



Asha Kiran

A Comprehensive Report

January 2015 - March 2018

# Table of Contents

**1**

Preface

**2**

Salient Features  
of Asha Kiran

**4**

Conceptualization  
of Asha Kiran

**7**

Preparation :  
selection of the states,  
call for proposals from  
implementing partners  
and selecting partners

**11**

Baseline survey  
to identify  
the children

**14**

Screening of  
children

**16**

Approval of  
children

**18**

Training of  
teachers

**20**

Locations of AKCs,  
admission of children  
into AKCs and  
teaching them

**23**

Running of  
Asha Kiran Centres

**30**

Admission of  
children into  
Government School

**34**

Story of Changes



# Preface

The huge population of India also gives India its own share of problems. One of them is illiteracy. The Census 2011 data has revealed two alarming facts: as many as 78 lakh Indian children are forced to earn a livelihood even as they attend schools while 8.4 crore children don't go to school at all. Several attempts are currently being made all across the country to combat this situation and make India totally literate. *Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope* is one such attempt of Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM). RILM is an initiative of the Rotary South Asia Society for Development and Cooperation (RSAS) which is the legal entity and a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. RILM's objectives are total literacy and quality education in India.

Accordingly, RILM has taken up implementation of the program “**T-E-A-C-H**”, in which '**T**' stands for '**Teacher Support**', '**E**' for '**E-learning**', '**A**' for '**Adult Literacy**', '**C**' for '**Child Development**' and '**H**' for '**Happy Schools**'. Each of these five verticals consists of one or more schemes. The project *Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope* comes under Child Development vertical.

Asha Kiran is project to bring out of school children back to the mainstream. It's a targeted intervention with a fixed timeline. The overall goal of Asha Kiran is to bring back 1,00,000 children into the mainstream school system.

On January 2015 *Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope* started its journey towards the goal of reaching out to 1,00,000 children.

States got selected on the basis of concentration of highest number of never enrolled and drop out children. In the initial phase intervention has been made in the state of Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. There were other need based interventions like in the state of Karnataka, Delhi and union territory of Chandigarh where Asha Kiran involved children of migrant labourers who stayed in urban slums and were deprived of education.

NGOs were taken on board after systematic review of each of the proposals and review of documents related to organisation's legal status, financial management system and past experience of working on education and child protection issues. So far RILM reached out to 13 states and 1 Union Territory of India.

RILM follows quarterly grant disbursement system to implementing organisations and disbursements are made after reviewing of progress made as per the program implementation schedule jointly agreed by implementing organisation and RILM.



## State wise outreach of Asha Kiran... a ray of hope

Total 34,236 children enrolled in the program



## Salient Features

The main objective of Asha Kiran is to bring out of school children back to the mainstream school system. The targeted beneficiaries are children of 7 to 14 years, who have never been to school, irregular or laggard.

The project is implemented in **13 states** and **1 Union Territory of India**. The **Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM)** has implemented the project along with 32 implementing partner NGOs who were selected from 127 proposals received by RILM for Asha Kiran.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **32 partner NGOs** was made for **43,617 children** and till March 2018 the through partner NGOs we have been able to reach out to 34,236 children. The rest 9,381 children will be covered in the next phase.

The majority of children under Asha Kiran project who are part of the intervention are Dropout 22,367 (65.33%), followed by Laggard children 7,874 (23.00%) and rest are Never Enrolled 3,995 (11.67%).

Majority of the children under Asha Kiran project have been mainstreamed into government and government aided schools. As of March 31, 2018 the project cycle was successfully completed for 22,236 children. The project cycle for 12,000 children is under process / on-going. The breakup regarding status of 22,236 children is given below:

- ▲ Out of 22,236 children 20,835 (93.70%) children are successfully admitted into schools by partner NGOs.
- ▲ Out of 22,236 children 1,401 (6.30%) children were unable complete the project cycle. The major reason for them not completing the project cycle was their families have migrated in pursuit of better livelihood.
- ▲ The visits to schools where children are admitted in those schools monitoring visits were done 3 months after the approved project is period are over.
- ▲ Out of 20,835 children we have found 16,208 (77.79%) children are present in the schools.





Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope

Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope

## Conceptualization

The huge population of India also gives India its own share of problems. One of them is illiteracy. The Census 2011 data revealed two alarming facts: one, as many as 78 lakh Indian children are forced to earn a livelihood even as they attend schools and second, while 8.4 crore children don't go to school at all. India has the world's largest share of illiterate adults population as well (37.4%, UNESCO, 2014). Several attempts are currently being made to combat this situation and make whole of India literate.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/8-4cr-Indian-children-dont-attend-school-Census-data/articleshow/54473779.cms>

To combat the situation Rotarians across the country came together and formed South Asia Society for Development and Cooperation (RSAS) of which Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM) is an initiative. RSAS is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. RILM's objectives are total literacy and quality education in India.

Subsequently RILM evolved a comprehensive program named as "T-E-A-C-H" in which 'T' stands for 'Teacher Support', 'E' for 'E-learning', 'A' for 'Adult Literacy', 'C' for 'Child Development' and 'H' for 'Happy Schools'. Each of these five verticals consists of one or more programs. Asha Kiran ... A Ray of Hope is a program under Child Development vertical.

Asha Kiran aims to bring out of school children back to the schools and total span of an intervention is of one year. The overall goal of Asha Kiran is to bring back 100,000 children into the mainstream school system.





## Preparatory phase :

selection of the states, call for proposals from implementing organisations and selection of implementing organisations

The Indian Market Research Bureau International [IMRB International] did a survey of out of school children, and the survey focused on government's flagship program Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) <http://ssa.nic.in/pabminutes-documents/NS.pdf> where they found that 6,064,230 children in the age group of 6 to 13 years were out of school in India during 2016. On the basis of that survey 10 states were prioritised for intervention:

