

# Role of Community Organization in Helping Education Needs of Underprivileged Children in the Age Group of 6-14 Years'

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**ABSTRACT**As the world witnesses deepening inequalities, the role of promotive forces such as community organizations becomes imperative. Community organizations are becoming a center for social development since they are facilitators in the process of social development and serve different age groups. The present study explores the role of community organization working for children. This paper discusses with a help of case study role played by community organizations in promoting the culture of learning and happy childhood among low income students. The paper explores both the implementation and impact of intervention deployed by community organizations on the development of life skills among children between the age group of 6 to 14 years. The study being exploratory in nature undertook development of case study on community organization namely 'KhelGhar' located in slums of Pune city. The organization caters to children from different socio-economic backgrounds. In order to understand the impact of intervention deployed, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed. Finding of the study highlight achievement of specific skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking and ability of manage conflict among low income students. The study therefore, concludes that, use of responsive pedagogy as an intervention should be used in the regular teaching-learning process and not simply resorted as a remedial measure. The study also, concludes that community organizations in education help in accomplishing high-learning, engagement and strengthen reform at local level. The findings reveals that community organizations play a significant role in combating challenges at local level with special reference to the needs of children.

Key words: Community Engagement, Education, Teachers, Life Skills, Khelghar.

#### 1. Introduction

Man is a social animal and has always needed to live in harmony with his society as much as he has with his surroundings. Ever since humans learnt of the strength that lay in beating the odds of survival in packs and groups over solitary life, organizing themselves in social units has been a fundamental characteristic of the development of civilization. In essence, communities have been around for as long as civilizations.

The term 'community' derives its origins from Old French - comuneté, hailing from the root word communis which means 'shared in common' in Latin. However, the concept of a 'community' may carry different implications in different situations/contexts. Community organizations across the globe have targeted a plethora of pressing and prevalent humanitarian issues that need redressal ranging right from the struggle for basic human rights to healthcare, primary education, unemployment allowance and combating discrimination in all its ugly faces based on caste, creed, colour, gender, religion, political identity, sexual orientation and much more. Community organizations thus have played an important role in enabling governments across the world to distribute resources, reach out to people and segments they could not and help in creating a better world.

India as a country has its unique challenges and therefore needs unique solutions. For example, India accounts for 42 percent of the child and adolescent population of its total population which is 440 million (Census of India 2001). India is also home to the world's largest adolescent population which is 243 million leaving behind China (UNICEF report, 2012). Children deserve guidance, access to quality education and opportunities to realize their potential along with care. But there exists a big reef between the expected and the reality. A very large number of children in India are deprived of the basic facilities to experience a dignified childhood. A substantial part of the country's population, not only in the rural and remote pockets but also in the semi-urban and urban regions, continues to be deprived of fundamental rights such as having access to clean surroundings, basic sanitation, healthcare facilities and primary education. A by and large failure of the formal governing system to address this very evident plight owing to a multitude of contributing factors makes this situation all the more unsettling.

One such major and recent challenge is rapid and unthoughtful urbanization which is leading to creating socio-economic disparities in India. Though primary education has been brought under the right to education in India, greater privatization has also led to creating a greater learning divide between low-income students and high-income students. Students coming from low-income backgrounds have peculiar family characteristics which is unsupportive for their growth and development. The inability of the parents to help children in their studies, early exposure to domestic violence, and unsafe and

unhealthy neighbourhood hamper learning at school. Students are unable to cope with studies, they lag behind the other children of their age coming from affluent backgrounds. The formal education system at schools is unable to help the child cater to life skills and therefore, more local and promotive force such as community organizations plays a vital role in capitalizing on the collective psyche of the low-income communities. They enable a high learning environment and invoke greater parent accountability too. Although the nation's plight in the last two centuries called for and received copious amounts of social and community involvement, there is a lack of a formally documented and studied historical account of the presence of community organizations in India.

Based on the problem statement, below are the research objectives of the research

- To study how community organizations intervene in the process of development or handling a challenge at the community level, through case study analysis.
- To measure the impact of a community organization KhelGhar, on the life skills development of children.

#### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human development is multidimensional. The development of a child involves a diverse and complex dimension such as the biological forces and family dynamics involving family functioning, attachment to the caregivers and the broader socio-economic and environmental forces such as the economic status of the child. All these forces together shape children's growth and development. The developmental challenges and opportunities of child development vary depending upon factors such as the child's upbringing pattern and beliefs about raising children. Children are exposed to different levels of hazards depending upon households, communities, and societies. Because of this children experience a variation in their developmental trajectories. However, varying moderating and mediating influences at the individual, family and social levels can interact and intersect to influence the child's development. (Burchima et al 2008; Stevens 2006; Toth and Cicchetti 2010).

Also, it is understood that the child development process is time-sensitive in the sense that children's response to certain external stimuli is high in a certain period of age. This increases the vulnerability of children to transit into better adulthood in the long-run who are exposed to risk during those periods of their childhood stage. As such early childhood is recognized as the most crucial life phase in terms of development. Unequal participation in early childhood or social exclusion can cause greater harm. As such early childhood is recognized as the most important life phase in terms of development as at this stage the growth process is accelerated. (Streuli et al 2011; Woodhead et al. 2009).

Children draw their feelings of self-worth, identity, and personal well-being from the external environment they are exposed to. The external environment consists of their family, peer group and community (Boyden and Crivello, 2012; Ridge 2002). Children are exposed to different levels of hazards depending upon households, communities, and societies. Because of this children experience a variation in their developmental trajectories. However, at the individual level and the level of family and society, the introduction of varying mediating interventions can lead to creating greater influence on the development of the child. (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008; Stevens 2006; Toth and Cicchetti 2010). Also, as the school's curriculum and pedagogy fall insufficient to help children especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, to develop holistically the need for moderators such as community organizations is felt more.

According to (Levin, 2007), the socioeconomic status of the child is the single strongest predictor of a child's achievement in school and a low socioeconomic status has various negative influences on a child's development. Family income and poverty status are the key indicators for determining educational, cognitive and behavioural attainment. (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov, 1994). It is the magnitude, depth and duration of poverty which influences the child development observed (Fergusson, Boyaird & Muller Malik & Mohanty, 2009). Gortte et al. 2007,). It is generally observed that children from poor households receive late schooling their drop-out rate is high and they work during their studies. It is also observed that disadvantaged children have limited access to music, art and other leisure activities compared to children of affluent families. Children are therefore observed to be at greater risk of experiencing exclusion due to poverty within schools. (Ridge, 2002). Children are citizens entitled to rights and capabilities (Klasen1998). Social exclusion of children violates their rights and capabilities for better adulthood, which is recognized by the Conventions of the Rights of the Child and national legislation governing the rights of children UNICEF, 1986. A study of challenges faced by children due to social exclusion is important for reasons that there is a greater possibility that socially excluded children may grow up to be socially excluded adults. These children may suffer from deficiencies in important capabilities such as the ability to be healthy, well-educated and well-housed. This has large social implications and such exclusions may lead to or have other social problems which may threaten the stability and prosperity of society at large, such as crime, violence, social pathologies, racism and xenophobia etc. they may also become a burden on society (Klasen.S, 2001).

A study observed that when deliberate attempts are made to integrate members including students, parents, teachers, and administrators of various constituent groups for discussions in a way that respects wisdom and context, individuals are better able to grasp one another's viewpoints and shifts in thinking take place. (Garcia,2019). Teachers must participate in professional learning in order to assess and strengthen their critical thinking skills. To develop children's critical thinking, pedagogical training is crucial. (Lancrin 2019) Community-based experiences can help teachers empathize with students from diverse backgrounds and can integrate justice and equity in their teaching (Marlatts' & Barnes 2022). Skills development in itself is a dynamic process for which the early years

