

A REPORT ON RESPONSE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS



THE COVID-19 SCENARIO IN ASSAM



A COVID-19 risk assessment conducted by Assam State Disaster Management Authority has put 46% of the state's 3.65 crore population in the 'most vulnerable group' which comprises 21.88 lakh senior citizens and 1.46 Crore children below 18 years of age. As on 10/6/2020, a total of 3093 COVID-19 infected cases were reported in the state of Assam. There is still an uncertainty on when the educational institutions will be re-opened.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE COMMUNITY

A substantially larger percentage of people in the communities where the organization work have manual roles, such as working in tea garden and farms, which means they can't work remotely and, hence are with limited income options. With the law & order situation in Assam last year because of the CAA/NRC and lockdown in March due to COVID-19, the condition of the workers in these rural communities have worsened. They are struggling to meet their daily needs and find an income source for their survival. The schools are closed and most of the families living in these communities can't work remotely, which makes it extremely difficult for students to access online classes and resources. The stress and anxiety among parents who have lost their jobs, coupled with social isolation and educational disruption are likely to put many children at a significantly higher risk of school drop-outs, poor learning and lack of emotional well-being.



IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The COVID-19 pandemic has almost collapsed the operations of Public-school system in Assam. The major concerns which teachers and stakeholders are facing during the crisis are how teachers can keep students engaged in learning remotely, how to support the continued progress of already-vulnerable students, how to plan for an uncertain future and what strategies should they adopt once the schools are opened. One thing is very clear i.e., all of us need to work together and collaborate to impact the lives of our students.



HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED OUR WORK

With Schools being closed and restriction of movements, the previously planned operational strategy has been affected. The challenges have increased and the team are brainstorming on new methods to reach out to these children. Some of the key areas which have been affected are as follow:

- a)** All the schools are closed and with an uncertainty of opening, our two years Program Implementation Plan (PIP) has been affected. With this current situation, PIP have been customized and re-engineered to find an alternative way.
- b)** The payment of staff's salaries has been a challenge with the pending official certification and additional fund requirement due to sudden changes in program.
- c)** There is a disconnect between school and students which can adversely affect the expected program outcomes.
- d)** Building relationship with new intervention schools has been affected as the team didn't get enough time to initiate the work.

NEAID RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

NEAID had navigated its ways through this pandemic, constantly being mindful of the above challenges, and seeking different ways to approach this problem. As an organization, the team realized that there's no one solution out of this pandemic and hence there is a need to break down our responses to COVID-19 into 7 essential activities i.e, supporting families during lock-down, online teaching, reaching out to students & parents through volunteers, Virtual meetings & Capacity building of Akikaran Team.



Our Akikaran team is working closely with teachers, students, SMC and parents to explore ways on how we can capitalize on this opportunity to change practice, how we make the system more efficient and connect better with students, teachers and community.

-Founder, NEAID



ACTIVITY 1: AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The fellows at Akikaran, have been working along with SMCs to spread awareness around Corona Virus in the 4 communities with 2800+ population. Some of the action steps taken are mentioned below:

- a) Our Fellows along with the School teachers did different awareness camps in and around intervention Schools to educate people about Do's and Don'ts of corona Virus.
- b) Separate awareness camps are being organized for students and adults.
- c) Students are being educated to protect themselves against the Corona Virus (proper ways to wash hands, maintain social distance, social etiquette of sneezing and coughing) in a fun and friendly way.
- d) Important information was provided during these awareness campaign like phone numbers of the centers set by the government of India to help people in need (provide essential goods) during the lockdown.

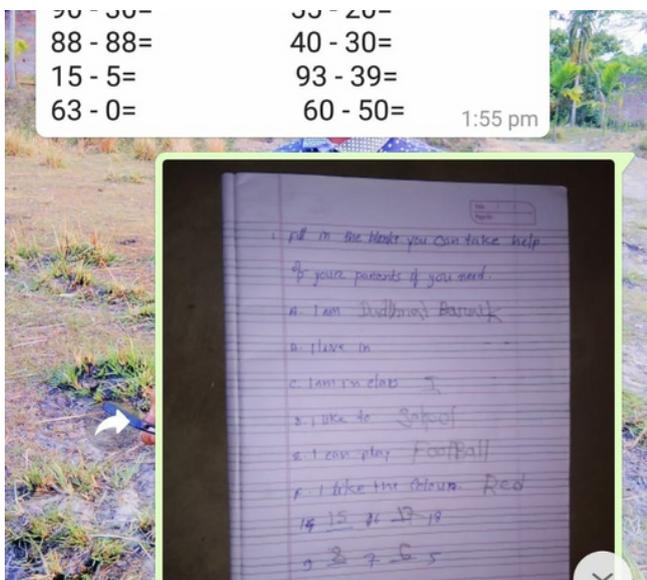


ACTIVITY 2: USING ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR LEARNING

WhatsApp group for parents have been created to reach out to students and other online platforms were used for continuous learning as per government directives.

