LexQuest Foundation

Working Document
Sustainable Reforms: Education for Livelihood in the Hilly Regions

Conceptualised & Created By:

LexQuest Foundation ‖ www.lexquest.in ‖ info.lexquest@gmail.com

January, 2019

Contributors: Ms Chethana Venkataraghavan, Ms Ankita Jha

Inputs: Dr Vasudha Pant, Green Hills Trust

Supported & Recognised by:

नीति आयोग
National Institution for Transforming India

GNLU
Gujarat National Law University

Government of Gujarat

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

LexQuest Foundation

"In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms."

- Brown v Board of Education

The Policy Troupe: Almora, Uttarakhand (July, 2018)

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

LexQuest Foundation

Contents

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Introducing the Terrain

As a developing nation, we are often grappling with myriad problems and multiple challenges that our governance structures alone aren't equipped to resolve. This is why it becomes imperative that the citizens engage, ideate and deliberate on change that they seek, as it will not only encourage proactive citizenry but will also help attain effective and impactful solutions.

At LexQuest Foundation, we are working towards increasing youth engagement in the policy making process, and enabling citizen empowerment through grassroots level intervention, in line with the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals**; we intend to stir and awaken the change seekers and change makers amongst the citizenry. Since we firmly believe that effective policy formulation is crucial for a paradigm shift, when it comes to our most ignominious failings as a nation, we are committed to facilitate the learning curve as far as policy analysis, assessment and awareness is concerned.

Keeping in line with our aim to nurture and fuel thoughts, we decided to enter the realm of policy innovation through our initiative- **The Policy Troupe**. In our first such outing, the Troupe transcended the length and breadth of **Almora, Uttarakhand**, and was exposed to real people and problems through interrogations, observations and interactions.

Amidst the picturesque landscape of Almora, lies the widely prevalent complexity of extending education for livelihood, more so, when mountains prove to be one of the most difficult terrains with limited sources of income and very few viable employment opportunities. While various Civil Society groups are assisting the local population to attain sustainable sources of income, finding long lasting solutions to resolve the following issues, is the need of the hour:

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

➜ **How to prepare children in schools such, that they are able to acquire the skills for a sustainable source of livelihood?**
➜ **How to cope with the perils of economic inequality and let education serve as a means to livelihood?**
➜ **How can teachers ensure that school education can equip students to take up alternative sources of livelihood?**
➜ **How can the problem of inaccessibility, that considerably hampers productivity in these regions, be addressed, so as to warrant improved livelihood opportunities?**

On entering Almora, the District Headquarters of the Kumaon region, we encounter prosperity, abled infrastructure and globalization all wrapped into one, amidst the serenity of the green hills that envelop this Himalayan town. Old colonial buildings, streets swarmed with traditional local delicacies and a whole lot of well maintained government offices, well kept government schools, scattering of ill-conceived primary private schools and a large number of public toilets; all on the same street that caters to the outsiders with its endless hotels, modest eateries and a trail of noisy vehicles.

Almora also has its share of the globalized world with a Mall and several outlets that endorse commodities as necessary end goals of survival. At first glance, it might seem like a place tailor-made for tourists, but it only serves as a transit route to other popular travel destinations and isn't exactly a favourite among the tourists.

During the time spent there, **our Troupe gained insight into the life, culture, society, mindsets, intentions and aspirations of the people in Almora in particular and the population of Uttarakhand in general**. We learnt that **migration (like the rest of the underdeveloped regions of India) is the curse of the region, but unlike most of other such States, migration here means plummeted agricultural and farm sector activities. Meanwhile the non-farm**

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

sector is incapable of creating opportunities for sustainable livelihoods because of myriad logistical roadblocks even as agriculture remains a tedious affair with unfavourable realities for a variety of reasons which therefore can not sustain lives. So what about the role of education in aiding livelihood? The disenchanted hold education as a gateway to their escape and for them qualification is the means to a source of income, even if it's only seasonal and not sustainable in nature. In the follow up to the Almora Deliberation, through our research and recommendations, we realised that **our hills and mountains need course change as against course correction if they were to step up at par with the thriving mainland of India**.