are important in shaping both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The early age development of skills lays the foundation for successful intervention and investment in later years. According to, (Bernstein et al., 2007), cognitive skills, are defined as the ability to "perform higher mental processes of reasoning, remembering, understanding, and problem-solving". Research supports that cognitive ability has been found to be highly correlated with schooling success and significantly contributes to future earnings as well. (Cawley, Heckman, &Vytlacil, 2001; Green & Riddell 2003). Compared to cognitive skills which peak in late adulthood and later start declining (Borghans et al., 2008) non-cognitive skills are comparatively malleable and have a long-lasting impact on one's life (Kautz et al., 2014). It has been found through research that non-cognitive skills are more predictive of long-term outcomes than are test scores i.e. IQ (Chetty et al. 2011; Heckman & Rubinstein 2001; Lindquist & Vestman 2011; Mueller & Plug, 2006).

Poor academic performance at an early age is a commonly observed phenomenon among children from Low SES children and they also fall short of NCS. Non-cognitive skills such as attention, self-control and motivation are found to be helpful in improving in reducing the disadvantages of low SES children (Liu, 2019). It has been observed that in different subfields, the interpretation and measurement of NCS are motives driven for example a community organization focusing on increasing physical activity among children will have a focus on different NCS to be developed than a School (Humphries & Kosse, 2017).

# 3. Research Methodology

The research design for the present study is qualitative and quantitative research design. In order to understand the community organization and its interventions, interviews with facilitators were conducted at length. Along with the interview method, observation by the researcher during visits to the community organization was sorted too. In order to specifically understand the impact of activities conducted by KhekGhar on the achievement of life skills a structured questionnaire was used, which was filled by the researcher while in conversation with the children.

# 4. Case Study Development: KhelGhar

**Background of the organization**: In 1987 the initial stages of the programme saw the introduction of the magazine "Palakneeti". The magazine covered areas related to conscious parenting and creative learning. By 1996 there was a need to reach out to the children of lower segments by education. Thus, came "Khelghar" a vision introduced by Shubhada Joshi an architect by profession from Pune. Her urge to do something for the financially deprived children made her interact with the parents of a Lakshinangar slum. In her interaction, she realized that parents wanted their children to get a good education and be good human beings. Khelghar is the project of Palakneeti Pariwar. The word Khelghar is made of two words Khel which means play and Ghar which means home. Thus, Khelghar is a place where learning is a joyful experience. Khleghar is neither a tuition centre nor a school.

Philosophy and the Motto of community organization: Khelghar is based on the concept of social parenting, which extends the idea of parental care from the individual to the public sphere. Khelghar aspires to alter the situation by creating an environment where learning is an enjoyable and meaningful experience. The motto is 'Education for the deprived'. It's now at a stage where children who have been students at Khelghar have now picked up jobs as teachers.

## **Activities at Khleghar**

- Discussion and interaction with Tai or the teacher
- Arts and Craft
- Visiting exhibitions and organizations
- Screening of and discussion on films
- Paint Pictures and Picture Writing Poster
- Clay Making
- Reading & Drama

**Teaching Interventions at Khelghar:** One of the most important instruments used in teaching is the tool called *Discussion Group*. Children from a financially difficult background and unstable home front face a lot of challenges. Children face humiliation, disrespect, addiction, face violence. Often children emulate elders. The Discussion Group gives the children the place, space and time to discuss the challenges faced by them. The children are given the freedom to discuss and honestly express their feelings. This helps the children to think for themselves and think independently. The discussion group enables them to put their innermost feeling into words. They are able to express their fears and apprehensions. Often when the children share it or rather speak about it loudly, children also realize that they are not alone in this and there are others who face similar challenges.

