the child: Disease or disability became an important factor of absenteeism in schools. With no support/remedial classes in place, it acted as a push factor for dropping out. The case story from field mentioned below tries to highlight in detail the theme and how it led to students dropping out

Mirinda a child from Langhin VDC, Langsomepi Block lives in a family of four and both her parents were farmers. She has one sibling. Mirinda in class VIIth faced some health issues and due to unavailability of good health care facilities, she had to miss a lot of classes. In the absence of any remedial class, she wasn't able to catch up leading to deterioration in her performance. Slowly she became demotivated and stopped going to school. After leaving the school she did not engage in any kind of other work and lacked the motivation to rejoin the school. Her parents also did not convince her, because for them, Mirinda's health was important. Absence of any intervention from the health department and schools to help Mirinda, led to Mirinda dropping out eventually.

In the field, intervention with children who had dropped out due to individual factors demanded sensitivity and transparent communication both with the child and their parents. Intervention examples showed that students and parents at times just required a nudge from the community leaders and social support. In almost all the cases the LRGs and VO/SHG members intervened by maintaining a chain of communication with the child and the child's family. Whenever the child felt demotivated, the parents were asked to deal with the child patiently and give them the space to decide for themselves. In a lot of cases the LRGs or VO leaders and SHG members accompanied the child to school to develop a bond and communication and engaged in repeated followups.

Take for instance, Manoj's case in Dhemaji. He had dropped out of class 6. He had no particular interest in education and felt that migration in search of a better livelihood would help him fend for himself and his family better. LRGs, in his case, met with him on several occasions and tried to make him understand that with education he could get better jobs near his home or even in other cities by giving examples of people from their own village. They also reminded him of the good time he used to have with his friends and how these friendships can be very helpful in the future too.

Whenever the LRGs intervened, the basic tenet of child rights which talks about a child's interest were followed. Each and every child was counselled and the SMC was also brought into the loop by the LRGs and VO leaders. The SMC was sensitized about the situation of the child. In many cases it was requested that the child be given special attention at school which increased the interest and also helped sustain the attendance rates.



*Image 4. Discussion by LRG, IMentor and Mentor with the family members of Drop Out children Ranthali GP, Nagaon District.*



*Image 5. Re-enrollment at school in Sutargaon GP, Hojai District*

## 2. Family Factors

Factors such as the structure of the family, the socio economic status of the family members, the support from family members for the child's education have played a decisive role in contributing to students dropping out from school. Interaction with the families revealed that the lack of social support and a rigid education system have contributed to this. The sub themes that emerged under this theme are:

- Single parent as sole bread earner: Field interactions brought forward that families where there was only one parent who was a bread earner were more vulnerable. Their children got less attention and were more likely to drop out.
- Separation of parents: In few cases, the children had to face uncertainty in terms of their permanent residence and were also shifted to their relatives' place. In such situations, the child faced difficulty in adjustment affecting the child's performance.
- Mental / Physical illness among family members: Families where one parent had disease or mental illness led to a large chunk of limited resources being spent in treatment, not leaving much for the child's education.
- Child as a bread winner in the family: Examples from field showed that meagre income, informal work pushed the children at a young age to contribute to the family income, sidelining their own education.
- Burden of household chores due to financial constraints The field interactions highlighted that children of whom both the parents worked in the informal sector, were more prone to be a primary care giver at a young age, affecting their education.
- Family's disinterest in Childs education: Families who were unaware of the benefits of education, did not show much interest in re-enrolling their child.
- Resettlement due to floods: Loss of livelihood, property, institutions of care and even basic identity proofs played a major role in child's education getting affected.

The case story discussed below will substantiate these factors.

Katmoni is a resident of Pokabam gaon in Baruahulla GP of Tinsukia District. At the age of 12, after she had to quit school, she rejoined the school in 2018 but could only continue for two months because of a series of unfortunate incidents. Her father fell ill for a prolonged period which in turn resulted in deteriorating socio-economic conditions of her household. Katmoni was left with no choice but to engage in labour work to support the family. As her father's ailment worsened, her mother became busy with overseeing his health conditions and eventually, had to step out of the house to earn a livelihood. Her father was also addicted to alcohol, which made the situation much more gruesome. Amidst all this, no importance could be given to education. Katmoni also has an ailment in her ear, which also led her to leave the school after two months. Even though her father recovered after a year, there have still been no talks of her readmission and more than two years have passed so on. Since then, Katmoni just engages in house chores and education sits as a distant dream.