Government Intervention: An Overview

The Constitution of India provides for the State to make provisions with respect to education under Article 41, which is a Directive Principle of State Policy. However, in the case *Unni Krishnan v State of Andhra* Pradesh, the Supreme Court has held basic primary education to be a fundamental right, that derives its legacy from Article 21, the right to life. Thus, it is the duty of the government to ensure that at least primary education is provided to every citizen of the country. However, **it has been observed that accessing education in the mountainous regions of the country is a challenge**, especially given the resource and knowledge gap.

In the Programme of Action, 1992, which was part of the National Policy on Education, 1986, it was observed - "*There are unserved areas in the country where, there is no school for 10 to 20 kms like in some tribal areas, desert or hilly areas where the low density of population does not allow enough children to be enrolled. An area may also be unserved though near a school if a physical barrier like river or mountain separates it*."

In order to improve the situation in the mountains, **The Hill Area Development Program was launched by the Government of India as part of the Fifth Five Year Plan**. In order to implement the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Central Government has been allocating Special Central Assistance to these areas through the Hill Areas Development Programme/Western Ghats Development Programme. The **objective of this program was to ensure sustainable development of hill areas, and generation of livelihood options for the local community**.

The Report of the Task Group on problems of hilly habitations in areas covered by the Hill Areas Development Program/Western Ghats Development Program was released in 2008 (hereinafter referred to as the "2008 Report"). The 2008

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Report states that under the Hill Area Development Program, funds were allocated for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme as well as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to ensure their extension to the hilly regions. Further, there were also provisions for the development of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe specific welfare schools, as well as provisions to develop toilets, playgrounds, drinking water facilities, and sports materials, bunk beds, blankets specifically for Government Tribal Residential schools (Government Tribal Residential Schools are discussed in detail in further paragraphs).

This Report concludes on a rather bleak note, where it was observed that the hill areas lack infrastructure facilities particularly roads, power, education and health facilities, and **that funding may become a problem in the future, as most of the hill stations are sparsely populated, and not significant enough to be vote banks for political parties**.

Further in 2010, the Report of the evaluation study on Hill Area Development Program in Assam and West Bengal (hereinafter referred to as the "2010 Report") was released. **Among other things, the 2010 Report mentioned that hilly areas are different in many ways from the other parts of the country, and government programs not tailor made for those regions don't have a good chance of succeeding, and that development plans need to be area specific, and local solutions should be examined.**

This Report, in line with the conclusion made in the 2008 Report remarked - "*most of the hill areas lack infrastructure facilities particularly roads, power, education and health facilities*". The 2010 Report also made two important observations. First, it spoke about the difference between what the government thought it had achieved, and what the locals considered as development. It states - "*There is a gross mismatch on opinions of the line department officials and villagers on the quality of services provided which suggests that further evaluation needs to be done at the post*

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

implementation phase". Second, it observes that there should be more surveys regarding the number of schools and students, which proved to be inadequate in order to better analyse data and suggest improvements to schooling in the hilly areas.

Policy Recommendations

➜ <u>REGION SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS AND DE-CENTRALISATION</u>

Every region is different and may have specific quirks, that should be dealt with separately, instead of rigidly sticking to a national model that may not have the sensitivity or aptitude to deal with regional problems.

For example, in Tamil Nadu, the prevalence of a large number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe individuals was noted, and special initiatives were created through the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department. This Department has created special Government Residential Schools in order to ensure accessibility to education among the tribals. Further, the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) has been implemented in ten hilly regions. Textbooks, notebooks and uniforms have been provided by the State in these schools.

In addition to this, the ten best performing students in these schools are selected in the tenth standard and sent to a private school for the remainder of their school education, with the State bearing the expenses for the same. The Department has also set up a Tribal Research Centre that gathers data about the tribes, their lifestyle, language, and educational status. In this case, Tamil Nadu has identified the prevalence of caste, and the economic and social inequalities that exist within certain communities and identified solutions tailor made for them.

However, it has been reported that these residential schools remain poorly maintained, and as a result, the students prefer not to stay in them, which defeats the purpose of the initiative. This ties in with the requirement to tend to existing infrastructure and maintain the same, as lack of maintenance and care renders even the best laid plans to waste.

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Other **hill States can emulate this model and propose local solutions to problems that plague that particular region, instead of depending on a national template**. Further, **through decentralisation, the government could also consider placing more responsibility on the Panchayats and Local Government Bodies to improve education**.