#### Discussion done at Three Levels:

- Section and introduction of the Topic to the Class
- Pacilitator directs the Discussion
- List the different aspects
- To note the changes that need to be made

While selecting topics for the group discussion it is ensured that the topic is such that Children have the Freedom to speak Secondly Children get knowledge in the Process and thirdly the discussion helps the children change their opinions and prejudices

Children and made to sit in groups of 15 to 20. They sit in a circle so that they can face each other. The group discussion generally has an equal number of boys and girls. The facilitator also sits amongst them. The children get their turn to speak and raise their hands if they want to add to something that is being said

Some of the topics discussed at Group Discussion were: Ganesh Festival, My Neighborhood, Violence vs Non-Violence, Competition and Cooperation, Deprivation in Society Likes and Dislikes, my favourite Space, Relationships within the Family, how are Boys and Girls Different Why, what is Women's Works and what is men's work, Friendship, love Marriage, Difference between Khleghar and School, Freedom vs Responsibility, Justice vs Injustice. The outcome of this activity is to enable the expression of feeling, to examine prejudices that exist and bring critical and rational thinking to the context, and to learn from one's own life experience and confidence building.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

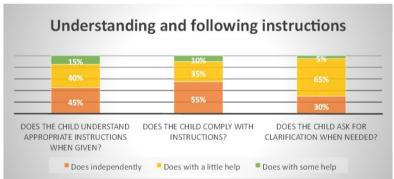
## 5.1 Khelghar as a community organization

One of the most important factors affecting the development of children is 'Education'. Access to education is an important determinant of the capability approach to social exclusion. Education is also regarded as an important participatory process for generating respect in society. It is the inclusionary nature of the education process that its universalization was emphasized. However, conversely, education can be exclusionary in nature if it fails to promote equal participation and access and if it fails to develop a child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. In developing countries like India, with a huge population base, efforts of small, yet effective programs run by community organizations at the local level to develop non-cognitive skills or focus on overall child development can be very useful. Such as Khelghar a local community organization from Pune is based on the concept of social parenting, which extends the idea of parental care from the individual to the public sphere. Khelghar aspires to alter this situation by creating an environment where learning is an enjoyable and meaningful experience. Often, children from a financially difficult background and unstable home front face a lot of challenges. Children face humiliation, disrespect, addiction, and face violence. Often children emulate elders. The Discussion Group gives the children the place, space and time to discuss the challenges faced by them. The children are given the freedom to discuss and honestly express their feelings. This helps the children to think for themselves and think independently. The discussion group enables them to put their innermost feeling into words. They are able to express their fears and apprehensions. Khelghar serves children from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The surrounding of any child is made of three important factors such as family, neighbourhood and community which includes their school.

However, each child may not experience a caring family, a fulfilling neighbourhood and a nurturing community. Khelghar as a community organization works with these children not only to improve their academic performance but also intervenes by providing social parenting support to them through its various activities such as discussion groups, arts and crafts, music and drama which are planned age-wise. One such prominent activity to be mentioned is the tender age of 10 to 12 when children experience physical changes in their bodies as they are nearing puberty. Children of this group were asked by their facilitator to look into the mirror and observe their faces which made them comfortable to express their observation about self. As the discussions moved ahead, children reported about their skin colour, nose, and what they liked and disliked about it. The facilitator then led the discussion to a better understanding of self and the creation of a positive self-image and avoiding teasing and physical comments. Similarly, children between the age group of 6 to 9 are engaged in activities such as folding a handkerchief or a towel, to enable them to become organized and keep their stuff properly. Activities like this and many others are planned to provide the parental support they may lack at home and school. Low-income communities are known for having no economic power but are observed capitalizing on their collective political power and strategic alliance to achieve their goals. Community organizations such as Khelghar use this collective power and bring awareness among parents of these children and focus on public accountability too (M. Elena Lopez, 2003).

# 5.2 Measuring the impact of interventions in the form of non-cognitive skills

**5.2.1 Understanding Instructions:** It is very important to develop the habit of asking for help or clarification when needed to complete a task. Understanding instructions and complying with them is an important skill. It was observed in Fig. 1 that 65% of children ask for clarification, 15% need some help in understanding instructions and 10% need some help in following instructions.



**Fig. 1**. Understanding and Following Instructions Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

**5.2.2 Creative Thinking:** Creativity is an approach to doing or solving challenges. Creative thinking pushed in the form of activities that would ask students to think differently and apply novel solutions to situations, problems and products can be a great way of learning. As shown in Fig. 2, 70% of respondents at KhelGhar are experimental with things, 55% derive pleasure from finding solutions, 60% wish to grow and accomplish in life, and 80% are ready to accept a different solution. 5% to 15% need some help and 5% are those who need a lot of help.

