

Anakuran: A Proposed Path to Education for Children of Migrant Construction Workers in India

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ABSTRACT

'If you cannot go to school, the school comes to you.' Project Anakuran (the Hindi word for germination) is an innovative design which seeks to provide formal education through **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** to the **children of migrant construction labourers** based at medium and large construction sites in urban locales. The study addresses the right to free and compulsory **education** for Indian children between the ages of 6 and 14 years in purview of the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009. It is also an initiative to promote **public-private partnership** to fulfil the second Millennium Development Goal aiming to achieve universal primary education by the year 2015.

Keywords: *ICT; education; children; construction workers; innovation; Millennium Development Goals; India*

INTRODUCTION

"Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development... Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity... an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential."

-Kofi Annan

The first major serious attempt made by India to bring the vast numbers of out of school children under the purview of the formal education system was the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009. The path in this direction began with the 86th Amendment Act, 2002 which made three specific provisions in the Constitution to facilitate the realisation of free and compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen years as a fundamental right. These were (i) adding Article 21A in Part III (fundamental rights), (ii) modifying Article 45, and (iii) adding a new clause (k) under Article 51A (fundamental duties), making the parent or guardian responsible for providing opportunities for education to their children between six and fourteen years. After much indecisiveness reflected through long drawn out discussions and debates for almost seven years subsequent to the 86th Amendment to the Constitution, the RTE Act 2009 received presidential assent on 26 August 2009, taking forward the agenda for free and compulsory education.

The RTE Act, 2009 reads:

Every child in the age group 6 to 14 years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education.

However, there remain major ambiguities and lacunae in the Act which fails to fulfil the requirement of achieving universal education for all. Owing to the lack of specific consideration, certain categories of children remain outside the purview of the Act. One such segment is

children of migrant construction workers who move along construction sites with their families. Interestingly, even though some of these children may be enrolled in their native village school, they have no access to education and remain absent for long periods of time and eventually drop out. Hence, the children of these 'footloose labourers' remain deprived of their basic right to education. Though the RTE Act, 2009 includes the provision that - "if the child is required to move from one school to another such child shall have a right to seek transfer to any other school," this is not feasible as an option, especially taking this category into consideration, owing to the following constraints:

- The migration workers generally stay at the site of the work along with their family for limited periods of time varying from three to six months and then move to another construction site. In this field the general pattern of migration is that "women and children have always featured as 'associated' migrants with the main decision to migrate having been taken by the male of the household" (Pandit et al. 2011, p.16).
- Migration has no connection with academic calendars of school education and can happen any time depending on the needs of the profession.
- Frequency of migration varies on a large scale based on the skill sets of parents and their requirement at the sites of construction.
- Geographic scope of migration for the construction workers vary widely and can be intra or inter-state in nature.
- With increased mechanizations the work at the sites is restricted mostly to the male members. The women folk usually either stay at home or sometimes even work within the local community outside the construction site.

All these constraints contribute to manifold challenges, some of the major ones are as follows:

- Mid-term admission of any child in any school becomes extremely difficult.
- Since India is a multi-lingual country, the medium of instruction in most government schools is in the local language of the state. For example, in West Bengal, the medium of instruction is Bengali while in Maharashtra, it is Marathi. Therefore, language for imparting education is a barrier, especially in the case of children of the inter-state migrants.
- Owing to the absence of extended family as a social unit escorting the children to school and ensuring regular attendance is problematic.

All these challenges ultimately result in failure of the RTE Act, 2009 in most cases for this segment of society. Though, there are some Non-Governmental Organizations trying to address this issue through various programmes like the School on Wheel programs (education imparted by reaching various locations in vehicles and imparting education at such sites), opening centres at the construction sites and community awareness programmes, they remain highly localized and in most cases the contact with the children is lost once the child moves out of the project site. Besides, education imparted through these programmes is informal in nature and can be used as a type of bridging course and not as a substitute for formal education imparted in school. Given below is a set of questions which has been operationalized through the recommended program design:

Can there be any structure to ensure free and compulsory education to children of migratory workers between the age group of 6 years and 14 years?

Can the education be formal in nature similar to that being imparted in school?

