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Transitioning to Better Primary Education: The Role of an Expatriate Organisation in India

Sandeep Sharma *, Dora Marinova and Diana Bogueva

Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute, Curtin University, Perth 6102, Australia; D.Marinova@curtin.edu.au (D.M.); diana.bogueva@curtin.edu.au (D.B.)

* Correspondence: sharmass@bigpond.com; Tel.: +61-412-515494

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Abstract: India is a signatory to the United Nations' programs, accepting to implement the Millennium Development Goals and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While progress on universal primary education has been made since 2000, attaining equitable education for all (SDG4), remains a challenge in rural India. With an estimated 200 million children under the age of fourteen, enrolment in commencing primary education has improved. However, progress beyond year V (primary education in India covers school years I to VIII) is inadequate. One third of children in rural areas drop out of school by that time and this increases to almost half by year VIII. Given India's large diaspora, this article analyses the impact of a new model of educational support through the work of a non-resident expatriate association, India Rural Education and Development Inc. (IREAD). It uses a 2011–2019 longitudinal case study of a government school in the village of Lakhnu, Uttar Pradesh. Data from the activities of IREAD, researcher observations, interviews, photographs and infrastructure evidence, are analysed. A grounded theory emanating from the data is proposed and areas of improvement are suggested. The research concludes that a major shift is difficult to achieve but IREAD's contribution delivers small steps in the right direction to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for rural children in India.

Keywords: India; rural; primary education; sustainability; expatriate; non-resident; association

1. Introduction

There is a recognition by the Government of India that education is a fundamental building block of a progressive society and significant programs with funding allocated have been instituted to promote universal primary education (UPE) at scale within the country. For example, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA), or education for all, signature initiative has been active in the country since 2000. From a broad policy perspective, India is also a signatory to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) declarations which commit to universal quality and equitable primary education.

Despite many activities put in place to respond to the MDGs and SDGs, progress has not been satisfactory. Of the estimated cohort of 200 million children in the primary school age bracket, over six million children still remain excluded from schooling [1]. Of those enrolled, attendance is poor, attrition rates are high and learning outcomes are inadequate. This situation is particularly pronounced in rural India where parents and children are facing additional challenges due to poverty-related demands on their households, social and cultural complexities as well as the inadequate conditions in primary schools. Primary education in India covers children in the age group six to fourteen years old progressing through school years I to VIII. Beyond year VIII, children proceed to secondary school which culminates in year XII. At a pan-India level, by school year V, one third of the village children drop out and this share increases to almost half by year VIII [2]. As such, a significant number of

children are not truly literate, failing both basic numeracy and literacy standardised tests [3]. Private schools are perceived as providing a better education than the government system but only a few villagers can afford the fees. The efforts of domestic and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are largely invested in private schools in urban centres while government schools remain deprived of such assistance thereby enhancing the inequity of the economically most disadvantaged. The high drop-out rates need to be addressed and the quality of education improved in rural India for UPE and SDG4 objectives to be achieved [2]. The poor metrics also deter and devalue the international diaspora's contribution to education in India. In the absence of a proven model wherein expatriates can contribute both time and money within their individual constraints, achieving meaningful outcomes continues to be a challenge.

The sections to follow describe a case study of a government school in the village of Lakhnu, Uttar Pradesh and the role of an expatriate organisation. Before we provide the details of the case study, we examine existing research related to primary education in rural India and comment on the factors affecting poor children's school participation. The size and influence of the Indian diaspora are also highlighted. This is followed by the methodology and results of the case study. A discussion of the role of an expatriate organisation within the Indian rural education landscape is then presented. The concluding section highlights the novelty and contribution of the expatriate engagement model as one of the possible supportive forces for lifting the educational level of rural children and achieving SDG4 in India.

2. Primary School Education in Rural India

Current research has considered the multiple challenges faced in implementing universal primary education in India [4] and confirms poor learning levels of children in rural Indian primary schools [5] and low levels of transition to secondary school [6]. Furthermore, there are significant differences at a pan-India level despite all states having the same educational policies. As evident from Table 1, the State of Uttar Pradesh (UP) ranks considerably lower than proximal states with similar culture [3]. Reasons posited are the higher status of women and a more homogenous society with lower caste-based barriers in these adjacent states compared to UP [7]. The poor performance of UP has been linked to strong caste distinctions, a history of feudalism, inequality and poverty with a bureaucracy which functions in a rigid and legalistic fashion [8].

Table 1. Learning outcomes in Uttar Pradesh compared to proximal states with similar culture.

Year VIII Data (Rural)	All India	Himachal	Punjab	Haryana	Uttar Pradesh
% of children who can read Year II text	73%	87.9%	86.3%	83.7%	67.9%
% of children who can divide	56.8%	59.2%	58%	65.4%	37.4%

Source of data: [3].

2.1. Exclusion from Primary Education

The existing research also indicates that a range of factors, from household economics to school quality, influences school attendance and learning in rural India [9]. Strong intergenerational effects persist, e.g., educated parents, particularly literate mothers, tend to send their children to school [4]. Perceived school quality and whether children are learning also have a significant impact as do incentives, such as free mid-day meals, especially in the poorer sections of the community. Children from historically deprived scheduled class or tribe, girls and children with special needs are disproportionately excluded from primary education [5]. Exclusion is a broad term covering children who have not enrolled, have dropped out or not transitioned beyond primary school. Such exclusion is impacted by a multiplicity of reasons, including poverty, lack of facilities and social and cultural biases faced by the children and their families particularly in rural areas. This exclusion must be considered

as a process with contributing events coming from the community, the family, the playgroups and the school [5].

As government schools are free, the majority of the rural children across India are enrolled in them. This includes children from disadvantaged backgrounds, often the first generation to go to school [9]. Poverty and education form a complex nexus [10]. It is not as if the government is unaware of these challenges. National policies do place the issue of poverty front and centre but "despite the dedication to development [the government] appears to be incapable of doing more to combat chronic poverty" [11] (p. 279). There is no ideological opposition to redistributive policies or commitment to equality for the marginalised by the government in India and that makes the lack of urgency in eradicating poverty harder to rationalise and paradoxical [11]. However, the success dependencies of UPE are not unidimensional and besides poverty, other factors—social, cultural, geographical or religious, can also impact when any individual or group is excluded [5]. Exclusion from schooling denies children a right to education, potentially locking them into a poverty trap [10]. While enrolments may indicate almost universal participation, high dropout rates with poor transition to the next educational level, dubious learning and cognitive outcomes require serious attention. The National Sample Survey [12] outlines five causal factors for children not attending school: proximity to school, income generation requirements, domestic work taking precedence, not considered important and others, such as marriage (Table 2).