Increasing the salaries of teachers who teach in hilly areas, and running State supported Teacher Training Programs for enabling application based and demonstrative pedagogical approach, may also be considered by the respective State Education Departments.

Regional analysis and specific solutions are important to implement grassroots level change in such terrain.

➔ MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM CONTENT

The medium of instruction should not be a standard language (it's either one of the major Indian languages or English), and should be according to the vernacular of that region. Moreover, the curriculum should be relatable for the students from the socio-economic background of a hilly area. In an article 'Education and the Problems of The Tribals in the Hill Districts of Manipur', the author, who hails from the hilly regions and felt disconnected with the education system and curriculum, had written that the textbooks and reading material "*should include lessons depicting the life of the tribals, their folklore, songs, history and the lives of their cultural heroes. These lessons should be woven into ordinary text books in order to enable the non-tribal and tribal students to understand each other. This will add to respect for tribal life and inculcate in the tribal student a sense of confidence that his way of life, history and culture are not inferior and it has the adequate support from other members of the society*".

In order to do this, the State Governments need to be involved and **constitute committees which can look into developing a curriculum specifically for students in the hilly regions, that includes references to tribal history and other aspects of forest and mountain dwelling**. This is where tribal research centres (like the one in Tamil Nadu) can help, with respect to material and sources for the curriculum.

The curriculum in schools also needs to be revised and life sciences, through which students could be taught about agriculture, farming and utilitarian activities inclusive of but not limited to tourism, hospitality, hotel management, etc. in the regions that they belong to, should be introduced at the elementary, intermediate and advanced level of their education. Further, internships through tie-ups with varied government departments functioning in the hills and State Sponsored Student Support Programs, could help facilitate

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

the students' interests in specific fields of their choice, in turn making the hills a highly lucrative option for their livelihood sustainability.

➔ INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENTS FOR GENDER INCLUSIVITY

The societal and cultural makeup of the hilly regions, much like the rest of India, put women at the hearth, while men serve as the breadwinners of the family. While the mainland of the country witnesses an ever increasing participation of women in the economic and political set up, the remoteness and isolation of the hilly regions, renders their orthodoxy prevail to this day. Such predefined and rigid roles have adversely affected the scope of livelihood by limiting the potential of women's abilities. As a result, women are either restricted inside the household or are found toiling in the agricultural fields which are difficult to navigate and hence not the preferred source of labour for the menfolk.

Similar status quo once marred the livelihood turf, in the States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. However, these States witnessed a major overhaul when women centric livelihood alternatives reached sensitized and empowered groups of women. **For the hilly regions of the country to emulate this idea, it is necessary that gender sensitization with busting the myth of 'gender roles' at the focal point, becomes the key area of engagement at the primary and secondary levels of schooling. This will ensure that early familiarisation with gender equality and sensitivity enables all genders to choose livelihood alternatives at the high school level that they are best suited for irrespective of the traditional notions about the same.**

Another challenge is to address the high dropout rates amongst girls in schools. To resolve the same, **well curated vocational training courses, economic education with special focus on the basics of micro finance (that defines the viability of India's SHGs), should be designed for girls**. Though these will prove beneficial at the secondary level of schooling, the same should be **introduced at the elementary level itself so as to encourage and motivate**

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

the girls to attend schools even when other compulsions prompt them to drop out.

State Government sponsored fellowship programmes (in line with the Chief Minister Fellowships in the States of Haryana and Maharashtra) could be devised to facilitate counselling sessions for all genders, that will entail mentoring about career opportunities, commence informative dialogue on sexuality education and administer active assistance to overcome the societal and logistical hurdles that prompt students to discontinue their education.

➔ SENSITIZATION AND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION DRIVES

It has been noted by various Central and State Government Reports that the main difficulty in educational reforms in the hilly regions is retaining students, as most of their parents do not see education as a profitable use of time, and prefer that their children do manual labour which would bring in money. In a paper titled 'Education for All: A Case of Rural Himalayas' which discusses the access to education in the State of Uttarakhand, the authors observed - "*The generational gap is an unavoidable truth bearing testimony to past neglects*".

Detailed awareness programmes need to be conducted in order to **highlight the importance of education, and the short-lived and seasonal nature of manual employment**. In this regard, it is important to note that most people living in the hills may not have undergone formal education; **their thinking and mindset could be worked on, by stimulating awareness around the fact that living and surviving in the hills shouldn't be looked down upon, while also providing them with the requisite tools and resources to aid their survival in such difficult terrain**.