Can this form of education have a standard similar to the one imparted in schools and be given recognition for admission in any school at any point of time?

Can we overcome the language barrier for children of inter-state migrating families who have received prior education in a different language?

Can parental escorting of the children to school be minimized while imparting education?

A PROPOSED ROAD MAP

With the ever-increasing development of globalization and urbanization the construction industry has emerged as “the single largest employer of migrant labourers in India” (www.mumbaimobilecreches.org). According to Mobile Creches, a non-governmental organization operating in the city of Mumbai, Maharashtra for the cause of children of migrant construction labourers, approximately 30 million men and women work in this sector and they are entirely unorganized. In Mumbai alone, one million men and women work in this sector. Since the construction industry is not fixed in place, the production site keeps moving. The labour force which is usually sub-contracted and hired through ‘labour agents’ is also mobile. A large proportion of the labour working on the construction sites is usually migrant labourers moving in from the countryside. Basically most of these workers are small scale farmers or farm labourers, without any special skill or education, who seasonally migrate to the cities in search of better employment opportunities.

Though there is no exact figure available to estimate the number of children migrating with their families, the proportion of men and women working at these construction sites gives some indication of the number of children who are deprived of their right to free and compulsory elementary education ensured under the RTE Act, 2009.

To address the situation described above, an attempt has been made to develop a framework for providing free and compulsory education to the children of migrant construction workers.

Major Stakeholders Involved:

- Children
- Government
- Employers (various construction firms, builders) and sub-contractors
- Construction Workers (parents/ families of the children)

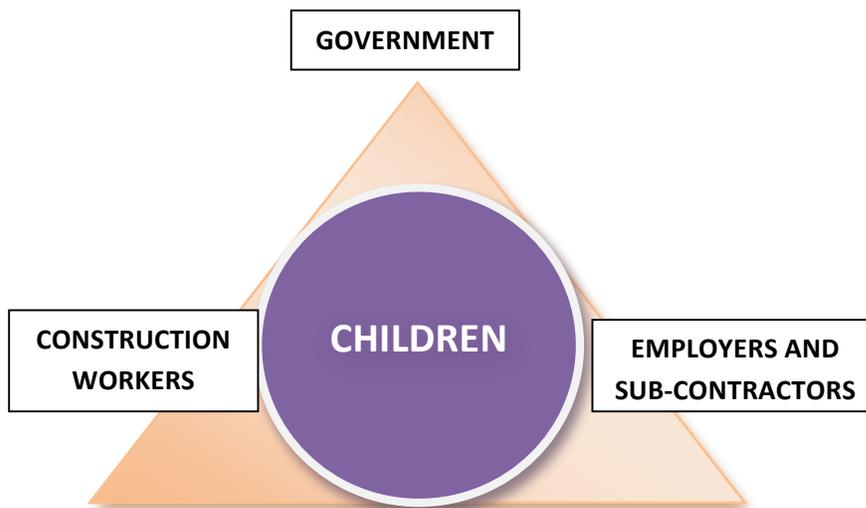


Figure 1: The primary stakeholders in Project Anakuran

Roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder:

Children: The primary stakeholder

The children will be at the nucleus of the program and the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the program will be determined and formulated keeping in perspective their well-being and best interest. As shall be seen later, the program has been developed in such a manner that the children have also been given a voice to participate in various forums and put forward their ideas and grievances.

Government of India: The role of the State as an entity

To amend the Factories Act, 1948 to incorporate the special provision for children of migrant construction workers

- Presently the Factories Act, 1948 provides a crèche facility in every factory wherein more than 30 women workers are ordinarily employed. It further requires the provision and maintenance of “a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years of such women.” Similarly, it is recommended to incorporate an amendment within the Act which states that, wherever more than 30 construction workers are employed in a project and there is a minimum of ten children between the ages of six and fourteen years who are not attending any school, a provision must be made for a room which can be used as a classroom, having the required infrastructure and regular maintenance.
- Infrastructure would include electricity, and the specified number of computers in working condition which is at least equivalent to one fourth of the total population of children of workers who are not receiving any formal education in school.
- The centres will be called Anakuran (the Hindi word for Germination) symbolizing their journey to attain the highest level of development.