Table 2. Reasons for not going to school per 1000 dropouts, India, 2006.

Reason	Rural Boys (Years)			Rural Girls (Years)		
	5–9	6–11	10–14	5–9	6–11	10–14
School too far	1	1	3	0	2	16
Has to support household income	4	16	171	2	10	70
Education not considered necessary	5	21	73	16	35	21
Has to do domestic chores	0	1	12	1	14	109
Others (marriage, health etc.)	34	65	170	37	62	142

Source of data: [12].

In the India Country Report 2015 addressing the Millennium Development Goals, the Minister for Education claimed, that with regards to MDG2, the country was "marching in the right direction and the measures being taken are resulting in real and positive changes in the lives of the people in India" [13] (p. 4). This has been rebutted by private citizen support organisations, including leading NGOs pointing to the poor literacy levels and asking for measuring what the children are learning.

2.2. Factors Affecting Primary Education in Rural India

Various researchers have examined the factors that affect a child going to school and learning in rural India. Poverty is a key determinant and while price elasticity of demand for education is considered low, direct costs of schooling can have detrimental effects, thus impacting decisions taken by families regarding education [14]. Additional parameters identified include village and school geographic location [4,5,9,15]; caste-, gender- and disability-based discrimination within India's structured social system [16–19] and significant subsistence living issues related to health and nutrition [10,20]. Other research has also suggested that school enrolment is impacted by family literacy levels, household characteristics, child labour, community influences and school quality [21]. Social capital accumulated with community support can be a powerful tool [22] and there is often a disconnection between such a force and education in rural India [23]. The impacts of seasonal migration away from the native village to either nearby cities or to other states are an active area of research and hundreds of thousands of children could be missing school and closing opportunities for learning [24,25].

Furthermore, poor service delivery of education in government schools is a significant issue. Multi-grade classrooms and single-teacher schools impact what can be taught as curriculums become hard to follow [26], a facet exacerbated by high teacher absenteeism [27]. Causality is attributed to insufficiency of funding as it limits teacher staffing, training and school quality [28]. Caste politics also enhance particularism at the expense of universal public services like education [29].

There is limited research and a lack of longitudinal studies focused on the determinants of poor transition and high dropout rates from primary to secondary education [6], as well as on factors that push children to leave school before completion. The matter probably goes beyond demand and supply for the schooling system under India's governmental policies [4]. While a range of contributing factors can be identified, no specific reasons for the results emerge and single explanations are unlikely to offer a satisfactory reason for poor participation [4].

The reasons behind the poor uptake of primary education are thus complex and poorly understood in their intricacy. Examining the currently available body of knowledge, as summarised earlier in this section, resulted in the construction of a mud map (Figure 1) which highlights the key elements impacting the uptake of primary education.

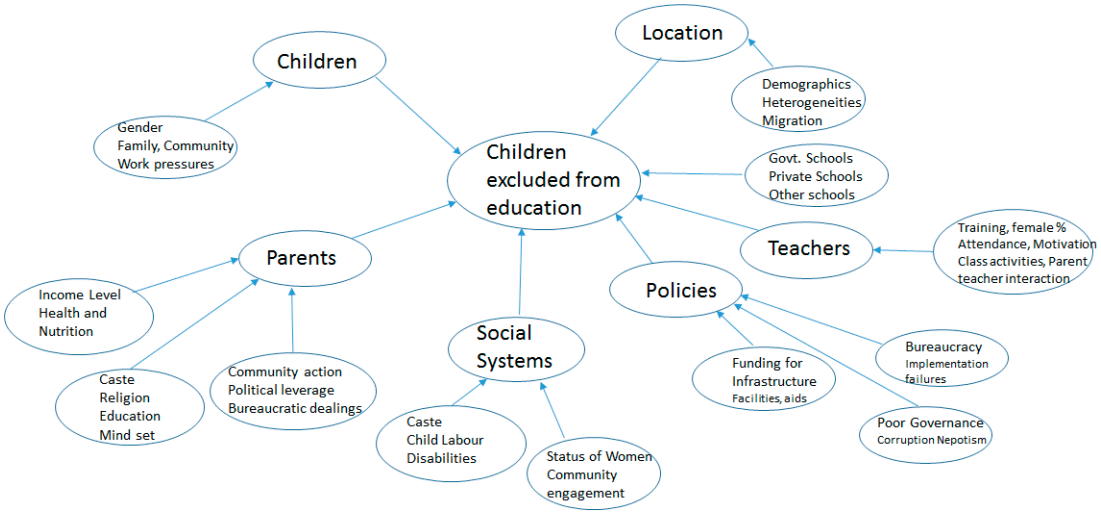

Figure 1. Mud map of factors impacting exclusion of children and their educational outcomes.

These causal factors reflect the demand and supply aspects of the provision of education to children in rural India. The demand drivers are the parents and the children themselves who are seeking to avail of the service. Policies, such as compulsory education, also push the demand as do incentives, including the free mid-day meal scheme. Social systems and cultural issues can either spur demand by encouraging the community children to attend or act as a deterrent imposing restrictions due to religious or other family reasons. Good infrastructure and motivated teachers can also support demand as can flexibility in policies which can adapt to the village agricultural cycle. Inadequacy of funding is potentially a limitation. The current national education budgetary allocation is around 3–4% of GDP as opposed to 6% recommended by various committees constituted by the government [30].

While extensive, current research on primary education in rural India is principally based on large-scale survey data collected over a defined period of time, typically a few months (e.g., [3,9,24]). A smaller number of studies conducted through individual researchers, universities and research consortia (e.g., [2,7,16,23,25,30]) have used other techniques but the work is rarely followed up and no temporal aspects can be considered. The dominant research mechanisms in the literature as summarised by the authors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dominant research mechanisms in literature.

Mechanism	Stakeholders	Duration	Examples
Large-scale surveys and database building leading to subsequent analysis	Largely rural households, parents and children	Short; targeted over a few months	Annual Status of Education Report (ASER); Government census and other surveys conducted every 5 to 10 years; private surveys (Public Report on Basic Education in India, UNICEF and World Bank supported) conducted episodically
Interviews and focus groups	Cover rural residents and also the bureaucracies	Short	Generally carried out as part of a thesis or other research requirements; not usually repeated except through centres in universities, such as the University of Sussex and the Columbia Earth School where some continuity exists

Source: Compiled by the authors.