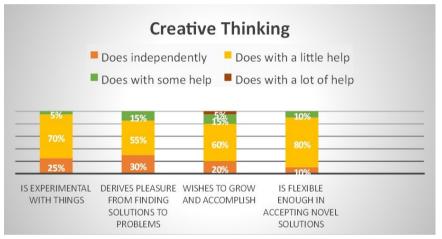


Fig. 2. Creative Thinking

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

# 5.2.3 Critical Thinking

Lastly, developing a critical view of things, situations and everyday life. It helps children build their perceptions and overcome challenges at home, school and in society. As shown in Fig.3, 55% can think rationally and understand the logical connections, 60% can build a positive image about self, and another 60% show readiness to correct self. Children from slums especially for girl children, the family and neighbourhood may not be very supportive of education. However, the ability to think critically can always help them to find ways out and look at life from a better perspective and not adhere to stigmas around gender. One of the common complaints by the founder of KhelGhar was boys, get swayed away to bad habits and end up doing wrong things. The development of critical thinking at a young age can be very helpful.

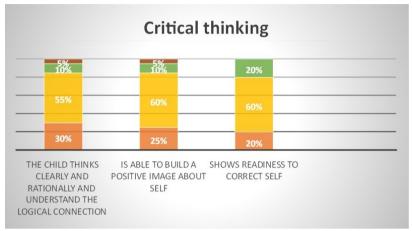


Fig. 3. Critical Thinking

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

## 5.2.4 Managing Conflict

It can be observed that with every life skill measured students whether it managing conflicts, understanding and following instructions or critical thinking is able to do it, but need some help denotes that the community organization has been able to definitely make an impact on them and intervention in the form of community organizations like Khelghar are needed as majority of them still need some help. Observing their family income and parental education organizations like Khelghar are definitely making a positive impact through social parenting in helping these children transition smoothly from childhood to adulthood as shown in Fig.4.

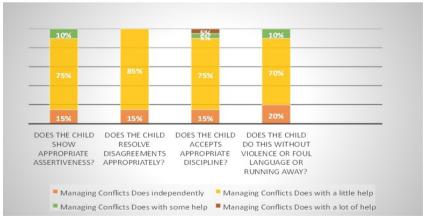


Fig. 4. Managing Conflict

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

#### 6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Children constitute a very important part of the population. If they are enabled to transition into adulthood with needed support, help and care they can further contribute towards development. Community organizations such as KhelGhar are acting as positive mediators to enable children from poor socio-economic backgrounds an opportunity to lead a happy, safe and playful childhood. In exercises such as dialogues with the instructor, children especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds are given an opportunity to speak up and share their experiences, understanding then brought by the instructor to the context enables these children who witness domestic violence on a day-to-day basis to understand the situation and create a positive self - image. Non-cognitive skills provide scope to develop a child's creative capability to solve problems, critical thinking enables to bring more meaning to any context in life and is observed to be present in the majority of the children who are part of Khelghar.

The findings highlight specific skill enhancement. The study also highlights that community organizations strengthen reforms at the local level. They operate as organizations which are able to create learning communities at the lower end of the society. Through their responsive and engaging pedagogy, they enable better learning outcomes among the target audience. The findings also bring to light that interventions such as motivation through discussion, problem problem-solving assignments to apply creative thinking are not used as a remedial measure to overcome early life skill deficits but it used simultaneously with the formal education system. The study, therefore, concludes that the use of responsive pedagogy as an intervention should be used in the regular teaching-learning process and not simply resorted as a remedial measure.

As India embarks upon a new journey of education through NEP 2020, community organizations working in education empowerment should be recognized and brought in as part of the formal education system. The government-run schools are advised to run a pilot study collaborating a local school with a community organization such as Khelghar to partner in holistic child development. It can use the local reach of the community organization to reach out to children as well as their parents. These connections can be further utilized to create the needed awareness for education and greater parental involvement in child development which is observed to be absent at low-income communities.

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