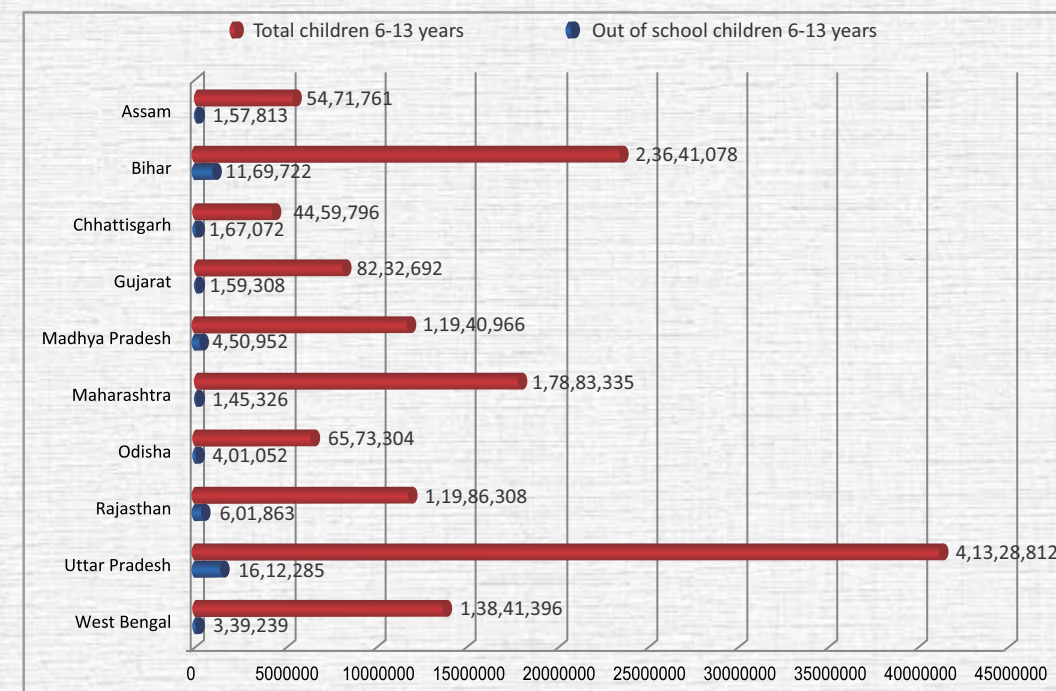
<sup>1</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/8-4cr-Indian-children-dont-attend-school-Census-data/articleshow/54473779.cms>





RILM organized its own resource mobilization and, a major portion of the funds for running the Asha Kiran project came from Rotary Clubs of India. The annual meet for the year 2015-2016 of Rotary Clubs (for 34 Rotary Districts for India), was the event where the Rotary Clubs decided to raise funds to sponsor 34,850 children under Asha Kiran. RILM only kept 4.76% of the funds for its administration costs and, 95.24% were kept for the implementing partners, which they were to receive in 4 installments:

- 25% at the time of admission of the child in the Asha Kiran informal study center. This will take place after the identification, approval and uploading of data at the RILM website for out of school children.
- 25% on completion of 3 months in the study center. The child must attend the informal study center regularly (at least 75% attendance is required). A progress report has to be uploaded at the RILM website for each child.
- 25% when the child gets admitted to a formal school or starts going regularly to a government or government aided school. A progress report has to be uploaded at the RILM website for each child.



- 25% after the child completes 3 months of formal school with regular (at least 75%) attendance. Monitoring report has to be submitted to RILM.

Call for proposals were published on external job portals such as - DevNet <http://www.devnetjobsindia.org> and total 127 NGOs from all-over India (covering 19 states) applied as per RILM evolved proposal template to become implementing partners of RILM for Asha Kiran program.

Out of 127 proposals around 30 proposals were selected after systematic review of each of the proposals and review of documents related to organisation's legal status, financial management system and

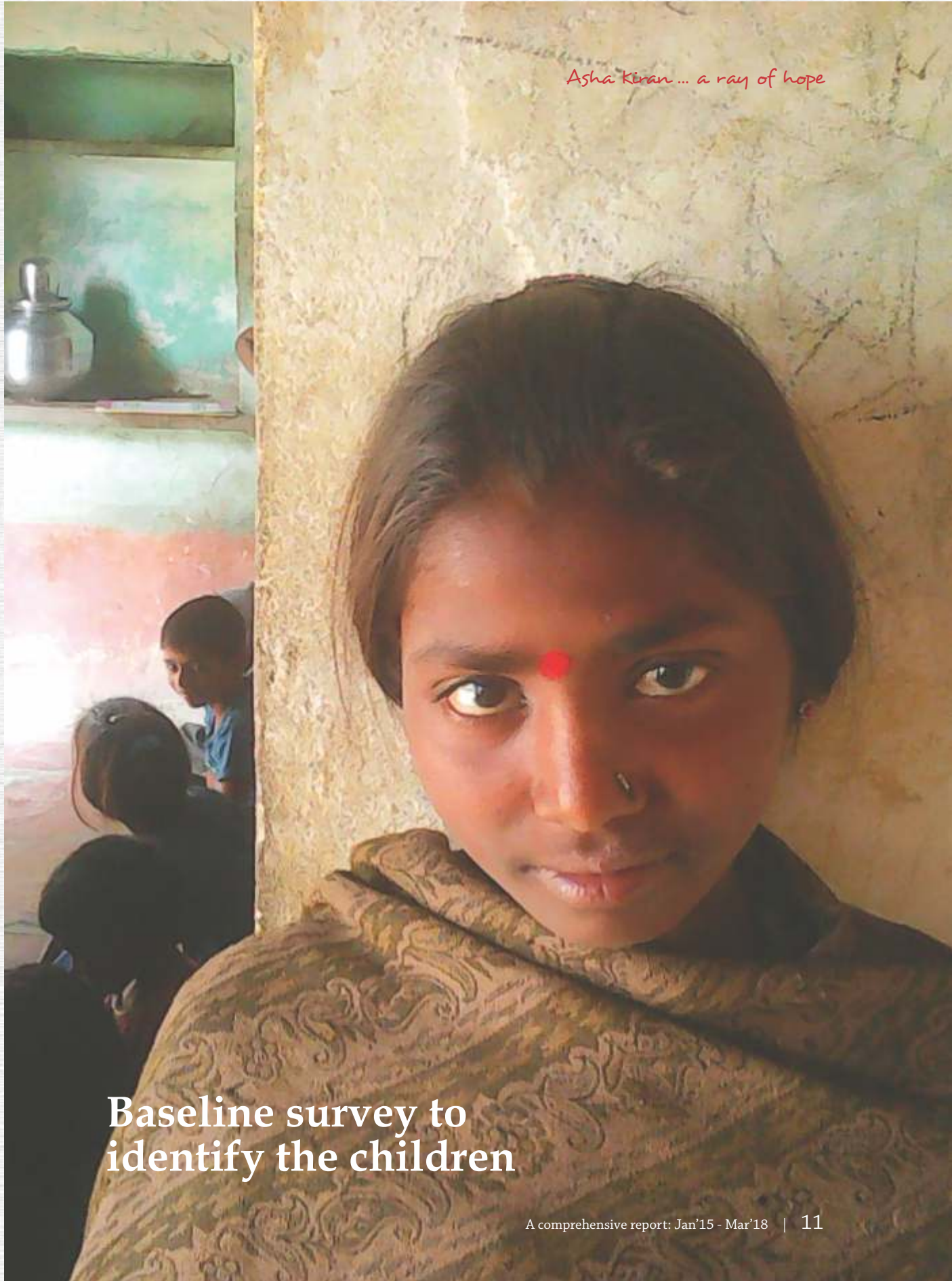
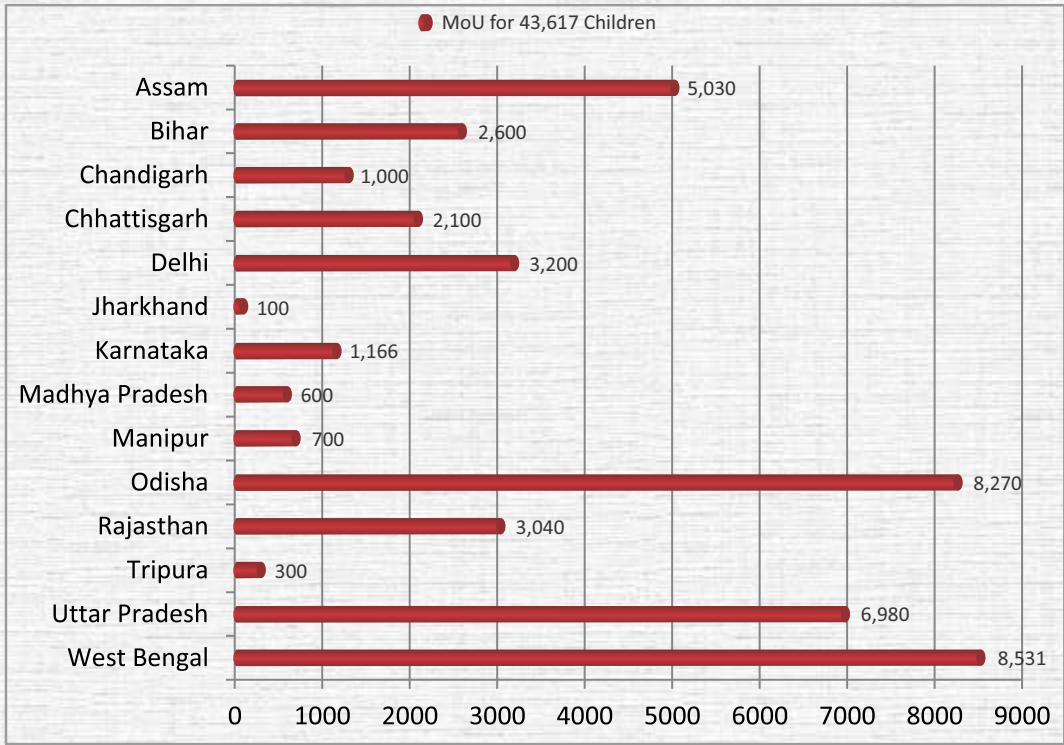