2.3. Indian Diaspora

The status of primary education in rural India is of concern not only to the country's government but also to the wider and global Indian community. India has a large diaspora with around 17.5 million living overseas, including an estimated 700,000 in Australia [31]. Most of these migrants realise the value of education as it allowed them to further their own careers and eke out a good life. Many want to and do contribute to the overall cause of education in India, mainly through international and local NGOs [32]. Inspired by similar ethos, consistent with the UN SDG4 intent, this article is based on a longitudinal case study from the perspective of an Indian expatriate in Australia who believes that education is a critical ingredient that can improve the future life prospects of children in Indian villages.

2.4. The Case Study

In 2008, an association was established under the Western Australian Associations Incorporation Act 1987, namely India Rural Education and Development Inc. (IREAD). Since then, this Association has been engaged in a range of educational and community development activities in the village of Lakhnu in Hathras District, a small but representative part of India's most populous State of Uttar Pradesh. Initial access to the village was provided through personal ancestral ties, but over the last decade, this trust was maintained through regular visits organised by IREAD members and visible benefits to the local schools. Within this overall context, the contribution of IREAD to improved school attendance and learning can be explored.

The qualitative longitudinal study conducted is a novel approach chosen for assessing and analysing the education situation in the selected settings. This was done over nine years, utilising a multiplicity of techniques, including observations, conversations and interviews to understand the root causes of poor educational participation and learning outcomes at a primary school level. The longitudinal study was conducted in the Indian government primary school in Lakhnu, namely Lakhnu Junior School. A collaboration emerged between the school, its students, the village community and the IREAD expatriate organisation. This paper analyses and presents the insights gained and impacts of this new model of support to the school infrastructure and education quality, thereby providing another option for Indian diaspora wanting further education in India. A grounded theory-based approach is considered, opting to develop an understanding based on an iterative data-analysis process [33].

The IREAD linked approach in this longitudinal study adds another dimension to the body of evidence that exists to understand exclusion of children from primary school and the poor levels of learning. Such an approach, transcending multiple years, allows a level of interaction with the local

community that is unlikely to be achieved with other methods and has not been previously considered in the literature related to education in India.

3. Materials and Methods

The study area, the village of Lakhnu, is typical of the around 700 villages in the Hathras District in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Hathras is a small town with a population of 1.5 million and located around 200 km south-west of the national capital New Delhi. Lakhnu is around 13 km from Hathras and covers approximately 17 km^2 with a population estimated at 3000 adult residents and 1000 children [34]. The population composition is consistent with the broad national averages of 79% Hindu and 19% Muslims [35]. Traditionally, the Hindu society is divided along caste lines with the upper castes generally being economically better-off, having more land ownership and influence in village affairs. The principal economic activity in Lakhnu is linked to agriculture. Poverty is visible and under-employment is high. The village has no registered health workers or functional medical clinic, all contributing to poor health and nutrition indicators [36]. The village's infrastructure is basic with poor roads, no railway line and a sporadic bus service.

3.1. Research Question

There are two government schools, one private school and a Muslim Madrassa in the village. The primary school (years I–V) is built within the village boundaries. The upper primary or junior school (years VI–VIII) is approximately 1 km away in a separate compound. By comparison, the private school covers years I to VIII and is located within the village in the Principal's home. Enrolments in each of the government schools have varied from 75–120 students per school year over the last decade, while attendance has averaged around 50%.

The principal research question of the study is to understand how a community-based collaborative relationship with non-resident Indians through the work of an association like IREAD can be used to improve the uptake of primary education in rural India. Set as a longitudinal case study, it uses participatory research, while performing IREAD activities in Lakhnu Junior School and the community over the period 2011–2019 to understand causal factors and direct strategies for improving educational outcomes (Table 4).

Table 4. IREAD (India Rural Education and Development Inc.) activities supporting the 2011–2019 longitudinal case study.

Focus Area	IREAD Activities
Support Lakhnu Junior School by improving its facilities and teaching	- Direct support with books, sports gear, and exercise kits - Direct supply of computers and laptops as teaching aids - Informally represent issues raised by teachers and parents or observed directly with the state administration to improve the infrastructure—e.g., classroom benches, adequate teaching staff, electricity connection, boundary wall and library; the representation is deemed as being informal as IREAD has no formal role in India's education system but acts as a voluntary interested party akin to a NGO - Support through hiring specialist staff directly on a short-term basis to familiarise children with computers and teach word processing and simple spreadsheets - Consider applicability of other initiatives and/or educational products (e.g., tablets with educational apps) as teaching aids

Table 4. *Cont.*

Focus Area	IREAD Activities
Encourage children to study and attend school regularly	- Prize distributions for children who perform well at school and also a forum to honour their parents and teachers – prizes are given to boys and girls who come first and second in year V and year VII exams each year (the year V students come from the primary school and transition to the junior school, whereas the year VII students become the senior class in the junior school for the following academic year)
Engage with and honour parents, teachers and other community members	- Discuss with parents the importance of continued education and encourage them to send their wards to school - Felicitate parents, teachers and other respected community members in an open forum with speeches and small gifts
Broader community engagement and support	- Raise the brand of the school and visibility of the village by providing a conduit to reach other resources in the country and outside – this could include facilitating visits by external parties related to education and development, and providing computer education for the children - Consider community issues that may impact education and liaise with the state authorities to have them actioned - Increase awareness on health and hygiene with diagnostic camps for eye testing and vaccination support - Research successful poverty alleviation and employment generation schemes and consider their applicability to the village, particularly for the parents of the children in the school

3.2. Research Process

The methodology used in this study is based on bottom-up participatory research with locally relevant longitudinal data collected during IREAD activities in Lakhnu Junior School and its community over the 2011–2019 studied period. It is graphically presented on Figure 2. Starting without a pre-formulated hypothesis or theory, the case study follows a grounded theory approach, wherein the theoretical insights result from the methodical gathering and analysis of data. The fundamental methodology is thus focused on understanding the common themes emerging from the data [33]. Four principal streams of data, are used—one through regular IREAD activities, the second garnered through IREAD-facilitated projects, such as the Curtin University Lakhnu Community Sustainable Development Projects (LCSDP) [37], the third through IREAD initiated specific initiatives, and the fourth from interviews conducted with key stakeholders.