The case story from Tinsukia district traces the factors in the life of a girl, whose family conditions forced her to drop out. As the story highlights dropping out of a child was closely related to the family's socio-economic status. It also was dependent on who was the primary care giver of the family and it was a single parent household. A large number of dropouts were from families where both the parents were daily wage earners and the child had to look after the family needs by engaging in work or house chores.

These were the most difficult to intervene. In such cases, the LRGs communicated with the child's parents and counselled them on the importance of education. Taking into consideration each family's individual situation, further help was suggested. Families in which young children had to be looked after were asked to seek help from the Anganwadi Centre. Also, in cases of families in which the parents could not look after or monitor the child's schooling, community help was taken.

Like in one of the cases of Hojai District, a child name Junmoni had dropped out. As the parents were not aware of how education has the potential to reap benefits for their child, when the LRGs visited the family, they realized that the family was not very keen on Junmoni pursuing her education. LRGs immediately understood that the family needed to be counselled. They cited examples of children who have been re enrolled and were doing well. The role of education in playing a key role in shaping the future of a child was emphasised. They also mentioned that perks of being enrolled in a school such as regular health check ups and adolescent awareness camps. They tried to make the parents understand that not providing basic education to their children will keep them deprived of many benefits, including government scholarships. With the persistent efforts from VO members and LRG's, her parents agreed to re enroll her. The LRGs also tried to make sure that the child was able to get support from the Panchayat and the education department. Thus, with a bit of handholding support and transparent communication, Junmoni was re enrolled back in the school.



*Image 6. SHG Members with reenrolled students, Doboka GP, Hojai District*



*Image 7. Re-enrollment of students, Dhansiri VDC, Karbi Anglong District*

### 3. Community Factors

Case stories where factors such as bullying, shaming, harassment on economic, social, behavioural reasons leading drop out have been categorised under this theme. Ordeals inflicted by peers, society/ community also resulted in reduced self confidence, self esteem and underperformance by many students, consequently leading to increased drop outs. Interaction with families revealed that the parents themselves were ashamed of their child's declining performance which worsened the situation and led to him/ her helplessly quitting the formal education. The sub themes under the broader theme are

Social stigma on children's failure in school education: Few children dropped out due to the stigma associated to their poor performance or an activity that they might have indulged in.

Bullying and stigma on child's socio-economic condition in schools: Few children felt ashamed going to school, because their parents could not afford a pair of shoes or a bag like their friends.

The case story mentioned below from Dhemaji district unfolds the factors better.

Luhit Gogoi, a boy of 13 years of age from Dhemaji district has 1 sister and 2 brothers. His parents are agricultural labourers and toil hard day and night. Luhit was decent in studies and was regular to school, until an incident deeply impacted him. At a very young age, Luhit was blamed by one of his neighbours of stealing from their shop. The news spread like wild fire and people started teasing him and calling him names which made him uncomfortable. For many it might seem like a small issue, but for a child of 13, it was a setback. He was embarrassed to attend school as his friends would also tease him and did not even join any social gatherings. Slowly this led to Luhit, losing interest in education and eventually, dropping out.

As the case story explains, Luhit who was a son of agricultural labourers was accused by one of his neighbours of stealing from their shop. This story had spread within the community to his school where he was shamed by his peers. This led to Luhit feeling demotivated and he stopped believing in himself. Once the LRGs and VO members started talking to the child and met the guardian of the child, they found that the guardian were interested in readmitting the child. They first tried to build a rapport with the child. When the LRGs and VO members enquired the reason for dropping out, he mentioned the story of his friends teasing him and made it clear that he would not go back to school. The LRGs then made an effort in talking with the SMC and conveyed the fact that students have to be sensitised about bullying and the teachers also supported the idea. The LRGs and VO members convinced Luhit to get himself reenrolled and they also gave him confidence that no one would tease him any further.

They motivated him to give it a try and if in a month from then, he still had the same thoughts, they would think of something else. Presently, the VO has also planned to arrange a sensitisation class on bullying and how it affects school children. In many other cases the LRGs with VO and SHG members have also mobilised the resources for students to rejoin schools across all the 9 Districts. This was done in situations in which the family lacked the resources to do. So help was taken from the Panchayats, VOs, Gaon Buras and school itself, highlighting an integral role that a CBO or the immediate community can play in situations in which the families are deprived. The intervention highlights that a holistic approach can play a crucial role in getting children their basic right to education.