past experience of working on education and child protection issues. Through these organizations, RILM reached out to 13 states and 1 Union Territory of India.

Total 32 MoUs got signed to cover 43,617 children and in its initial 3 years RILM has reached to 34,236 children. The rest 9,381 children will be covered in the next phase.



Baseline survey to identify the children





Partner NGOs did the social mobilization to identify and bring children for inclusion. The steps / methods that were used by the NGOs are community meetings, meetings with local elected representatives, meetings with local school teachers and meetings with local Government officials to make them aware about the implementation of Asha Kiran project in the nearby locality.

Children remain out of school for a variety of reasons and it is needless to say that Asha Kiran made its intervention in some of the very hard to reach geographies: a special mention about the background of a few of such groups of children will throw some light on our reference community. Examples: Community/NGO.

Uttar Pradesh Voluntary Health Association (UPVHA) and its partner Bharatiya Manav Samaj Kalyan Seva Sansthan (BMSKSS) should get special acknowledgment: one AKC was opened for the children of the Nat community at Shravasti district of Uttar Pradesh. These are absolutely hard to reach children. The Nat are a nomadic community found in Northern states of India. They are one of a number of communities that are said to be of Rajput origin, and have traditions similar to the Bazigar caste, meaning "he wins, whenever and whatever he plays". The word nata in Sanskrit means a dancer, and the Nat were traditionally entertainers and jugglers. They have fourteen sub-groups, the main ones being the Nituria, Rarhi, Chhabhayaia, Tikulhara, Tirkuta, Pushtia, Rathore,

Kazarhatia, Kathbangi, Banwaria, Kougarh, Lodhra, Korohia, and Gulgulia. The Nat maintain strict clan exogamy, and each clan is of equal status. In Uttar Pradesh, the Nat community now consists of two groupings, the Brijbasi Nat, who are settled, and the Bajania Net, who are nomadic.

Turn Your Concern into Action (TYCIA) Foundation opened AKCs for Korku children in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh. The Korku are an Austroasiatic ethnic group predominantly found in the Khandwa, Burhanpur, Betul and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh and in the adjoining areas near the Melghat Tiger Reserve Forest of Maharashtra. They speak the Korku language, which is one of the Munda languages and is written using the Devanagari script. They are classified as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government.

Uttari Rajasthan Cooperative Milk Union Ltd. (URMUL) was able to open AKCs for the children of Bheel community in the Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan. Bheel or Bhil are primarily an Adivasi people of North West India. The Bheel are also settled in the Tharparkar District of Sindh, Pakistan. They speak the Bheel languages, a subgroup of the Western Zone of the Indo-Aryan languages. According to the Census of 2011, the Bheel were the



largest tribal group in India. The Bheel are listed as Adivasi residents of the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan - all in the western Deccan regions and central India - as well as in Tripura in far-eastern India, on the border with Bangladesh.

ATHMIK identified an unusual social situation of children working and living brickfields. The brickfield workers and their families come to West Bengal mainly from the neighbouring states of Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha. At their place of origin these people mostly work as agricultural labour; the areas of their origin are not very fertile consequently yield only a single crop in a year. Search for better income is the main reason for their migration. They spend six to eight (work starts from November and ends in June) months as seasonal workers. They work as families / units. Asha Kiran centre was opened for them in West Bengal for 8 months and, for the rest of the 4 months the Asha Kiran staff went back with the kids to their place of origin and admitted them into schools so that the mainstreaming component of Asha Kiran gets completed. This pilot with migrant children presents a successful model of completing one academic year by studying in 2 geographical locations.





## Screening of children

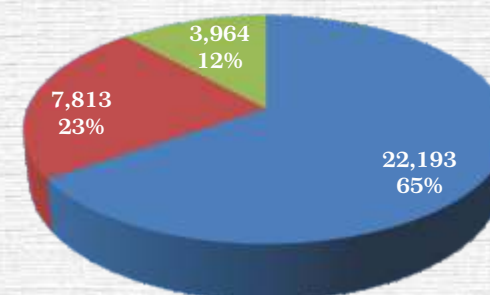


The screening of children is done by Rotarians and RILM staff. A child profile card was designed by RILM to collect the necessary information about each child.

Like any other project for the development of vulnerable children, Asha Kiran also has its own criteria for selecting children.