The regular IREAD activities involved interactions with the key stakeholders affecting education in Lakhnu—the teachers, parents of the children, the broader community and policy-implementing officials of the state administration. Observations of the school activities over multiple visits were used to assess qualitatively a typical day and the effort going towards learning. This also included comparing quantitative data on enrolment numbers and attendance. School teachers were usually available during the IREAD visits and their interactions with the children were apparent. Normally, parents and interested community members were informed about IREAD initiatives via the school and participated in the discussions or activities.

Key officials impacting Lakhnu are the District Magistrate (the most senior officer in the District) and the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (Officer in-charge of Primary Education). Their schedules are difficult to ascertain ahead of time as they can be called away by other bureaucrats or politicians at a very short

notice. When present, they typically have a long line of people waiting to communicate with them and can only see each individual for just a few minutes. These officials are transferred frequently, sometimes within a nine-month to a one-year period. Hathras is a small town and fairly remote, so officers are also keen to move on and leave for a better location.

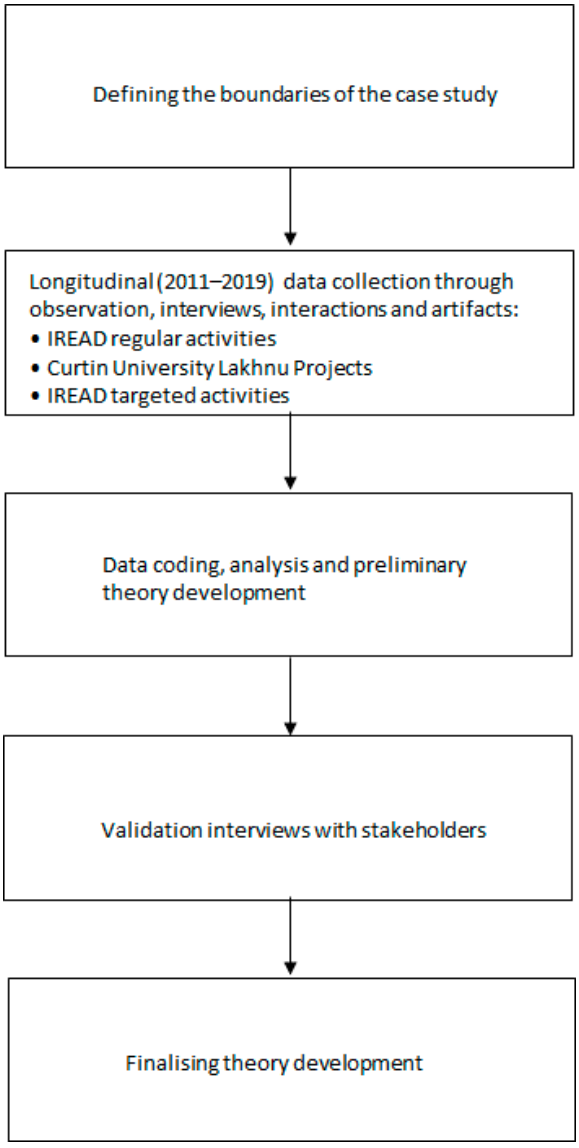

Figure 2. Research process.

Meetings with these key officials were held in their offices when available. The research communications with the state administration comprise of diary notes of discussions and formal letters written requesting specific actions by IREAD. There were more than 15 meetings with senior government officials conducted throughout this longitudinal study. They allowed to explore the actions of the main players affecting children's education in the village, including teachers, parents and state government officials.

Relevant evidence collected through the Curtin LCSDP interactions and other facilitated projects with the local community was also analysed [37]. These are accretive to the IREAD exchanges in understanding the issues faced in regard to education. The IREAD specific initiatives, such as the Sanitation Project and Farmers' Cooperative Workshop, allowed for further observation and data collection. Finally, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted towards the

end of the data collection period, in early 2020, to complement the other sources used and validate the understanding emerging through the grounded theory approach. Figure 3 outlines the grounded theory development process using the participatory research mechanism [33].

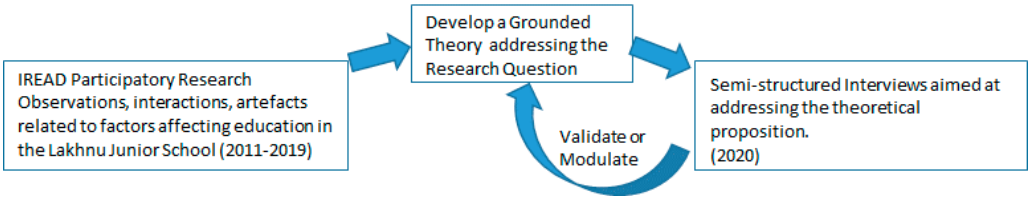

Figure 3. Grounded theory building through the participatory research mechanism.

The described methodology can be systematically implemented with observations in given time intervals and interactions following a defined script [38]. However, it is more common to allow flexibility and have the researcher define the steps [39] (p. 131), which generally allows for more natural coordination and flow of social interactions. This approach should also help gauge the level of comfort of community members or parents and their reception to the research interactions. Such a flexible approach is followed, for the most part, in applying the data collection methodology while a more defined structure can be used for the interviews to validate the findings.

3.3. Data Collection

In this longitudinal study, data was collected over 9 years during 18 separate visits with 66 days in the field. All activities were in everyday settings with people in real-life roles [23] (p. 109) within the village, at the school and in the offices of the state government officials. The Lakhnu Junior School parents and other community members, particularly those in the lower socio-economic strata, have very limited levels of formal education and a significant number of them are not able to read or write. Informal settings for consultations as opposed to more formal approaches are better suited to a frank discussion as they appear non-threatening. For genuine responses to be elicited, honest and trusting relationships need to be created by the researcher. Here, the established presence and trusted relationships between IREAD and the Lakhnu community allowed for access to stakeholders who were willing to share their thoughts and experience.

As previously indicated, the amount of time spent in the field in carrying out such research can vary considerably from several days to a few years [39]. This depends on the events or projects planned, the specific interests being pursued or simply determined by available resources. The IREAD visits varied from a few days to two weeks at a time with the village and school being visited on average of twice a year.