To form an Academic Committee and establishing their powers and responsibilities:

- To compose an Academic Committee at national and state levels encompassing a minimum of five members including academicians, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experts, nominated or elected members of builders and construction industry and other members as per Government of India rules and norms.
- To create an awareness programme through various forms of mass media before launching the programme to ensure its effectiveness and encouraging members of civil society and different non-governmental organizations to inform the Committee about the number of children currently present at the site for further intervention on the part of the state to start Anakuran.
- To make available the Government of India approved primary and middle school curriculum, in the form of virtual media with the aid of computer, compact discs (CDs) and digital versatile discs (DVDs).
- To ensure translation of the curriculum into twenty-two scheduled languages as recognised by the Constitution of India. The languages are Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Assamese, Kashmiri, Urdu, Oriya, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Sindhi, Konkani and Manipuri.
- To appoint primary school teachers conversant with computer knowledge, one per Anakuran centre, who will act as the supervisor.
- To conduct a training program to make the supervisors conversant with the curriculum and the study material. Follow-up refresher courses will be undertaken every year.
- To ensure that the requisite compact discs (CDs) and digital versatile discs (DVDs) are available to the supervisor of Anakuran.

- The children/guardian can select any language of teaching from the available 22 scheduled languages as the medium for learning.
- The supervisor appointed may be transferred from one centre to another depending upon the need as per recommendations of the Academic Committee.
- To form a forum comprising students, their parents, the supervisor and a representative of employer/contractor/sub contractor. The forum would meet monthly to discuss different issues with special focus on the learning progress of children.
- To ensure effective monitoring of the centre, submission of a monthly report, by the supervisor, to the State Level academic Committee will be made mandatory.
- To form a Panel of Observers at the District level consisting of one representative from each government school in the District who will be nominated by the Principal as per the requirements of the centre. The Academic Committee will select every month a group of representatives to visit (preferably surprise visits) the Anakuran centre for monitoring the functioning of the centre and the progress of the children. The number of representatives selected will depend on the number of centres functional every month. The representatives will be required to submit a report of their findings to State Level Academic committee after the visit.
- To organize a series of examination papers of varied academic levels not only to track their progress, but also to test the children when they get registered at the centre and also when they migrate from the site and leave the centre. A government recognized report card will be issued to the children to enable them get admission in their respective classes at their next destination.
- To organise an annual examination in form of virtual media in the respective Anakuran centres to test the learning level of the children and based on the minimum qualifying criteria a certificate will be issued to the children stating their current educational status as per their standard.
- To form a grievance redressing cell at the state and national levels to address complaints and grievances of any stakeholder.
- To ensure that whatever expenses that are incurred by the employers/contractors/sub-contractors for the Anakuran programme shall be tax-exempted under Income Tax Act 80G.

Employers (various construction firms, builders) and sub-contractors: The private sector encompassing the concept of public-private partnership

- To record the details of the number of children, their age and educational status in a prescribed format (see Appendix I and II) while hiring the workers at the construction site.
- To inform the Academic Committee at state level if the number of children out of school at the site exceeds the prescribed number as per the amended provisions in the Factories Act of 1948.
- To make provision for a suitable room at the site for starting the Anakuran centre as per the rules provided in the amended Factories Act.
- To nominate a representative to participate in the monthly Anakuran meeting.

Construction Workers

- To share correct information regarding the number of children and the related details with the employers/contractors/subcontractors.
- To take the initiative to inform the Academic Committee at the state level or approach any district government school if the site has more than the prescribed number of children as per the amended Factories Act provisions.

- To participate in the learning process of the child and encourage completion of elementary education.
- To participate in Monthly Meetings of Anakuran

Operational Module of Anakuran Centres

- The scheduled centre timings will be from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm with a recess from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm for six days in a week.
- The centre shall remain closed on Sundays and other Public Holidays as decided by the Academic Committee based on the local holiday calendar of Government Schools.
- The supervisor appointed at the centre shall be required to be present on all working days as per centre timings.
- The children shall be allowed to use the computers only under the supervision of the Supervisor.
- The children shall have the freedom to use any of the twenty-two scheduled languages as their medium of education.
- In case the number of computers is less than the number of students, resources will be shared in equal slots as allotted by the Supervisor of the centre after discussion at the monthly meeting.
- An attendance register will be maintained by the Supervisor to ensure regularity of the children and if the child is absent for more than two days without any information contact must be made with the parents.
- Entry, Exit and Annual Examinations at the Anakuran centre will be undertaken under the supervision of the Supervisor.
- After completion of the project the resources used in one Anakuran centre like computers can be utilized in any other Anakuran centre subject to their being in a workable condition.