Image 8. Registering the name of six drop out students, Tokowbari GP, Biswanath District



Image 9. Registering the name of drop out students, Kakkonathar, Tinsukia

## 4. Livelihood Factors

An interesting finding was the close relationship between the status of employment of the family and a child's presence in school. It was observed that most of the parents who worked as daily wage earners, landless farmers, marginal farmers or having meagre resources, considered education secondary, due to their socio-economic conditions. Case stories where such factors related to employment or livelihood issues of the family has led to students dropping out of school are categorised under the themes mentioned below. The sub themes that emerged out of the livelihood theme are:

- Daily wage earner: Most of the children had dropped out as both their parents were working as daily wage earners. Absence of anyone to look after house engagements, and younger siblings contributed significantly to the decision of dropping out.
- Landless or marginal farmers with meagre income: Given to the seasonality of work, small farmers had meagre income to support education of their children. Children in few of these families had to provide support in livelihood activities.

Case story discussed below highlights how informal occupation can add to the vagaries of families without any social support.

Padumoni Pator who is 13 years of age from Nagaon District had dropped out in class 5. His parents are daily wage workers and his elder brother had also dropped out from school 7 years ago to support his family and started working as a daily wage worker. This led to creating a situation where Padumoni had to stay back home and look after the needs of his family. Padumoni's parents and brother go to work, he goes for fishing and gets fish for his house. Thus, an informal livelihood, which depends on the seasonal availability of work does not give the family enough social security to send the child to school.

Intervention for generating sustainable livelihoods did not come easy. However, there were a few cases in which the community managed a way out. Look at Pooja from Dhemaji District for instance dropped out as her mother could not afford her education. Being a single mother, she had several other pressing needs to cater to. As Puja's mother was within the VO fold, the other VO members were familiar with this particular situation and understood the depth of the problem. As a first step, VO members along with the LRGs approached the Gaon Bura to understand the possibility of getting a contract for Puja's mother as a cook in the school to increase her earnings and security visàvis her current job.

The Gaon Bura agreed to the same and got a job offer for Puja's mother. When Puja's mother got to know about the same, she was happy and she requested the VO's help in re-enrolling her child as now both of them could go to school together and return together. During the meeting with SMC, the school headmaster also took assurance of looking after Puja and helping her in the lessons that she missed out on. This highlights that the LRGs not only thought about livelihood in its singularity but tried to make it more impactful by linking it to school. This, in a way, solved two problems: drop out of her daughter and also ensuring quality food for other children of the school.



Image 10. Submission of Proposal on School Drop outs, Kalabari GP, Biswanath District



Image 11. Re-enrolled child with School Headmistress, Moridhal GP, Dhemaji District

## 5. Systemic Factors

Factors relating to lack of awareness or institutional support from the schools often lead to students dropping out. Such factors have been categorized here. Though mostly the GPs and schools were enthusiastic about reenrollment, but the education departments did not show much interest in supporting these students.

A topdown approach from departments led to most of these departments (working at the Panchayat level) waiting for orders from their seniors to initiate any intervention. A close look at sub themes will help get a better understanding of the contributing factors.

- Lack of community ownership of quality education in schools:
- Absence of any system in place to ensure regular monitoring of schools and the quality of education, led to a poor quality of pedagogy adding to dropping out of students.

Lack of awareness among community members about admission procedures: In few cases the child was not re enrolled because the parents were not aware of the process of re-enrollment.

Absence of nonformal education or pedagogy: A uniform approach to cater to all the students without recognising that the needs of each student are diverse. In addition, ignorance towards the idea that students with special needs and the ones who are differently abled need to be taught differently.

Discussed below is a case story which will help substantiate the aforementioned points.

Himani Khan who is a 15 year old and from Goalpara district was studying in class 4 when she dropped out. Her family is comparatively in a better off position economically. Her dropping out was mainly a result of ignorance among her family members towards the importance of education. At a young age her reluctance in going to school was taken very seriously by her parents. Her parents were not aware about RTE or the procedure for re admission. Moreover, being a girl child, education was considered to be secondary. Her parents are marginal farmers, and she has a younger brother. Her parents, did not have an understanding about how education could benefit her child and hence did not even push hard to get her daughter re enrolled creating a huge gap of some 4-5 years in her formal schooling time

Interventions involving such systemic factors, were approached in a multipronged manner. Like in one of the cases in Tinsukia district, Katmoni had to quit her school at 12 years of age due to unforeseen family issues. She wanted to continue studying, but her father fell terminally ill and her mother had to spend a major portion of money on his medical needs. This case caught the eye of the LRGs. After due discussion with Katmoni, her parents and the VO leaders as well as consultation with School committee and teachers, official intimation was given to the BPM & BCs, ward members and President. It was finally decided that Kasturba High School, which is a residential school run for needy students from marginalized backgrounds, would be the best option for her.