There is no all-inclusive set of options, a cook-book or a codified approach to consider as part of designing a case study [39]. All four data collection streams are outlined in Table 5. In stream 1, the data consists of observations, discussions, interactions and field notes by the researcher while carrying out IREAD activities over the years of 2011–2019. Photographic evidence of infrastructure and other artefacts, such as school equipment, enrolment and attendance sheets, was recorded to facilitate discussions with administration officials. Observation was also used for school activities over a period of time in order to assess qualitatively a typical day and effort going towards learning. Furthermore, observations around the village during school time were indicative of children's attendance and prompted IREAD discussions with their guardians in that regard. In most cases, observations and notes were subsequently recorded in a diary. Data stream 2 contains results from the most significant IREAD facilitated project over the research time frame, the Curtin University-led Lakhnu Community Sustainable Development Project wherein staff and students visited the village on five occasions (2011–2016) and carried out a range of collaborative community projects centred on the families of the children of Lakhnu Junior School. As an expatriate organisation, IREAD initiated several public-interest workshops targeted at the wider village community and the data collected during these

events contributed to stream 3. The collected research data are diverse, consisting of quantitative information, such as attendance and other school records, qualitative interpretation based on value judgements through notifications of personal researcher experiences as well as artefacts, such as photographic material.

Table 5. Data collection activities.

Activities	Visits	Stakeholders (Number of Interactions)	Data
IREAD Regular Activities (Stream 1)	2011–2019, 17 separate visits; 2020, 1 visit	Teachers (40) Parents (30) Officials (10) Community (10)	Observations, interactions, artefacts, factual data and targeted interviews
Curtin University Facilitated Projects (Stream 2)	2011–2016, 5 separate visits	Teachers (17) Parents (12) Officials (2) Community (4)	Dwelling surveys, observations, interactions, interviews
Other Facilitated Projects (Stream3)	2016—Sanitation workshop (Government- led); 2019—Farmers' cooperative benefits workshop (NGO-led) [1]; 2020—Sewing skills assessment for women	Officials (1) Community (2)	Discussions, observations
Stakeholder Interviews (Stream 4)	2020—in March, to validate research findings and theory development	Teachers (3) Parents (8) Officials (2) Community (2)	Interview transcripts using a structured questionnaire

[1] Centre for Collective Development, www.ccd.ngo.

Stream 4 generated data from semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2020 with the principal players impacting children's education, namely teachers, parents and state government officials who implement primary education policies. Three teachers and eight parents were interviewed in separate groups for an hour, and around 30 min were spent with the key officials—the District Magistrate and the Basic Shiksha Adhikari. In addition, two influential community members, including the Pradhan (elected village head), were interviewed for around 15 min. The open-ended guiding questions (see Appendix A) were developed based on the insights from the other collected data and served to validate the theory being constructed.

The data collection activities are summarised in Table 5. The number of stakeholder interactions (listed in brackets in Table 5) include discussions and consultations and totaled 143. Their duration varied from three hours for teachers to two hours per parent and around 15–30 min spent with officials and community members.

The multi-faceted data accumulated through the range of IREAD activities requires a structured approach for analysis and subsequent validation. This was developed to draw out the inferences and learnings from the observations, diary notes and key themes which emerged from the grounded theory approach.

4. Results

A novel framework for India's rural education settings which embeds IREAD is the proposed theoretical construct to address the research question. The emerging analysis can shape a theory and allow a better definition of the educational challenges and how they are being addressed. These are explained in turn below.

4.1. Analysis Framework

Based on the research data and considering the demand supply debate for the provision of education in Lakhnu Junior School, a framework combining the concept of hygiene factors (Herzberg's

use of the expression "hygiene" [40] relates to prevention of dissatisfaction, or disease, and this is the meaning implied in this research; it should not be confused with the medical term related to cleanliness and prevention of diseases) [40] and the conflicting forces as envisaged by Porter [41] can be formulated. This framework centres on Lakhnu Junior School with demand drivers—push factors, and supply drivers—pull factors, working in tandem to encourage children to attend school and learn. The push-pull model is also commonly used in innovation research to describe the interplay between forces shaping the adoption of new behaviour [42]. In India's poor rural settings, and Lakhnu in particular, the dominant tradition is for children not to attend school beyond year V; hence, transitioning and studying at junior school is a novel behaviour. The hygiene factors identify the minimum requirements that are essential for children to attend school. They can also be described as preventative factors in the same way hygiene prevents the spread of communicable diseases. In other words, the existence of hygiene factors will not motivate children to attend school but their absence will generate dissatisfaction and deter them from participating.

Conceptually, if the hygiene factors are present and the right combination of push and pull factors can be orchestrated, children should attend school and learn. Minimum hygiene factors would be the availability of a school, teachers and access to schooling for children. The demand drivers, as an example, would include expectations from parents and the broader community for the younger generation to be educated to have a better future and the children themselves wanting to attend school. On the supply side, minimum conditions should be ensured through legislation for the availability of at least basic facilities and requirements for children to attend school. This framework should also facilitate understanding the subtle influences of caste and social norms on both the push and the pull factors. Having considered the various insights from the research data, the analysis framework can be populated with the demand, supply and hygiene drivers based on the themes impacting education as presented in Figure 1. Figure 4 illustrates these drivers and the analysis to follow elaborates on those that appear to be most influential for Lakhnu Junior School. It is important to note that IREAD has no direct input into the hygiene factors but can influence Lakhnu Junior School through the supply and demand drivers.

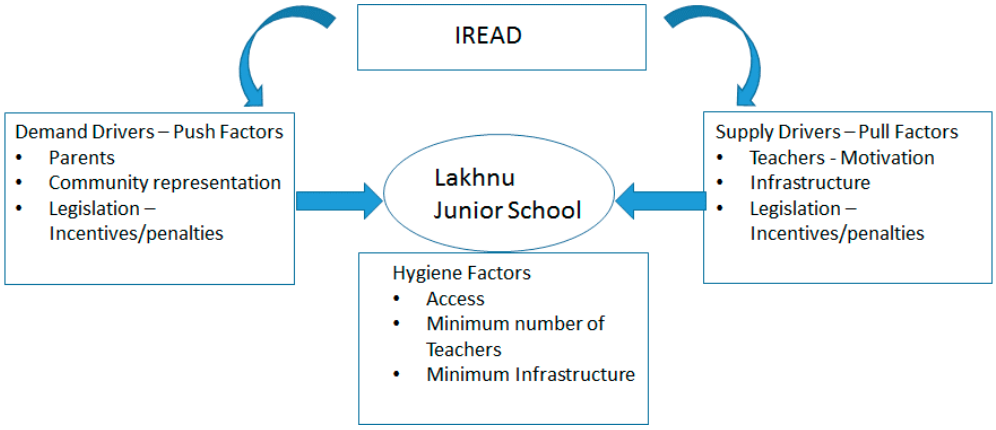

Figure 4. IREAD embedded framework with the key parameters influencing the demand-supply and hygiene factors impacting attendance and learning.