Table 1: Allocation of funds and public-private partnership in funding

GOVERNMENT	EMPLOYERS/CONTRACTORS/SUB-CONTRACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing a mass media campaign • Setting up an Academic Committee at National and State levels and a Panel of Observers at district level • Appointing a Supervisor • Curriculum development and production of study materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a suitable room at construction site • Electrical charges • Purchase and maintenance of computers

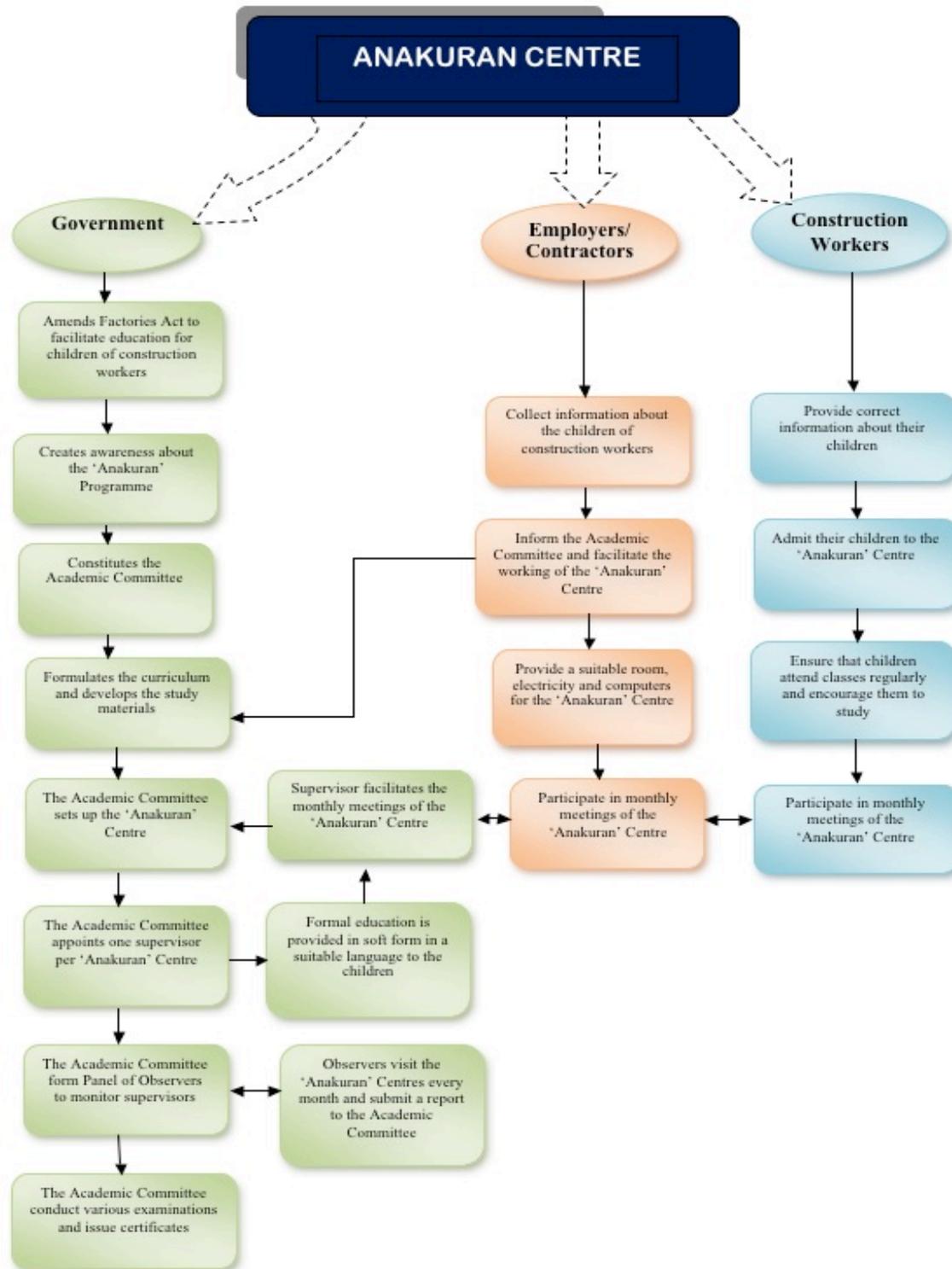
Table 2: Costs incurred by employer (an approximate estimation)