Furthermore, a School Leaving Certificate was arranged for the student since it was mandatory for re admission in the new school. A Drop - Out Certificate was also arranged by the LRG members where the Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) official helped them to procure it from the District SSA office in Tinsukia. Alongside, a letter from the District level Education department was also required in order to prove her eligibility for readmission, which was also procured. Following all these procedures, on 4th March 2020, Katmoni was reenrolled into the Borsapori Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in 6th standard, in the presence of her mother. The school is a fully funded government residential school for girls where all expenses are looked after by the Government. Along with the school curriculum, vocational training such as cutting, tailoring, embroidery etc. are also provided to the students. This clearly shows that when all the stakeholders including the child, her parents, the CBO structure, local governance system and line department came together, the intervention was made possible.

An intervention will be sustainable when all stakeholders consciously take part or take responsibility for the problems and can work with one another to solve the problem without an external force. Education department, faculty at local school, SMC, Gaon Buras and elders of the village, cadre of the project, line departments were some of the stakeholders whom the community approached while intervening with various cases. In certain cases, Headmaster, SMC helped in counselling the parents and students and helped the community and families in formalities for reenrolment. Panchayats, SMC, Headmasters also extended monetary and material support to many families.



Image 12.

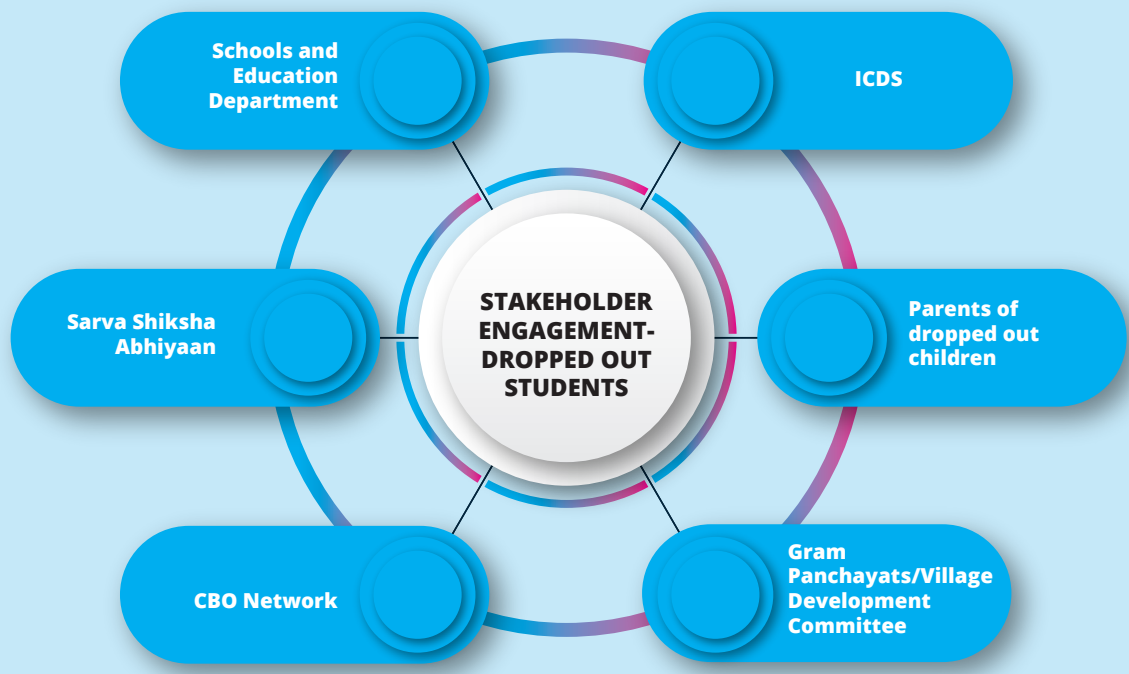
*Re-enrolled Child receiving books from teacher in Kakopathar GP, Tinsukia District*



# Areas of Improvement

While intervening with cases and engaging in communication with the child and other stakeholders like schools, SMCs, the education department and the parents to understand the causal factors of drop out and plan an intervention, several gaps emerged which are important to highlight. The gaps which are listed here are mostly the ones which do not require huge funds, to be addressed these gaps emerged due to a weak operational mechanism with the departments. Also, due to centralised systems in place at the village and Panchayat level, the local governance systems do not get the autonomy to take decisions for emerging issues on their own. Some of the issues are.