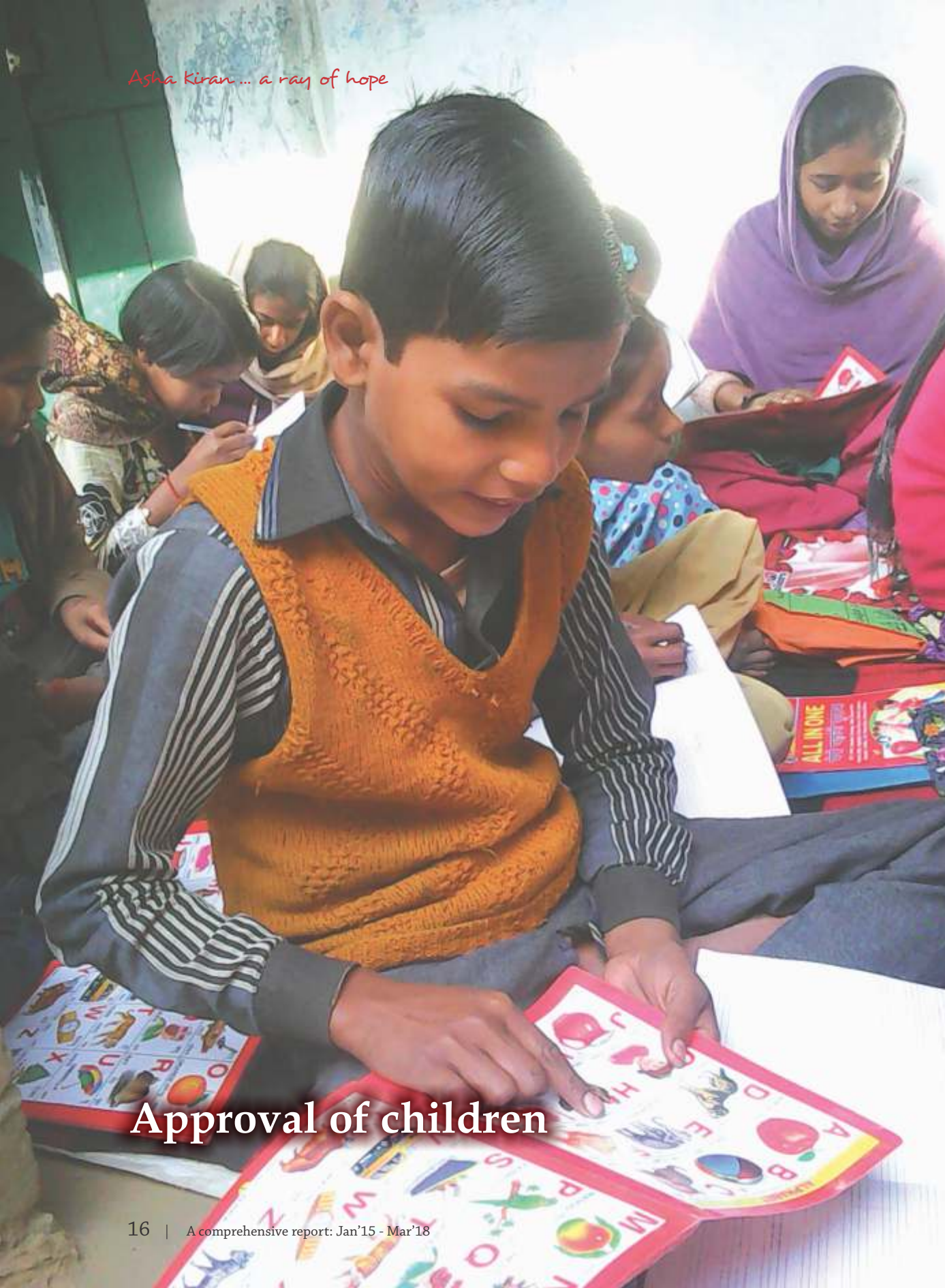
These are, the children who are in the age group of 7 to 14 years and, must belong to one of the criteria given below:

- have never been to school
- are not attending school, but are nominally enrolled, irregular or absent for more than 45 days without informing the school
- are laggard (e.g. the child's age is 12 years [should be in class – VII], but s/he can read texts of only Classes II or III etc.)



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## Approval of children

After a set of children are selected for admission into an Asha Kiran Centre (AKC), their individual details are uploaded into the RILM website by the partner NGOs. This is done to prevent any chance of duplication and, to make it sure the photo of each child was also uploaded into the website: however to adhere to child protection policies only a sponsor and concerned program person of RILM has the access to child's detail profile.

The ratio of children in AKCs is usually maintained at a ratio of 1 teacher for 30 children: for example if a NGO is working with 300 children then they usually opened 10 AKCs with 1 teacher per centre.

*Asha Kiran is being implemented all over India thus it has been our learning to organise state wise meet between Rotarians and partner NGOs which will be a platform for exchanging of information. This will help the implementing NGOs to understand the program objective more clearly and on the other hand Rotarians will also get to know about the intervention and further scope of involvement will get created on an ongoing basis.*





## Training of teachers

In the Asha Kiran Centre the teacher plays a very important role. For the children this person is the link with to the unknown outside world. Thus building capacity of the teacher is most significant for the success of Asha Kiran program. From the side of RILM great emphasis was given about this aspect of project management.

Respective partner NGOs organized training for AKC teachers, to orient them about the project deliverables and for up gradation of their skills.

The emphasis was more on teaching in a multi-grade situation, therefore following are the main areas of a teacher training:

- Assessment of Children to identify their level of knowledge
- Classroom Management / Seating Arrangement / Groups Learning
- Weekly Routine / Lesson Planning
- Monthly Evaluation of Progress