The school is proximal to the village, and the facilities, while basic, exist. These should not be a limitation to children studying and learning. It is thus plausible to consider that the hygiene factors in the case of Lakhnu are present. Viewing the data acquired in light of the push and pull factors can be quite insightful. It shows that IREAD can influence these two groups of factors to varying degrees and while some of the avenues have not been explored to date, they may be feasible and within the Association's mandate.

4.2. Using the Grounded Theory Approach

The bottom-up methodology used in this longitudinal study is based on locally relevant data collected during IREAD activities over the 2011–2019 studied period. As this multi-faceted data is collected and analysed, certain recurrent themes are conceptualised. This is consistent with using a grounded theory approach, wherein the new theoretical insights result from the methodical gathering and analysis of data [33], and do not test a particular theory.

In relation to this specific study, the grounded theory approach is appropriate as the qualitative design allows specific issues to be explored with confidence through the emergence of repetitive insights [43]. In this case study, the two-pronged approach is aimed to first arrive at a theory and then attempt to validate it as far as possible through the interviews of stakeholders.

The available data is analysed by key phrases or codes as extracted from the range of sources during the IREAD interactions with the stakeholders over the research period. It is estimated that the data represents 60 interactions with teachers of over 3 h each, 50 interactions with parents of 2 h each, 15 interactions with the district officials of around 15 to 30 min each and 18 education related interactions with the community members of around 15 min each. This all adds up to approximately 290 h of primary material. The qualitative data is classified as either being supportive of education for children or not. While all these keywords have come up frequently and characterise the repetitive insights emerging from the data, some (highlighted in Table 6) have come up on almost every occasion. The keyword codes are classified against the stakeholders that they relate to as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Expressions classified by affected stakeholders.

Affected Stakeholder	Codes Supportive of Education	Codes not Supportive of Education
Parents	**"Manyata" (individual mind-set)** **The child will learn something** **Better chance to get a job** Will learn from others May learn computers May learn English	**We are very poor and every day is a struggle** **Children can help with work and income** **No guarantee of a job** Not interested—does not understand what is being taught Nothing will change for us (fatalism) Girls have to learn housework (for marriage); more important than school Parents are not interested
Teachers	No caste bias in the school Master sahib (teacher) will teach them only good things **We go home to home to bring children** **We want to teach** **It is our job** We do the best we can We are willing to do extra work if the children are interested	**Teachers don't come, don't teach** We don't know what is happening (in school) **We get little respect** **We get blamed by parents for children not studying** We are blamed by our masters if the enrolment numbers drop We feel ineffective Teachers are often negligent but we can not do much under the rules
Policy	**Free food (Mid-day meals)** **Free uniforms, shoes, books** We have built schools	School schedule not flexible with farming Budgets and curriculum controlled from HQ (headquarters) Too much paperwork
Administration and Policy Implementers	**School facilities are OK** We provide all the essentials as per the policy	**Not enough teachers** **We are assigned non-teaching jobs** Our training could be more relevant Nepotism in the administration We have staffing issues
Community	The community helps each other We don't pressurise parents on religious grounds	**Community does not care.** Government does not care We have so many issues—roads, drainage etc., to raise with the administration

Note: The expressions in bold emerged with a very high frequency in almost all occasions.

With quantitative data, a sensitivity analysis can be performed to gauge the impact on the outcomes of each of the influencing factors. A simple way to do this is by assigning one point to each

key phrase and two points to the highlighted ones. The resulting tornado chart of the influences which the stakeholders have is depicted in Figure 5. A longer bar length refers to the factor being more significant in both directions – as a motivator or detractor.

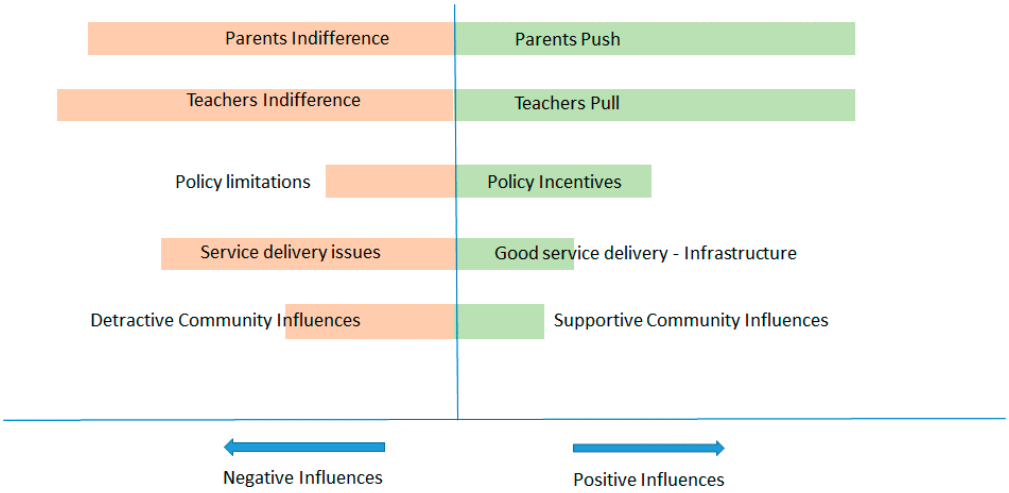

Figure 5. Qualitative tornado chart based on repetitive insights gleaned through IREAD experiences.

The principal levers to children attending school and learning are parents and teachers. There is also a significant influence from the policy framework, school infrastructure and the local community. It is encouraging, in this model obtained through grounded theory analysis that, other than the policy matters, IREAD can influence all factors positively and play a constructive role in improving educational outcomes for children in Lakhnu as an example of rural India (Table 7).

Table 7. IREAD impacts over the research period.