Owing to the notion that it is not necessary for the girl child to be educated beyond primary schooling, there is a higher dropout rate for women in schools. Civil Society Organisations, with the aid of the relevant Ministry, if required, could conduct programmes that teach people about the importance of educating the girl child. Engagements with Gram Panchayat and other local government bodies could be a necessary part of these sensitization drives.

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

➔ <u>ADDRESSING INFRASTRUCTURE</u>

<u>Roads</u>

While the hilly regions have a bountiful of natural beauty, they also cater to a population that requires access to roads and other modern infrastructure mechanisms. It is an indisputable fact that roads play a crucial role in increasing accessibility to schools, colleges, and other educational institutions especially in the difficult terrain of the mountains.

However, these roads should be constructed in an ecologically sensitive manner. Existing government programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana can be expanded to ensure better connectivity in the hilly regions.

Himachal Pradesh has developed an exemplary model to showcase the direct correlation between accessible roads and education. In a November 2017 report of the India Today magazine, the State was ranked first in the list of best states in India with respect to education and infrastructure. Himachal Pradesh even overshot its target under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and was awarded a financial incentive for its performance during 2017-18, out of which at least 4% roads were constructed using green technology. In the same year, it was reported that the learning outcomes of students of elementary classes had increased by 15-30%. In fact while infrastructure facilities were being improved, the State started 193 new Primary Schools, upgraded 1,097 government schools from Higher Secondary to Senior Secondary, started vocational education in 873 Secondary Schools, opened 65 degree colleges and other speciality colleges. This proves that infrastructure development not only complements, but also aids educational advancement. Other **hilly regions of the country should try to adapt the Himachal Pradesh model so that increased access to roads enhances the scope of effective education**.

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Transport

One of the main reasons for students not attending schools in the hilly regions is the difficulty of the commute. In certain seasons, it can become impossible to travel by foot. There are many dangers associated with travelling through the hilly regions by foot, especially for children. **Attendance rates will increase if the State can facilitate transportation for these students**. **This will, in turn, have a positive impact on the learning outcomes, as the teachers who otherwise have to undertake a rigorous journey on a daily basis, will also be able to reach school on time, and hence be motivated to conduct classes regularly**. Additionally, the viability of teacher and student exchange programs will improve. As this terrain holds a special charm for the younger generation and tourists from foreign countries, who are eager to take up **voluntary teaching positions in schools, this facility will enhance the scope of learning levels of students through this interaction**. Though an unconventional form of learning, the importance of such exposure and **its long term positive impact cannot be undermined in a globalised world, where even learning a foreign language or familiarisation with technology could improve the scope of employment opportunities**.

Other Amenities

It has been found **that the lack of toilets, drinking water, and other basic amenities in schools have largely been responsible for high dropout rates**. The lack of sanitation facilities for girls was also found to be a problem. Further, it was observed that some schools do not have adequately high compound walls, which could be attributed to as a high risk factor, especially in hilly regions that are prone to landslides and wild animals.

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Not addressing such fundamental issues has led to dire circumstances for the students; **timely repair and routine supervision of the state of infrastructure could help alleviate the problem of dropouts in such schools**.

➔ FOCUSSING ON DIGITISATION

Himachal Pradesh increased its budget by almost two crores to Rs 5,824 crore in 2016-17 and moved towards digitisation to enhance education. The concepts of e-review and e-monitoring emerged for the students, along with measures like e-tracking the delivery of textbooks to remote portions of the State, thereby ensuring that geographic inaccessibility did not stand in the way of the State's responsibility to provide adequate facilities.

However, this measure did not specifically deal with the advancement of educational methodology. Since 2015, the Centre for Development of Telematics has been working on long distance and solar powered wi-fi devices, in order to enhance connectivity in rural, remote, and hilly areas. While this is a great leap forward in the arena of science & technology, it would have an even greater impact if it were pegged to an educational initiative in a remote area. Thus, **existing government programmes that specialise in technological development should work in tandem with existing educational programmes in the remote and hilly regions, in order to maximise efficiency and welfare**.

If there is good connectivity and access to internet in these areas, it would not be difficult to connect these students to teachers who are in different parts of the State, especially given that hilly regions are prone to seasonal inaccessibility during rains and other such factors.