Locations of AKCs,  
admission of children into  
AKCs and teaching them



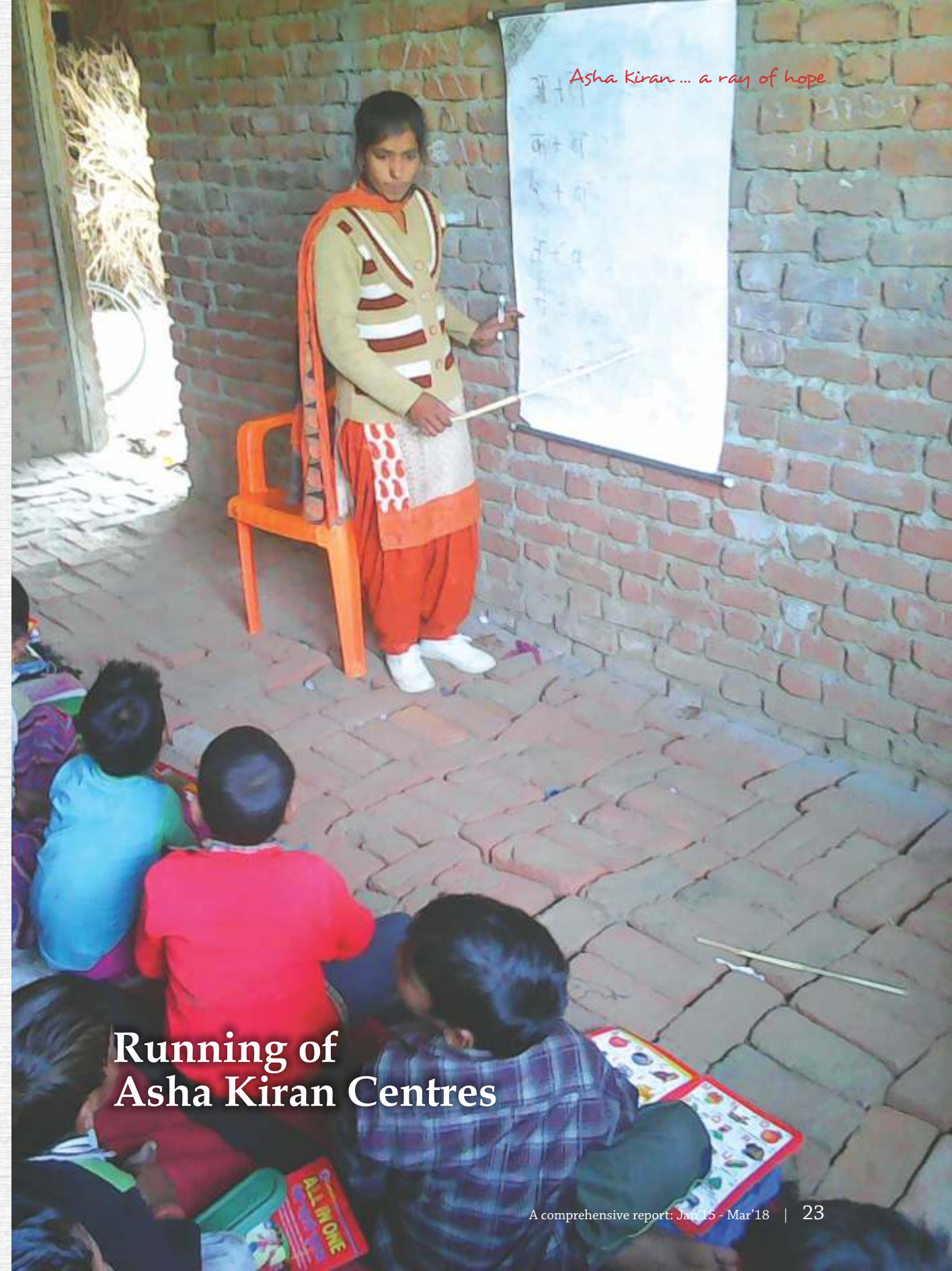


Some NGOs were able to manage permission from local Government Schools and, they opened AKCs inside the schools and ran the Centres either before or after school hours.

Some of the AKCs were located in common community spaces such as community resource centres, panchayat bhawans etc.

The first set of activities in AKCs are assessment of children to assess the

level of their knowledge, making a comparative list of where they are now and, what should be their age appropriate level / class and dividing them in groups. The second set of activities includes teaching and taking regular tests to prepare them for admission into schools at age appropriate classes. The regular tests help children overcome their fear of evaluations.



## Running of Asha Kiran Centres



Asha Kiran Centres are being set up involving 30 identified Children. RILM evolved assessment tools for Asha Kiran Centres so that all aspects of an Asha Kiran Centre can be captured. It involves aspects like physical location of

***RILM makes use of the digital platform and all monitoring visit related information are uploaded in the website and are used for collation of data.***

the Asha Kiran Centres so that accessibility by Children can be assessed; similarly availability of Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) and Teaching Methodology or Pedagogy also gets assessed among various other

aspects. These information are collated and an analysis is being done to understand the efficacy and impact of an intervention. This also helps in adding value for future interventions.

Asha Kiran Centres are being run for a duration of 9 months out of 12 months of intervention. Rest 3 months is for mandatory follow up of all mainstreamed children.

***The RILM website is continuously going through a process of up gradation by bringing in additional features. These will be helpful for partner organisations for sharing of periodic information like Child Progress Reports etc.***



## Admission of children into Government School





Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope



Most of the children got admitted into Government Schools and a few of them were admitted into private schools.

No major challenges were faced by NGOs in mainstreaming the children except for some of the states where Aadhar Card has been made mandatory for admission and also for distribution of mid-day meal. Thus admission of few children get delayed on account of non-availability of Aadhar Card. Partner NGOs did liaison with local Government authorities to organize camps for Aadhar Card for those children and their family members.

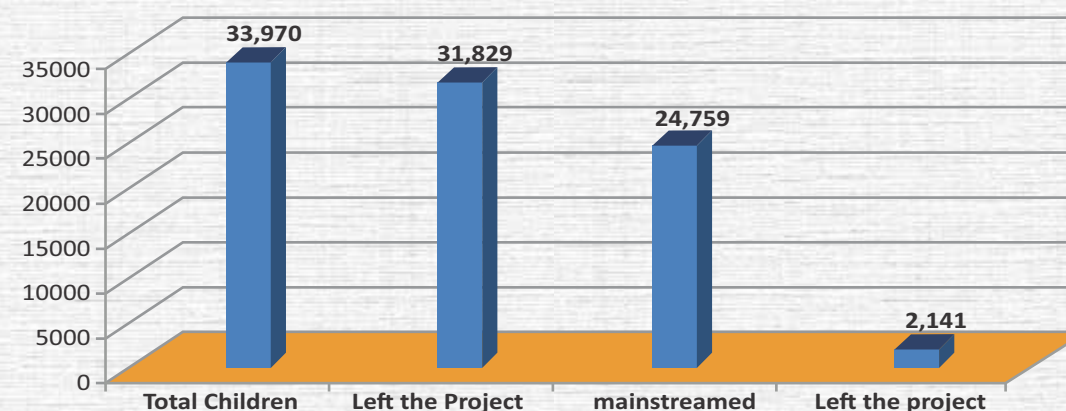
One of the major learning from the first phase is that different states of India have different academic sessions. Accordingly time for admission of new children, time of examinations, summer and winter vacations are decided. Not all the implementing NGOs planned the interventions in a synchronized manner with the respective academic sessions of that state; because of this in few places when the Asha Kiran children are ready for admission into schools, the NGOs found that the schools were already full in terms of their intake capacity and they had no room for new admissions.

## Retention of children into Government School

RILM designed a template to collect information about children's progress after mainstreaming and, it had sections to collect information from the children and their school teachers.

Majority of the children under Asha Kiran project were admitted into schools, out of 22,236 children 20,835 children are admitted into schools. Few of the children left the project mainly due to intra-state and inter-state migration along with their parents in search of better livelihoods. Out of 22,236 children 1,401 children were unable to complete the project cycle and were dropped out in the middle.

The effectiveness of the project has been evaluated by visiting the schools where these children are mainstreamed. One such evaluation was undertaken in schools after 3 months of mainstreaming. Evaluation revealed that out of 20,835 children 16,208 children were found to be in schools and it showed that the project have made a positive impact regarding bringing out of school children backs to school and retaining them in the schools.



Asha Kiran ... a ray of hope





Under Asha Kiran we have been able to bring 65.67% children up to their age appropriate classes and, rest 34.33% children made considerable improvement regarding reaching their appropriate classes. These 34.33% will reach their appropriate classes in the coming academic years of 2018 – 2019 by studying at respective schools where they have been mainstreamed.