LINE ITEM	REQUIREMENT	COST	REMARKS
Room	1 in number	N/A	An extension to the construction office
Computer	3 in number	45,000	Cost per computer @ Rs.15000, 3 computers for a minimum of 10 children
Furniture and other infrastructure		15000	Chairs, tables and other necessary items
Capital Investment		60,000	
Electricity expenses	12 months	24,000	@ Rs.2000 per month
Maintenance cost	12 months	12,000	@ Rs.1000 per month, including stationery items
Miscellaneous expenses	12 months	12,000	@ Rs.1000 per month
Annual variable expenditure		48,000	
Total expenditure		68,000	Considering the shelf life of the items under capital investment as three years, one third of the amount is calculated in the annual expenditure along with the annual variable expenditure
Per child cost @ month		565 approx.	Considering there are 10 children

SCALING UP THE INNOVATION

- Though the entire programme has been designed taking into consideration the children of migrant construction workers as a pilot initiative, it can be scaled up for other migrant workers who move along with their families across countries (Kamath 2005; Lawrence 2009).
- It brings a paradigm shift in the education system which can be quoted as “if you cannot go to school, the school comes to you” and imparts immense flexibility in terms of location and can be utilized to provide makeshift teaching centres wherever required instead of having schools at fixed locations.
- The programme offers flexibility of studying in all twenty-two scheduled languages under the same roof and existing government schools can adopt similar models.
- The programme offers unscheduled Entry and Exit examinations followed by certification of standards and thus imparts flexibility in entering and exiting a curriculum. This concept can be replicated in government schools during the transfer of any family from one location to another, ensuring the child’s immediate admission to any curriculum any time of the year without year loss.

Figure 2: Anakuran Centre



LIMITATIONS

- This programme can run only in places where there is an availability of basic infrastructure facilities, primarily electricity.
- In the construction industry this program is limited to large construction sites only, otherwise the cost of running a centre shall not be viable.
- Taking into consideration the current situation this program might take some time to become feasible in the rural sector owing to managerial issues and the unavailability of basic infrastructure.

However, with growing urbanization there is greater influx of people from rural to urban areas than the other way round or even rural to rural. The programme has been formulated keeping in consideration the current trends of movement in the population.

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Appendix 1 (To be recorded from the Construction Worker by the Employer/Contractor/Sub-Contractor)				
Serial no.	To be written by the Employer/ Contractor/ Sub Contractor			
Name of site	To be written by the Employer/ Contractor/ Sub Contractor			
Address of site	To be written by the Employer/ Contractor/ Sub Contractor			
Name of Construction Worker				
Address of Construction Worker				
Age of Construction Worker				
No. of Children of Construction Worker				
	Children 1	Children 2	Children 3	Children 4
Name of Children				
Age of Children				
Date of Birth				
Mother Tongue				
Language of Education requested				
Currently studying in a school (Yes/No)				
If yes, name of school				
Address of school				
Date				
Signature of Construction Worker				

Appendix 2 (To be submitted by the Employer/Contractor/Sub contractor to the Academic Committee)	
Name of the Site	
Address of the site	
Name of the Employer	
Number of Construction Workers	
No. of Children belonging to Construction workers	
No of Children of Construction Workers between 6 and 14 of age	
Tentative Date of Completion of construction at the site	
Date	
Signature of Employer/Contractor/Sub contractor to the Academic Committee)	

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