Factors of Influence	IREAD Activities	Impacts Seen over 2011–2019
Parents' Push	Regular discussions on the value of education	School attendance has improved from 50% to around 75%
Teachers' Pull	Hiring additional support staff Honour the teachers in an open community forum	Higher motivation levels and enthusiasm to use new teaching aids, such as laptops and tablets An empty room converted to an art room
School Infrastructure	Provision of sports and exercise kits and computers Government lobbying for building and such support	School benches installed, electricity connected, and a small science laboratory built Boundary wall largely completed and functional toilets
Community Influences	Regular discussions on the value of education	Respected members attend the annual IREAD prize distributions to encourage children's education
Policy Administrators	Regular meetings and written representations on school issues to the administration	Teacher availability increased from two to four and infrastructure improved

5. Discussion

Based on the case study data and perceptions, the parents and teachers seem to exert the maximum influence in children's ability to attend and their actual performance at school. Indifferent parents have a detracting influence by lack of "push"; however, having unmotivated teachers can result in children being completely turned off school. It is likely that children who are self-motivated will be less impacted but the average student will need a pull from the school to attend. Policy inducements, such as scholarships and mid-day meals, can act as incentives but penalties are hard to enforce and limitations cannot be overcome locally, so have a smaller influence. Supporting infrastructure and other attractions can be accretive and magnify the pull factors. Service delivery issues, such as shortage of teachers, assignation of teachers to non-teaching roles, and delay in provision of books can be a very significant disincentive for children to

attend school. Community influences can be negative if children remain disengaged form the educational and school activities. They can become a significant positive if the community can demand better services and present its case to the administration. Detractive community influences are small in Lakhnu as no particular race- or caste-based bias is seen in the school.

In summary, teachers need to be motivated; and the parents, together with the community, by becoming more involved with the school can effectively counteract shortcomings from the administration. Given the community power in a democratic society, issues raised by teachers and parents, if expressed regularly and forcefully, will be heard. This will also provide a system of checks and balances allowing the school to function more effectively. It would be an effective way to force the administration to improve service delivery and allocate the necessary resources. Experienced bureaucrats will perform if that is demanded by the politics of the day.

This system of feedback is depicted in Figure 6. It shows that a key to good performance is for the community and teachers to work together with mutual respect. A metric for success would be to see an empowered community looking after the educational outcomes for the children in Lakhnu where IREAD plays a supportive role in dealing with teachers, parents and the administration without interfering with the educational process itself.

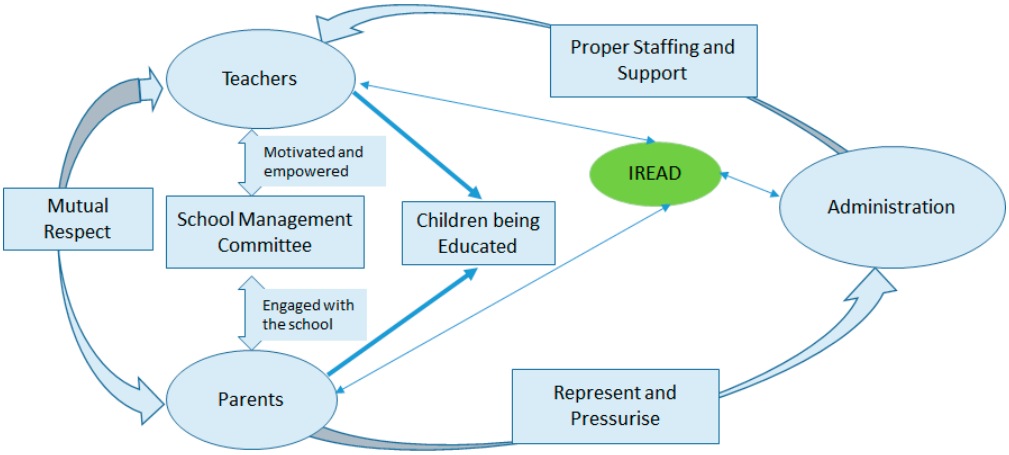

Figure 6. Role of IREAD within the confines of the current primary school system.

A theory for this case study can now be construed based on the above analysis. Recapitulating the original intent, the research is aimed at understanding how a collaborative relationship developed between non-resident Indians through IREAD can improve primary education outcomes in Lakhnu. Thus, from an IREAD perspective, the construct should focus on what is achievable and within the remit and capabilities of the organisation's constraints. The analysis can thus propose:

> *Within the existing policy framework, using an IREAD model, an expatriate organisation can engage with the parents, teachers and the administration to influence the educational process and deliver improved learning outcomes for the children.*

The semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2020 supported the above theory. Fostering mutual respect between the teachers and the parents and having the parents actively engaged in the school should improve the educational environment. The officials, while supportive of IREAD work, were legalistic and policy was constrained in their approach. Any meaningful change to the current school system would likely only be achieved by going through the community. Confidence is gained from the progress made in Delhi government schools wherein one critical aspect has been the school teachers' engagement with the parents and their taking interest in the learning of children [44]. In the interim, this is a model that IREAD can work in alignment with.

There is lack of similar longitudinal studies in the literature [6]. The developed IREAD model is very different to other existing ways of influencing primary education in India and Uttar Pradesh in particular.

For example, an analysis of the Indian educational environment shows a very high influence by the World Bank and other donor organisations since the 1990s through shaping educational reforms, policies and legislation as well as providing direct assistance in the form of aid. Whilst debates persist as to whether such direct aid complements or substitutes local government efforts, is holistic or divisive within the Indian society, and what its effectiveness is [45], the model developed by IREAD is less intrusive and builds on establishing relationships and commitment. It works at the grassroots level and engages with the local players which allows it to have direct influence on the children within a community.

At the other end of the spectrum are voluntary engagements by people who visit India as tourists. For example, many travelling English speakers, including expatriates, become teachers in India's primary school system finding unpaid temporary jobs in the state sector [46]. Although such contribution may generate interest from local children and motivate them to attend school, it may demoralise further the local teachers who are poorly paid and subject to being transferred to a new location without much warning. The IREAD model leaves the school education process at an arm's length through providing assistance aimed at strengthening the local delivery of teaching and is less disruptive.

Another model is the provision of alternative primary schools and/or teacher training by NGOs targeting underprivileged areas and children. Although there have been a lot of success stories, exploitation and profiting are also common [47]. In such cases, it is important that NGOs, or in fact any multi-national education providers, work in tandem with the government in order to maintain the quality of education and avoid competition [48]. From this point of view, the IREAD model also has advantages as it works in parallel with the existing structures without replacing them. Its aim is to create motivation from all stakeholders in the local community without becoming a disruptor and by enhancing the opportunities for all.