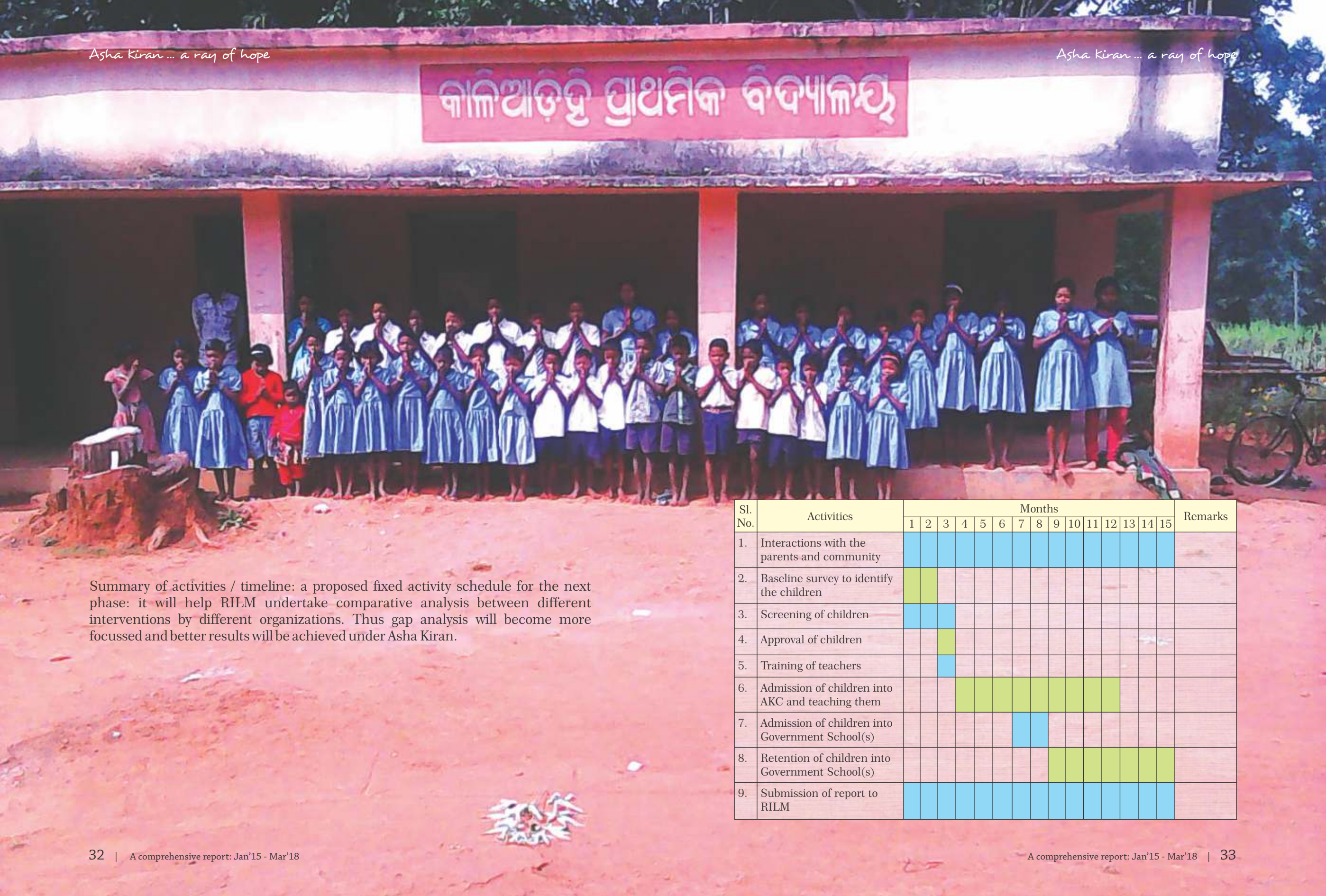
Involvement of community in the program was a key component of the program, be it in identifying the eligible children or setting up of Asha Kiran Centres or in mainstreaming children by liaising with schools and ensuring children remain in schools. So in future also the program would focus on this component to have more participation of community.



## Timeline for implementation for Asha Kiran Program







Summary of activities / timeline: a proposed fixed activity schedule for the next phase: it will help RILM undertake comparative analysis between different interventions by different organizations. Thus gap analysis will become more focussed and better results will be achieved under Asha Kiran.

Sl. No.	Activities	Months															Remarks
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
1.	Interactions with the parents and community																
2.	Baseline survey to identify the children																
3.	Screening of children																
4.	Approval of children																
5.	Training of teachers																
6.	Admission of children into AKC and teaching them																
7.	Admission of children into Government School(s)																
8.	Retention of children into Government School(s)																
9.	Submission of report to RILM																



## Story of Changes



# Sundarban

8 year old Baisakhi lives with her father, mother and three siblings in Samsergunj Village, Hingolganj, Sunderban. Sundarban, the largest mangrove forest in the world is situated on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. The Sundarban is famous around the world for the habitat of majestic Royal Bengal Tigers.

The dwellers of Sundarban gradually developed a culture of their own, having an isolated life from the main stream. They are deprived of almost every facilities of modern civilization. For survival these people have to fight with the man eating tigers and natural calamities day in and day out. The literacy rate as well as status of education of the entire Sundarban region is quite low. Due to the remoteness, less accessibility and poor connectivity, shortage of money, less educational facilities and emphasis on income generation, illiteracy rate is quite high in this area.

The family of three dwells in a small thatched hut entirely depended on the forest for living. Her mother and two

siblings share the room with her while her father sleeps in the Verandah. Customary to their community, young girls are rarely schooled, they help their mother in the kitchen and rest of the time they work on the paddy field. However the boys go to school but they drop-out after few years to support the family.

Eyes full of dreams and little hands tormented by the daily hardwork; Baisakhi gets up early in the morning and accompanies her mother to the river Matla for collecting crabs. Every Wednesday and Friday Baisakhi and her mother goes to the local market which is also known as Haat and sell crabs and home-grown vegetable to support the family's earning. Gathering wild honey in the wildness of the Sundarbans is the oldest professions practiced by the dwellers of the area for three to four months during the flowering season and still practiced in the traditional ways. These professional Honey hunters are locally called Mouals. Baisakhi's father is also a Moual, he owes only two bighas of land which is not adequate for the family, hence he goes to the dense Sundarban forest with a group of people





collecting honey and wood to earn more. One morning Baisakhi's father was attacked by a tiger in the forest while collecting honey. After that incident, Baisakhi's father went bedridden. It got tougher. Their only source of income is their two Bigha land.