The Akikaran team is working relentlessly with educators and parents to ensure that learning continues for all children and so that their academic and social emotional learning needs, are addressed, thus making true holistic education available during the pandemic. From the beginning of the lock-down, the team has been reaching out to all the students by sending them daily learning packets through text and WhatsApp messages. The children are constantly learning and sharing their learning with the team.

However, the program was closed after 20 days when it was realized that our engagement was limited due to no access of the internet and mobile phones among majority of students.



ACTIVITY 3: REACH THE UN-REACHED

One of the major challenges that the organization faced during these unprecedented times is reaching out to all children, nearly 60% of the students from the intervention schools do not have access to technology and internet. After several discussions with the teachers, HMs and the SMC members we started the “Akikaran – Reach the Un-reached” program.

14 volunteers from the community were selected with help from SMC and virtually trained for engaging with students in the most fun and effective manner. These Volunteers deliver the worksheets and daily activities prepared by the Akikaran Teaching team along with a resource kit to the students. They are collecting the worksheets and gave regular feedback to the Fellows about each student. Similarly, fellows use to jointly review the worksheets and progress of the students with concerned teachers. Each volunteer mentor 25 to 30 students in the community and they are paid on a weekly basis. Akikaran team conducts weekly training and take regular feedback from the volunteers to make sure the program is running smoothly. A daily task tracker is created for these volunteers to keep track of their work. These volunteers are also responsible to conduct awareness camps on hygiene for the adults in the community. They report to designated SMC members and fellows on daily basis. In the 1st phase the program has reached 580 students and in 2nd phase it will reach out to another 500+ students through the "Akikaran reach the un-reached program".



ACTIVITY: 4 CAPACITY BUILDING OF TEAM

In Akikaran, the believe is that, "challenges build leadership" and with this belief our team has been working to build capacity in our team for a new normal world. The senior leadership is providing different opportunities like skill building webinars, preparing TLMs and content training to Akikaran team with the help of their knowledge partners. Akikaran team is putting a lot of work and research practices that will help us in future when school reopens.



ACTIVITY: 5 PROVIDING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO FAMILIES AND THE STUDENTS

Our students and their parents are the biggest assets and this pandemic has given us an opportunity to engage with them, in depth. Our fellows and volunteers are having regular conversation with parents by conducting home visit and telephone calls to know about their well-being. Within a few days, an incredible engagement has been witnessed between the parents, volunteers and the team.