- CBO's Social Action Subcommittees in Assam have enormous scope to work on social development indicators within their village/Panchayat.
- Regular opening of AWC, and expansion of AWC as community led creche centres where young and infant children can be taken care of reduces the risk of repetitive dropping out.
- Dedicated work can be done to enhance the awareness among the local governance system and the CBO about maintaining a data base on social indicators like drop outs to make evidence based plans for Panchayat development.
- Increased handholding support from trained teachers and field workers under the education department, to support families regarding scholarships, options of open schooling etc. This kind of support should be extended to families where intersectionality in factors like caste, class, livelihood opportunities have led to drop outs and such support can reduce the risk considerably.
- Panchayat's financial or decision making autonomy to intervene in social issues which are contextual to their Panchayat was limited in Assam.
- The education department's capacity to converge with the existing CBO structure for monitoring the quality of education in schools and child enrolment retention rate was weak at the village level.
- The CBOs frail capacity to act as pressure groups for improving the service delivery also came to light.
- Increased sensitisation and training for school teachers with regards to identifying students at the risk of dropping out and following up with them can go a long way in retaining school children .
- Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) there are cluster coordinators in place, who are field level functionaries of the education department.
- Outreach of these functionaries has to be increased to increase their visibility with the Panchayat and the community
- At a macro level, sensitivity in policy making for children with disability, children with diseases, children coming from deprived background has to be given priority.
- SSA and Right to Education Act (RTE) need to be all encompassing and not limited to the age of 14 years to avoid dropping out at a crucial age.



# Suggestive Measures

- CBOs and their subcommittees' capacity can be built in identifying the drop out students and ensuring their re-enrollment.
- Existing community cadres and CBO leaders can work around providing transparent communication to family members regarding the importance of education and can connect them better with Panchayats and Departments.
- CBOs and Panchayat can explore alternative education pattern for children above the age of 14 years, children from economically and socially deprived backgrounds and children who have dropped out for more than five years.
- Ensuring participation of CBO in SMCs can be effective and quality of services can be improved.
- Ensuring follow up by school authorities when a child is absent.
- Departments can work around making plans for drop out students at individual level with the local governance system.
- The social development vertical of SRLMs can consciously focus on training SHGs to work on issues that improve the Human Development Index of Panchayats.
- A data base of children who have dropped out should be maintained and continuously updated by Panchayats and CBO.
- Awareness camps on RTE for both children and parents are essential in an interactive manner.
- Convergence with departments like Social Welfare Department under which Anganwadi centres are maintained. Anganwadi Centre can reduce the burden for families who have small children and are daily wage earners.
- A holistic attempt needs to be made to emphasise non formal education.
- Alternate livelihood interventions can be initiated under day care services in which panchayat's role can be crucial. This can help the daily wage earners and farmers.
- In many countries and even in India, a method has been developed called "early warning system" where a student's performance, attendance, behaviour is analysed to identify students at risk and can be introduced to pay special attention on vulnerable students who are prone to dropping out.
- Education, Gender, Disability etc. should be made a primary focus in GPDP Plan Preparations in the Panchayats.

# Challenges and Limitations

The PRI-CBO Convergence Project, while working with children who had dropped out of schools, faced umpteen challenges. Firstly, in the field, the challenge was faced during data collection and segregating the data for re-enrollment. Children who had dropped out for more than five years, re-enrolling them was not sustainable or supported by the authorities. Thus, with the existing limitations, the interventions were first panned out with only immediate drop outs. Even within these immediate drop outs, re-enrollment for children above 14 years of age was difficult. As the RTE Act mentions free and compulsory education for children from 6-14 years of age, children beyond that age from deprived families had to face difficulties during re-enrollment as they were unable to pay the fee. Specially children who were in the IXth and Xth standard were denied re-enrollment on administrative issues like registration for exams and overall school performance. Secondly, it was difficult to intervene in situations in which children came from economically and socially deprived backgrounds, like tea garden workers and daily wage earners, and from families where parents were facing issues of alcoholism or mental illness. For families who fell in the vulnerable category, it was difficult to collaborate with Panchayats and Departments. The Panchayats lacked sensitivity and capacity as well as financial powers to take up intervention for children of families from vulnerable background.