Baisakhi's mother is illiterate but she always wanted Baisakhi and her siblings to have a good life unlike hers. While asking her about Baisakhi, she timidly said 'Ami khub chai ki o porashona koruk. Amar moto koshto kore jeno khete na hoye oke. Boro shohore giye kaaj korbe etai amar shopno' (I want her to study. She should not lead a life like mine. I want to see her getting a job in a

big city and this is my dream). But after Baisakhi's father went bedridden, studies and school had become a distant dream for Baisakhi. Until one day Jejursa Women Health and Welfare Society started an Asha Kiran intermediary learning center in the village Shamsargunj. Baisakhi and many other out-of-school children from that area were personally interviewed by the NGO and RILM's staff and were enrolled in the center. Initially Baisakhi did not show much interest in interacting with the teacher and her classmates but things changed slowly.

According to her teacher, Malati, 'Baisakhi or class er shob theke medhabi

chhatri. Age khub chup chap thakto. Kotha kom bolto, tiffin er shomoye e khela dulo kom korto kintu akhon onek or modhye poriborton hoeche. Porashona khub taratari bojhe, moneo rakhte pare. (Baisakhi is one of the brightest students of her class. Initially she used to keep herself aloof from all the activities happening in the class but now she has shown quite an improvement. She is very attentive in the class and her memory is quite sharp)

Baisakhi regularly attended classes at the Asha Kiran center for 6 months. Her mother was very supportive throughout these months. Baisakhi enjoyed every moment at the center. She learnt how to recite poem and also started trying her hands out in art and crafts- 'Amar kobita shunte khub bhalo lage. Malati didi amake kobita bola shikhiye dieche' (I love reading and listening to poems. Malati didi has taught me recitation.) Pointing at her drawing she said 'Ma ei aka ta dekhe khub khushi hoeche' (My mother was very happy after seeing my drawing)

After 6 months of coaching at the center Baisakhi has been enrolled in Birsa Munda Primary School in class 2. Today Baisakhi is doing well. She is content. She understands the struggle her mother is going through and that works as an inspiration for her to continue studying. On asking her mother how she feels when she sees Baisakhi in school uniform, teary eyed she proudly says, 'My daughter wants to be a teacher'.





# Keonjhar

Odisha is the tribal dominated State where 62 tribes with 22.21% of the total population are habituating. Due to lack of developmental facilities, lack of adequate primary health facilities, common socio-economic and demographic factors such as poverty, illiteracy, etc. the tribal societies in India are considered as the weakest section of the population.

A land far off from the hustle-bustle of mainland Odisha, there resides mostly tribal people like Santhals, Bhils and Mundas. In Odisha, these tribes are largely distributed in the district of Balasore, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundergarh. They generally live in a separate sector in a village inhabited by other castes and tribes.

In district Keonjhar, block Kushkhora, villages Chan Pushi, Komandi and Burubanga are predominantly inhabited by the Santhal tribe. The erstwhile traditional hunter-gatherer Santhal have transformed into settled cultivator and wage labourer at present. Their basic occupation is to collect honey from Mohua flower and Kendu leaves for making bidi. The children from age group 8 to 14 also join hands with their parents. People from this community also work for the 100 days job provided by the Government, where they are involved in construction of roads etc.

Climate also plays a significant role in Keonjhar where harsh, warm temperature is the biggest hindrance. People face shortage of drinking





water. To overcome such situation they migrate to other places during summer or fetch water from far off sources to their houses. In such a condition, children dropping out of schools are much common scenario.

Currently, the tribes lag behind in literacy and education not only in comparison to the general population but also from the Scheduled Caste population. The tribal education has seen very pitiable condition due to various factors, like; the lack of awareness, remoteness, poverty, poor health condition and so on. Further, the children who come from families of low socio-economic background find it very difficult to continue their education at

from very early stage. This is because at an early age, the child becomes an economic asset, because he/ she can work at home or earn something outside. This is especially true for girls who have to assist the over- worked mother at home.

Under the Asha Kiran program, RILM joined hands with Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) to work



with 600 out-of-school children. LWSIT's area of focus is mainly health and education. In implementing the project, RILM along with LWSIT coordinators visited block Kushkhora, Chan Pushi, Komandi and Burubanga and started identifying children between the ages 7 to 14 years by personally interviewing them. After the selection process, 200 children were enrolled in the Asha Kiran intermediary learning centers which were established in the village. All the children were first generation learner.

The centers generally ran from 6:00 am to 9:00 am for up to 9 months. Each



center comprised of 30 to 35 children.

At the centers, a specially trained teacher coached them in basic mathematics, language and learning skills with a need-based approach to help them reach their age appropriate learning level. This teacher is a volunteer from the community.

The children's academic progresses were evaluated through continuous assessments. Regular visits to the centers were made by RILM's project coordinators to monitor the progress of the children and ensure effective implementation of the project.

These volunteer teachers not only train the children on basic reading and writing skills but also engage them in various co-curricular activities. The teachers and staffs from LWSIT also ensured a behavior change in the community, where the child belongs, through regular training and community awareness drive.



# Thar Desert

Murti, 9, walks to school in Barmer which is situated in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, India. Temperature in the summers can soar up to 50 degree Celsius. Murti gets up in the morning, fetch water from the well and takes a bath. She is in third grade and lives in a small hamlet with only 50 other families. There are no accessible roads to their hamlet. 'I eat my breakfast and then head off to school which is one hour from my home still I never miss it' - said Murti. She leaves her house at 7 am for school along with her few friends.

Poverty and illiteracy over the years have led to impoverished and unemployment in the region of Thar. The harsh weather and scarcity of water takes toll in the lives of the people living there. Life was not as easy for Murti as it seems right now. Being the eldest of the two siblings, Murti had to take responsibility of her grandmother and her siblings when Murti's parents were gone to another city in search for a job.

While migration of people in search for a job to a different city is a common

scenario in Thar it also lead to children being deprived of sustained education and they are instead employed as child labourers. Murti's parents are uneducated; they gave more importance to survival than education. When Murti's father and mother had migrated to another city for the first time, Murti was forced to drop-out of school and had to look after the house and her siblings. The challenges of keeping children in the classroom faced by the parents in Rajasthan are seen across rural India. Children from India's lower caste communities may be the first in the family to attend school, and don't get much support from home. While education in state schools is free, there are still some expenses such as paying for uniforms or stationary.

Sending a child to school also means losing a pair of hands to fetch water from the well or to tend to siblings. In the case of older children, it could mean forgoing an additional wage from working alongside the father on a construction site or in the fields.







This is where RILM's Asha Kiran program along with its partner Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and Uttari Rajasthan Cooperative Milk Union Ltd. (URMUL) intervened. An Asha Kiran center was set up in the village. After regular discussions and successful attempts with Murti's family, she was allowed to attend the Asha Kiran center. More than 25 children were admitted in the center where they received training from a volunteer teacher. The center ran for 3 hours. Murti enjoyed coming to the center. She played and learned at the same time. While her parents



were away Murti's grandmother took care of the house and the siblings. At the center, Murti practiced writing and reading. She loved to listen to stories narrated by the center didi (teacher).