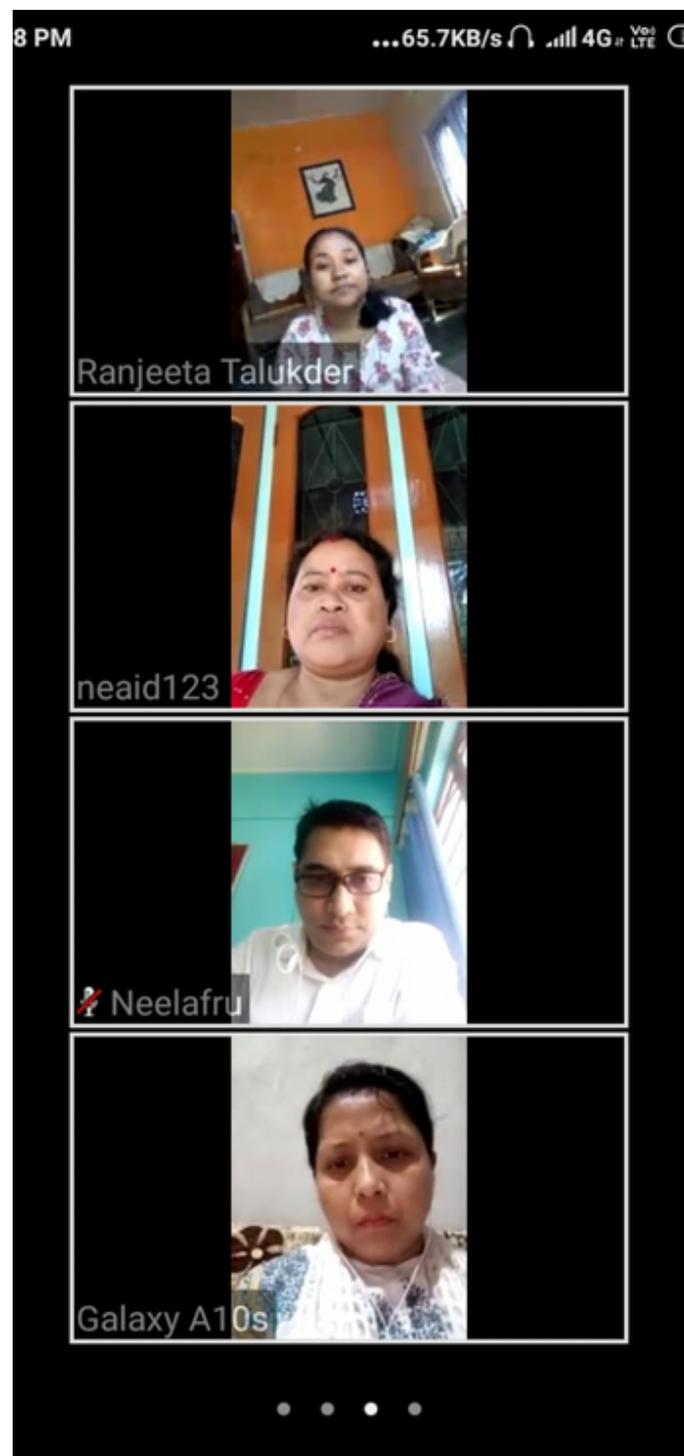
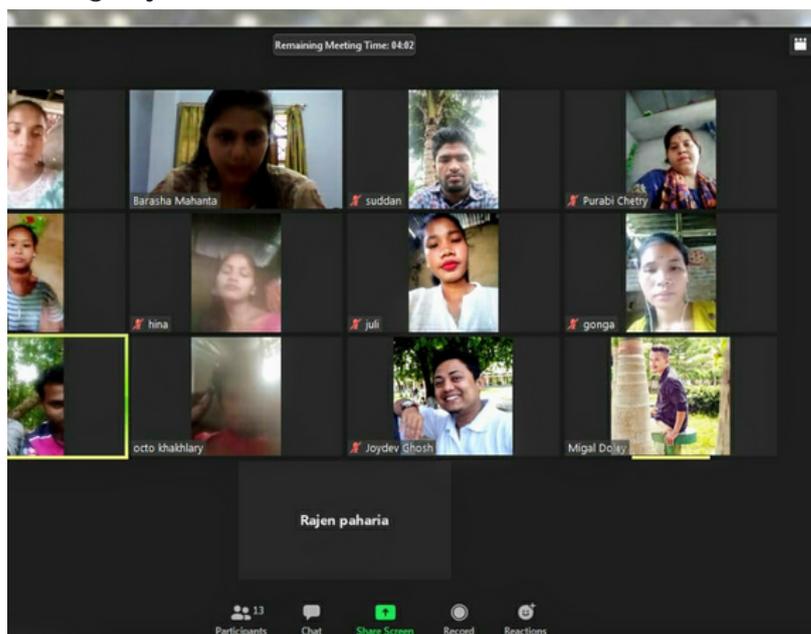
ACTIVITY 6: FOOD ITEMS DISTRIBUTED TO BPL FAMILIES

The entire team worked with school staffs & SMCs to ensure that children and their family members have the essential supplies to support them during these tough time. The activity was conducted with the help received in-kind from partners and individuals donors. With this initiative 156 families were reached out in the Morigaon and Kamrup Metro district. The support was given to families who were below poverty line or lost their earnings during the lockdown.



ACTIVITY-7 : VIRTUAL MEETING & TRAINING WITH TEACHERS, HMS & AKIKARAN TEAM

The pandemic has given us an opportunity to deeply engage with our stakeholders and invest them in our vision. The online learning circles with teachers and Headmaster were held to re-evaluate strategies, discuss plans for the post pandemic education scenario and gave them regular updates on student learning. Additionally, discussions were done with teachers on their engagement with students during this challenging time. Their regular feedback helped us to make the program better and “Reach the Unreached Program” was the result of these brainstorming sessions with these stakeholders. At the same time, the platform helped to create wellbeing spaces for our teachers through social emotional circles and conversations. The virtual meeting is being conducted for all the schools once in a month and fortnightly for individual schools.



GLIMPSES FROM THE GROUND

Our "Akikaran Reach the Un-reached Program" is trying to make sure that children don't miss what they usually do on a normal day in their school.



WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATION STAYING AT HOME



STUDENTS LEARNING IN HOME

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM OUR STAKEHOLDERS

“ I am surprised to see that my daughter is studying at home. I am thankful that local volunteers are helping my child with videos, worksheets and tried there best to reach out to us and our child during this difficult times. ”

- Sanjib Magar (Parent)
Amlighat L.P.School

“ Daa & Baa from our area come to our houses to teach us and make us do new things that are really interesting. I sometimes miss playing with my friends otherwise I am happy learning from home and don't feel like school is closed. ”

- Joydish Ghotowar (Student)
Gopal Krishna L.P.School

“ I am thankful to the Akikaran team for their involvement with us for continuous learning of our students. The awareness campaign on COVID 19 by the fellows helped the tea garden community to know about the pandemic and they also facilitated virtual meeting among our staff which helped the teachers to plan better things for the students during & post lockdown. ”

- Ibrahim Ali Dewan
HM, Bargog L.P.School

****THE TESTIMONIALS ARE TRANSLATED FROM ASSAMESE TO ENGLISH**