

Programme Proposal

**Towards a literate childhood: A Learning and Support Center for
underprivileged children in Noida
(Ugta Suraj)**

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underprivileged children in Noida
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Context of the Programme:

Children constitute a significant segment of India's population with around 42 percent of its overall population. It has the largest child population in the world, estimated at more than 380 million below the age of 18 years and about 200 million in the age group of 6-14 years (Census of India, 2001).

Childhood is a time ideally for playing, enjoying and learning about nature. But in actual, for millions of children in India, these are the three "luxuries" of life. The issue of basic day to day survival is a stark reality of their life since their birth. They are either working under forced economic conditions of their families to bring an income or tend to household chores for their parents to work. Their work lives at private homes, teashops, restaurants, mechanical shops, factories and farms are an endless saga of deprivation and exploitation in the form of extremely low wages and inhumanly long working hours.

Who is a child?

A child can be defined as "someone who needs adult protection for physical, psychological and intellectual development until able to become independently integrated into the adult world". Since the criteria of childhood varies with culture, the span (age) of childhood varies simultaneously. In India, a person below the age of 14 years is considered a child, especially with reference to child labour.

For an overall healthy development of children, the Government of India has made many constitutional provisions evidently through various acts and laws. For instance, Article 39(c) requires the state, in particular, to direct its policy towards securing that the children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in made the conditions of freedom and dignity so that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

To ensure literacy and meet the educational needs of children, there is a provision through Article 45, which ensures free and compulsory education for all citizens until they complete the age of 14 years.

In addition, there is a specific provision for checking the menace of child labour in the form of Article 24, which prohibits the employment of a child below the age of 14 years to work in any factory or mine or in any other hazardous employment. The concerning law is called, CHILD LABOUR (PROHIBITION AND REGULATION ACT) 1986.

While bringing literacy and education under its fold, SADRAG undertook surveys in different locations in Noida city. The areas covered were essentially rag pickers bastis, dhabas and road side shops along the entire belt of sectors 15,16, 17 and 18. The survey threw open many startling facts about these children. The major being that none of these children attended a formal school, despite the presence of many government schools in their neighborhoods. They were either working outside their homes or managed their household chores while their parents are away for work. Many children helped their parents in their work like selling goods, fruits and vegetables etc. The girls looked after their younger siblings at home while their mothers worked in the nearby factories. The economic hardships of their families did not permit them a normal childhood, comprising school and recreation. Besides adverse economic condition of the family, the callous attitude of parents towards children's need for school education contributed to their 'out of school status'. The silver lining to the whole scenario was that these children wanted to study in school. During our interaction with them, many asked us the question, "*where do we come to study and at what time*"?

This preliminary survey by SADRAG team emphasized an urgent need to provide a healthy educational and recreational environment to these children to ensure their physical, social and mental well-being. It also emphasized the necessity for enrolling these children into formal schools, which are either run by the government or various charitable organizations within Noida city.

Objectives of the proposed programme:

The programme is named Ugta Suraj and has been conceptualized to achieve the following objectives:

Long term objective:

To ensure the basic child right of free and universal formal school education among the underprivileged children of Noida.

Immediate objectives:

To bridge the gap between formal school system and community with an aim to:

- Provide for basic educational and recreational needs of underprivileged children
- Popularize among children, the institution of school and knowledge imparted therein.
- Provide psychological support and a motivational environment for personal growth and development of the children.
- Mainstream the children by linking them to formal school system.
- Ensure retention of the enrolled children by closely monitoring their school status for a period of one year.
- Help children with school curriculum and syllabus after the school hours.

Approach and strategy:

The proposed programme would be implemented in an identified location, Agahpur village in Sector-41 in Noida. The programme would be run through a Learning and Support Center (LSCs) for those village / basti children who attend no formal school of any kind. This centre would function in the community and cater to the educational and recreational needs of the children in and around the village / basti. It will enroll 45-50 children in the age group 6 to 14 years. These children would be working (as covered under the legal definition of child labour) as well as non-working (those who may be working at home or handling family occupation). These children would stay with the center till their formal enrolment in schools and would continue to have a need specific relationship with the center after school hours.