During a monitoring visit, RILM staff carried out a conversation with the center teacher, Tulsi, a volunteer from the community who taught at the center. I had visited Murti's village. I met the parents of the out-of-school and drop-out children including Murti's. Counseled and convinced them to send children to the Asha Kiran center' said Tulsi. Tulsi's grandmother was very supportive. Murti never missed her classes at the Asha Kiran center. 'I don't feel like going back home after the class gets over. I am very happy that I started studying again and will very soon go back to school. But after I get my admission I will still come to the center' said the nine year old.

After 6 months of training at the center, Murti and few other children from the Asha Kiran center were mainstreamed at a nearby government school. The remaining ones were still at the center for further training. Her father says: "The hardships we face are difficult. Initially, I only agreed to let Murti study at the teacher's request. But, after seeing her dedication, I want education for all my children."



The experience of the field visit conducted by the Rotary India Literacy Mission staff was so enriching that it not only justified our mission but also motivated and inspired us to take up these kinds of activities in the most deprived part of the communities.

Five-year-old Meeta thinks it is a game she must master quickly to be a winner. From the time she wakes up, until she goes to bed, Meeta watches her mother and all the girls and women in her neighborhood consumed in a frantic race: Making beedis - traditional hand-rolled Indian cigarettes. This is the normal scenario in Dhulian a small town in Murshidabad. To create each beedi, the maker painstakingly places tobacco inside a dried leaf known as 'Tendua' sourced from a local tree; tightly rolls and secures it with a thread; and then closes the tips using a sharp knife. For anything between 10 and 14 hours, regardless of how long it takes,

Meeta's mother and others must all roll at least 1,000 beedis to earn a paltry sum of money to spend a day. The cigarettes are taken to the warehouses of large manufacturers, where they are packaged before being sold in the market for a much higher price. For most, if they do not roll enough beedis every day there simply will not be food on the table. A study released that nearly 1.7 million children are working in India's beedi rolling industry. Children are knowingly engaged by manufacturers due to belief that children's nimble fingers are more adept at rolling cigarettes. Beedis are so popular that they make for nearly half of India's entire tobacco market. But, behind the country's unorganized domestic tobacco sector lie invisible millions trapped in modern day economic slavery. Poor economic conditions of the families involved in beedi work also pave way for the induction of children into work force as

# Dhulian Ganga





a part of family occupation. Beedi work does not require any formal training and can be carried out at any time, all of which are important reasons for the involvement of children. Due to this pressure of work the children start dropping out from school or his/her studies gets badly affected.

Well to tackle this problem RILM and its partner organization Marfat started working for 650 children in Dhulian Town in Murshidabad District. Marfat is focusing on ways to reduce the child labour problem or the dependence on children as work force in this area for Asha Kiran. During the screening process, NGO and RILM staff personally interviewed 758 children from 13 locations in 5 days, out of whom 650 children were enrolled in Asha Kiran intermediary learning centers. 13 intermediary learning centers were set up each comprising of 50 children studying in it.

The NGO Marfat also wants to start Adult Literacy programme. They believe this will create the much needed averseness about the

importance of education, mainstream schooling and to on the evils of child labour so that the Parents will also work as the agents in the community to change this trend in the Society.

One of the biggest challenges faced in this area was lack of awareness. Once a week the volunteer teacher made sure that they met the guardian of these children and sensitized them on the importance of literacy. At times during a Panchayat meet at the village, the volunteer teacher also delivered speeches to create awareness about literacy and how having educated children could benefit their families in terms of both societal and financial status. The children regularly attended the centers and received training not only on reading, writing and arithmetic but also involved themselves in various extra-curricular activities.

After 6 months of regular coaching classes, 400 children were enrolled back to formal schooling. The remaining 250 children were at the center for further monitoring and coaching.





# Mithila

Girls are generally married off early in Mithila region of Bihar. Maitrayi's story depicts the plight of girls who did not get a chance to study as children but got an opportunity to study when an Asha Kiran center was started at her village.

Maitrayi was just six when her father died to tuberculosis. Brought up by her mother, she grew up in a village of Mithila where child marriage was the norm rather than the exception. "My

mother stood behind me," says Maitrayi, now 17 years old. "The doors could have closed otherwise," she said, pointing to an end of education, ill health and thwarted potential she would have suffered as an individual if she were given away as a child bride.

I always wanted to study and inculcate other useful skills. I love to draw and stitch. Pointing at a table-cloth, Maitrayi said 'I drew the flower and stitched it





with my own hands. Doesn't it look beautiful?' Maitrayi studied till class 3 at a nearby government school. Her father always encouraged her to study. My time at the school was cut short when my father passed away. I was bound to drop off from school and started helping my mother with household chores. My mother almost got engulfed in sewing petticoats and blouses to run home. At the end of the day she used to make meager amount. Poverty and hunger tormented Maitrayi's family. When she reached at the age of 11, her neighbours coaxed her mother to marry Maitrayi off.

Though Maitrayi's mother was never in support of marrying Maitrayi at an early age but poverty and destitution had forced her to take up the decision. Maitrayi was heartbroken but tried to resist in vain. But winds of change were blowing and a different future unfolded

for Maitrayi. RILM's NGO partner Jawahar Jyoti Bal Vikar Kendra (JJBVK) had opened an Asha kiran center at Maitrayi's village in Mithila region of Bihar. Staff from JJBVK and RILM had jointly visited her village to carry out the screening process. After a 30 minute of an interview Maitrayi was selected and enrolled in the Asha Kiran center.

However Maitrayi's mother was adamant, she did not want Maitrayi to attend classes at the Asha Kiran center. She wanted her to get married. 'The teacher at the center convinced my mother about the benefits of literacy and I was allowed to join the centre.' At the center Maitrayi not only got training in basic reading and writing skills but was also encouraged by my teacher to involve myself in various co-curricular activities. From dancing to recitation, from making idols to taking part in

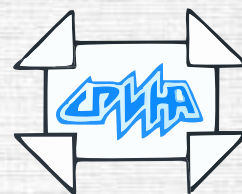
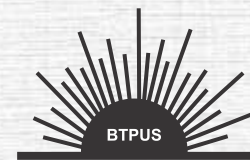


dramas each day at the center was fulfilled for Maitrayi. Eventually, Maitrayi's mother started supporting her in her journey. While at home, Maitrayi used to help her mother in stitching and also in various house-hold work. She practiced writing and reading at home after finishing her daily chores. She worked really hard and she could recover her loss of two years.

While conversing with the Asha Kiran center teacher, the teacher said, 'Maitrayi always pays attention in class. She loves to stitch. I will always be obliged to myself for speaking to her mother and help Maitrayi continue her studies at the Asha Kiran center.' Maitrayi is now a student of class five in a nearby government school. She regularly attends school and also visits Asha Kiran center and seeks help from the teacher whenever she faces problem in her home works. Maitrayi says Asha Kiran center had come as a blessing for her, she has no desire to marry soon. The additional skills which Maitrayi had absorbed at the Asha Kiran center will always be useful to her. 'I want to earn a living using skills rather than labour. I hope someday I can do that.' says Maitrayi.











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