The schools and the departments at block level to a large extent were also apprehensive towards accepting the number of drop outs due to the non existence of such a precedent in many schools of respective GPs/ VDCs in their database. This was a hurdle in initiating re-enrollment There were of handholding support.

During the Gram Sabha, the proposals which were submitted to the GP and VDC for intervention were discussed. It wasn't easy to get the plans incorporated in the AAP as well as the five year DSR. Most of the GPs claimed that the issues weren't in their jurisdiction.

The project also feels that intersectionality within each case was so distinctly visible, that the intervention of re-enrollment was not always enough. The vicious cycle of poverty can again force the same children to drop out. Though the CBO network and community cadres along with SMC has been sensitised, there is always the risk of falling out that persists until the structural issues are not intervened. The project tried to converge with the school, Panchayat and existing departments but there is more scope left to take up targeted interventions by the local governance systems and line departments in place.

Thus, an important aspect to understand was that no factor could be seen in singularity. While talking to each and every student, families of those children and stakeholders at school, local governance system and departments, intersectionalities were visible more vividly. A child who was a son/daughter of a landless farmer not only dropped out because of meagre resources but also due to lack of social support for such families. Hence, a major learning was that intervention cannot be planned with a single points strategy.

# Conclusion

The report highlights multiple factors that contribute to the dropping out of children. Intervention and attention to education in rural India remains a gap filling exercise for the government, where optics of infrastructure are still given attention to but quality of education dispersed and the quality and quantity of teachers allocated is minimal and ignored. The Project learnt a great deal while working with these students and the community along with the local governance structures. Structures about the circumstances under which many children leave schools, both forcibly or voluntarily. Mr. Krishna Kumar (former Director, NCERT) once said, *“A national picture for School dropout cannot be created, through mathematical aggregation or otherwise, because of wide regional variation.”*

Hence, with this report we have tried to categorise the variation of causes of drop out we have seen in our intervention panchayats and VDCs specific to Assam. Even though 5 factors have been mentioned and emphasised on and each case study categorised under them, but actually no factor could be seen in singularity. Intersectionality in factors was vivid. For instance, if the child had a younger sibling, AWC not being seen as an option for intervention or absence of day care facility increased the pressure on the child the drop out. If schools had maintained an active SMC and updated records, dropout children could be tracked and re-enrolled with more ease and prompt involvement from community. Moreover SMCs can prepare comprehensive school Management plans tht address issues of dropout.

According to the statewise figures tabled in the Lok Sabha in February 2020, Assam tops the nation in school dropout. The Project intervention area for School dropout cover a very small portion of the vast State but clearly displays the willingness of the community to improve their children's future in how ever small way possible.

The key gaps mentioned in the report are the gaps which we found in the system while re-enrolling the drop outs. The interventions mentioned are efforts the community took up to reenrol the students and do follow ups.

The report wants to highlight that if the mentioned inadequacies can be addressed at community level with the support and guidance of departments and the suggestive measures are taken up, several cases of dropout can be identified and mitigated at an early stage.

In the end, it is important to highlight two pertinent issues. As a number of case stories have highlighted that the overall social development of a Panchayat or a VDC plays a crucial role in addressing the challenge of dropping out. Most of the development plans that are being made as a part of Gram Panchayat Development Plan mostly focus on infrastructure development rather than making plans for identifying gaps in the service delivery and how it can be addressed through a community led intervention. Even the CBO which has been integral in pushing agricultural initiatives, animal husbandry initiatives, women empowerment and micro enterprise development on a large scale, haven't played a strategic role in ensuring that the children are not dropping out from schools under their social development work. Thus to intervene in an issue like drop out, it is important to build upon the existing structures in place which the Project tried to do.

The report would like to suggest two immediate interventions that can be started on field after analysing all the data. Firstly the CBO can maintain a data/ risk profiling of students with the SMC and can also update the GPs with these sets of data. They can together then plan individual level plans with these students which can be vetted by the experts from schools and block level education department. Secondly the GPDP plans should necessarily every year should start focussing on addressing issues of dropout and quality education which can give long term results in reducing poverty. By doing so, GPs can also ensure not Goal no 4 under SDG can be achieved.

Thus, the report aims at serving as an example to how solutions can be identified and can be community led. The methods adopted are small and we hope sustain in the areas. Our analysis and observations explain the context on ground and how each case was handled in a unique way. We hope our community as well as readers of this study, are inspired to replicate it to other areas.





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