SADRAG is already running three such a LSCs in Noida. These are at following locations:

- Harola village in Sector – 5
- Nithari village in Sector-31
- Ragpicker’s basti in Sector-16

A total of 150 -160 children are regularly enrolled in these centers. In addition, a few such children who attend neighbourhood schools, visit the centre every now and then to spend quality time and learn new concepts and skills.

In July, 2007, a group of 45 children were mainstreamed through Harola LSC. These children are in close contact with the centre for all kinds of support and the centre ensures their retention in school through their monitoring in academic and parental follow up for a period of one year.

SADRAG has conducted a survey of ‘out of school’ children in the above locations during the months of January to March 08. Around 1100 children in the age group 6 to 14 had been found during the survey. In April 2008, a preliminary survey was conducted in Agahpur village which brought about 200 such children who are not linked to formal school system. These are primarily the children who belong to the Kiraydaar’s tag (Migrated families from poorer areas who come to Noida in search of employment and better wages and live on rent within the village). Agahpur has hordes of tiny rooms which are constructed by the landowners and are rented out to migrated families on the monthly rent ranging from Rs 600 to 1000 plus. While the parents in migrated families are away to work from morning to evening, their children remain vulnerable to anti social elements in the absence of proper schooling and other support systems within the village. Agahpur village has a lot of jhuggi/ jhopri (kachcha dwellings) along one side. Therefore, this location has been selected for an intervention under “Ugta Suraj” program.

Methodology:

In anticipation of support from Noon.ch, an LSC at Agahpur village in Sector-4, Noida began in the first week of May 2008. To begin with, children coming to the centre are presently engaged in activities like drawing, painting, story telling etc. They would be gradually introduced to reading, writing and other skills. It would build upon the strategy adopted at the other LSCs, which is based on informal methodology for knowledge and information dissemination among the children. For instance, various subjects like Hindi, English, Maths, Environmental sciences etc. would be taught to the children through active interactive sessions with the facilitators. The curriculum of the programme would be planned on a monthly, weekly and daily basis for the inclusion of various educational and recreational activities. Thematic stories would be a regular part of their curriculum. For a wider exposure to children, resource persons and volunteers would be involved for various activities. The volunteers would share their skills and experiences with children through stories and interactive talks. Regular exposure visits to places of historical importance or otherwise would be included in their regular curriculum. Inter-centre activities would be held to promote spirits of competition and togetherness among the children.

The LSC at Harola village has an inbuilt resource library for the children. It is equipped with educational and recreational material of various kinds such as story books, indoor and outdoor games and relevant documentary movies etc. Its resources are extended to all children within the vicinity of the village. Such a resource center would also be a part of LSC in Agahpur village.

Implementation of the programme:

The proposed programme would be implemented and coordinated by SADRAG. Since the centers would have children, working as well as non-working, the district Education and Labour departments would be involved too.

Output of the programme:

Every year about 50 children would be mainstreamed through this intervention. The one year follow-up together with assistance in school curriculum would ensure 100 percent retention of children in school.

Budget:

The total expense of the LSC/year would be as following:

Category of expense	Amount (Rs)
Programme Director (Travel expense) Rs 1800/mth/12mths	21,600
Facilitator's salary two/center@Rs4000/mth/12mths	96,000
Stationery & resource expense e.g. teaching aids, stationery etc./year	30,000 (Rs 2500/mth)
Field visits by children & staff local travel/year**	27,400 (Rs 2283/mth)
Administrative, communication and maintenance/year	25,000
Total	2,00,000

** Besides catering for local travel of Program Coordinator and facilitators per month, this amount would also be used for taking children out for trips / outings.

The total yearly expense for running and maintaining the LSC would be Rs 2,00,000.