This study is the first to investigate a gap in previous research related to the role of expatriate organisations in influencing rural primary education in India. By comparison with the dominant previous snapshot approaches, this is also a longitudinal study over nine years. It produced a new theoretical model for understanding what the role of NGOs could be in supporting and facilitating an environment that encourages improved educational outcomes for the village children. Working within a space defined by push and pull factors, the IREAD model highlights the importance of long-term commitment in engaging with the main stakeholders in the village—parents, teachers and the administration, without interfering with the actual education delivery process, to positively influence the learning environment.

There are, however, factors that the IREAD model cannot influence and these limitations should be acknowledged. For example, flexibility in administrative polices, and tuning of the educational curriculum to the village agricultural cycle will also be accretive to improving both attendance and actual learning, however, it is difficult for IREAD to engage and impel such changes.

6. Conclusions

India has a long tradition in quality education and whilst the country produces large numbers of professionals, such as engineers, doctors and IT specialists, millions of children between the ages of 6 and 14 do not attend primary school, particularly in rural areas [49]. Such a dichotomy is unique in this country and puts the nation at a disadvantage in achieving genuine progress in making education equitable and available to all in line with SDG4.

The IREAD model does support both the demand and supply side drivers for primary education in a rural Indian setting. There is underlying trust between the community and IREAD members, which has been built over years and is the fundamental tenet of this model. The duration of the annual interaction time is less important than a continued presence over multiple years and a singular focus on addressing the areas of weakness in the school system as identified together with the teachers. Current activities continue to be valid for emphasising education and there is scope for additional initiatives to be considered as well.

Several key contributions towards the overall knowledge base of education in rural India can be drawn from this research. The role of an expatriate organisation, such as IREAD, has not been hitherto analysed in the field of rural education. Such an analysis revealed a new model of engagement with the local community and enhances the educational opportunities for the children of the rural poor. The data collection methodology and analytical framework are also novel, based on longitudinal analysis over multiple years. In Lakhnu village, if the community's and parents' involvement with the school is increased and the education system adequately equipped with infrastructure and teaching staff, children will likely attend school and learn. The limitations of the IREAD model should also be acknowledged, given the fact that it works within the existing local structures.

Scalability and impact are two commonly used metrics for gauging success of large-scale interventions promoted by national or international agencies like the UN or the World Bank for poverty alleviation and education expansion projects. A problem is identified, a large-scale intervention designed and implemented, whether it be for distribution of smoke-free cook-stoves in India or malaria prevention in Africa. Not all have succeeded and impacts, a few years post the closure of the projects, have been marginal [10]. The IREAD methodology is at the other end of the spectrum. It is low-key, takes a patient approach and tries to change behaviour over a period of time.

Lakhnu is a microcosm for the state of UP and the case study findings should be scalable across culturally and administratively consistent areas. Government schools in rural regions offer a unique opportunity to influence the social, cultural environment and prejudices that exist within India. Educated children can influence their parents and institute change. As this case study has shown, there are reasons to feel optimistic. The challenge for meeting the SDG4 targets are significant, particularly in rural India, and all approaches from incremental to transformational should be experimented. For those in the Indian diaspora who want to contribute to the field of rural education and are seeking personal engagement, IREAD is certainly a model to consider. Small steps can take you a long way, if you point in the right direction and give it enough time.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. However, there may be some perceived conflict of interest as the first author is a member of IREAD and his wife is the chairperson. To avoid such a potential conflict, the research was properly managed by the analysis being conducted independently and outside of the activities of IREAD. Permission was obtained from the IREAD chairperson, Mrs Surabhi Sharma, to use the data from the organisation's activities for this case study. Furthermore, the activities of IREAD and the organisation itself have no direct benefits, including no financial benefits, from the outcomes of this research. Human research ethics permit was obtained from Curtin University.

Abbreviations

IREAD	India Rural Education and Development Inc.
LCSDP	Lakhnu Community Sustainable Development Project (Curtin University)
MDG	United Nations Millennium Development Goal(s)
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (education for all in Hindi)
UN	United Nations
UP	Uttar Pradesh, a State in Northern India and the country's most populous state
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Appendix A

Table A1. Guiding questions and prompts for the open-ended interviews in data stream 4.

State Government Officials: Hathras District	Parents and Community Members, Lakhnu	School Teachers Lakhnu, Junior School
• What incentives are being given to children to study? • How can standards be improved? • Are all aware of the government initiatives? Are they having an impact? • How do you see the success of Government initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan? • How to address shortage of teachers? • Teachers are often assigned to non-teaching tasks? Can this be minimised, and if not possible, at least rationalised with the harvesting seasons? • Can some flexibility in the curriculum be managed to allow for more time off during harvest times (which may not coincide with school holidays)? • How can children have some practical classes on vocational training—cooking, carpentry, masonry, horticulture and farming in the field during the harvesting season? • Can an internet connection be provided to Lakhnu Junior School? • How can IREAD help with training the teaching staff? With computers? • How can NGOs help? What would you like to see IREAD achieve?	• What is the role of education? For boys and girls? • Do you think it is beneficial? • Are all your children enrolled? If not, why? What constraints do you face? • Why is attendance of children sporadic? • What impacts attendance? What are the children who have dropped out of school doing? • There are examples of village children who have become well educated and have good jobs. What influence do they have? • Do you think all children can have such opportunities? • What aspirations do you have for your children? • What concerns do you have? For boys? For girls? • Can these be met through education? • What can be done to improve retention in the school? • What incentives can be given to children to study? • Any impacts of caste and social class on your children going to school? • Are you aware of the government initiatives? Are they having an impact? • How can you influence the administration to get better services for the school? • What limits your participation in the school management committee? • What can be done to encourage children to attend school? Through IREAD?	• Why is children's school attendance sporadic? • What impacts attendance? • There are examples of village children who have become well educated and have good jobs. What impacts do they have? • Do you think all children can have such opportunities? • What aspirations do you have for your pupils? • What concerns do you have? For boys? For girls? • Are books, teaching materials, available on time and in adequate quantity? • Will computers help in bringing new ideas and encourage children? • What are your thoughts regarding the internet? Would it be useful to have an internet connection during school hours? • What aspirations do school children have? • Do parents want their wards to study? If not all – why not? • Any concerns related to caste and social class on children in school? • What can be done to encourage children? Through IREAD? • How can IREAD help with training of the teaching staff? • Opinions regarding IREAD activities such as visits from Curtin students and associated community projects. • What would you like to see being done and how would you like to participate or contribute to this effort? • Any information about other NGOs that have been active in the past or are currently active. What was their impact on education?

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