➔ AUTHENTIC DATA COLLECTION AND VERIFICATION

It has been noted in the 2010 Report that there should be more surveys with respect to educational policies and measures in the hilly regions, as the data that currently exists is inadequate. This needs to be rectified. State governments should **ensure and enable collection of authentic and sufficient data and statistics in the hilly regions, in consultation with their respective Education & Human Resource Departments and submit the same to the Central Government**, so as to assist the concerned personnel in formulating pragmatic policy solutions. Civil Society Organisations could aid the government in such efforts.

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

Concluding Remarks

As India marches towards evolving into a 'knowledge economy', it becomes increasingly imperative to focus on imparting skills relevant to the upcoming economic environment. **The discrepancy between skills and employment is particularly acute in the inaccessible terrains of the country, specifically the hilly regions.**

There is a long way to go in terms of improvement, but with adequate government policies, cooperation between various government departments, and effective implementation, education in the hilly regions has the potential to be at par with education levels in the other, more accessible parts of the country.

There has been a growing consensus among educators, since at least the last five decades, that literacy is not an end in itself and that it needs to serve some purpose and prove beneficial to its users. RS Mooshahary, State Chief Information Commissioner of Assam, agrees, that of the many objects of education, the one that aims at furnishing students with the skills of self-reliance is perhaps the most important. "Without it", he says, "education is devoid of direction and not worth pursuing". In a study conducted by the World Bank Group, across Bangladesh and West Africa, it was observed that programs that are centred around livelihood skills seem to stand a stronger chance of success as they can demonstrate an immediate reason for learning. **Organizations that are more concerned with livelihoods and other aspects of development seem to be better at designing and delivering effective combinations of livelihoods and literacy than organizations that are more focused on education.**

While India has made commendable headway in improving enrolment rates for primary education, it has been less successful in averting dropouts. According to a 2011 study by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, these 'dropouts' are most likely to be engaged in semi-skilled and unskilled employment. As per observation, analysis and local interactions,

poverty is not the only reason for the high dropout rate in the hills – **the difficult terrain, rural panorama and low employment opportunities do not attract highly qualified educators. As a result, students leave school, out of disinterest, or skip class as they find other vocations worthwhile of pursuit**.

As per American philosopher John Dewey, 'Any education, in its forms and methods, is an outgrowth of the needs of the society in which it exists'. Hence, the educational methods adopted in a developed European nation would be different from those in an underdeveloped country in Africa. For a nation as diverse as India, one size fits all could be the most disastrous approach to follow, especially when it comes to education.

While mountains and hills are perceived as a source of beauty, spirituality and asceticism, we have failed to acknowledge and fairly address the harsh geographical, economic and infrastructural realities of life in the mountains. **For the inhabitants of such terrain, education as an end in itself and education as a means to sustainable livelihood solutions remains an eternal challenge.**

We need to devise accessibility, inclusivity and outcome-intensive methods in line with The Global Goals for Sustainable Development, to assist India's mountain and hill population. It is imperative to resort to locally plausible, sustainable and region specific solutions so that **education for livelihood enables the restoration and retention of the natural resources, unique culture and rich traditions by investing in and nurturing the human capital in such regions**.

■ ■ ■

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention

LexQuest Foundation

References

1. National Policy of Education, 1986| Programme of Action, 1992
2. Report of the Task Group on Problems of Hilly Habitations in Areas Covered by the Hill Areas Development Programme (HADP)/ Western Ghats Development Programme (WGDP), Planning Commission, 2008
3. Report of the Evaluation Study on Hill Area Development Programme in Assam and West Bengal, Programme Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission, 2010
4. Himachal Pradesh tops in education, infrastructure in India Today State of the States report, Asit Jolly
5. Digital India: C-DoT's WiFi products to ease connectivity in rural areas, hilly terrain, ET Bureau
6. ADI Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Policy Note 2018-19
7. Absenteeism, a perennial problem in GTR schools, Meera Srinivasan
8. Education for All: A Case of Rural Himalayan, Suresh Sharma & Nilabja Ghosh
9. Education and the Problems of the Tribals in the Hill Districts of Manipur, Wangdibou

Policy Awareness | Youth Engagement | Citizen Empowerment | Grassroots Intervention