

# Impact of Prolonged Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown on Residential Institute of Underprivileged Children and its Functionaries, Managed by an NGO - A Case Study

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## Abstract

Closure of schools, colleges/universities, institutions across the world due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the education of children in an unprecedented manner. There are more than 2.2 billion children in the world who constitute approximately 28% of the world's population and children aged between 10 to 19 years make 16% of the world population.<sup>1</sup> Though, NGOs/voluntary organizations, teachers & students are quickly shifting from traditional face to face education mode to online education mode using technology and less dependence of classroom education, there is a limitation of creating a replica of school system.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> The long-term closure of schools/colleges/institutions and uncertainty of re-opening, being quarantined due to infection or fear of infection has led to physical and mental health conditions of the economically weaker section and /underprivileged children.<sup>2,6</sup> It is felt necessary to study the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on underprivileged children's education, and physical health. A study of Vadodara based NGO which is engaged in educational development of underprivileged children was undertaken to understand the impact on education, and physical health of the underprivileged children staying at the hostel premise of the NGO and how NGO functionaries and the children are coping up with COVID-19 pandemic challenges. For the study, NGO and the participants of the NGO were selected using

purposive sampling technique. The participant includes functionaries, teachers & children of the NGO. The total number of participants were thirty ( $n=30$ ). The major findings are, 1) There is a substantial impact on the education of the children due to closure of schools, 2) Children are engaged more in extracurricular activities such as sports, art & crafts, music, dance, cultural programs, skill-based activities, pottery work, cooking, garden maintenance etc. to cope up COVID-19 lockdown boredom and keeping good mental and physical health, 3) Awareness has increased among the children, staffs, teachers, volunteers regarding hygiene conditions, good health, prevention against COVID-19 infection, 4) In-spite of availability of various facilities for education, extracurricular activities etc., at NGO's hostel premises, the children are missing school structure and school environment, 5) NGO has initiated to create more classrooms buildings, expanding IT infrastructure to support online teaching mode, and augmenting teachers to nearly replicate school structure at hostel premises.

### **Keywords**

COVID-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Underprivileged children, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Health, Holistic Development

### **Introduction**

In pre-covid-19 lockdown era, learning of the children predominantly involved more face-to-face interaction with the mentors and peer groups. Nationwide closure of schools and colleges for a prolonged period due to COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have negatively impacted over 91% of the world's student population.<sup>7</sup> 332 million children globally, have lived under extended lockdown and left vulnerable to mental and physical health issue.<sup>8,9</sup> Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been closed which resulted COVID-19 education crisis.<sup>9</sup> The home quarantine/confinement of children is associated with uncertainty and anxiety which is attributable to disruption in the education, physical activities and opportunities of socialization.<sup>2</sup> Absence of structured school environment for a long duration result in disruption in routine, boredom and lack of innovative ideas for engaging in various academic and extracurricular activities. The children missed outdoor play, meeting friends and not able to engage themselves in the in-person school activities.<sup>10</sup> The children have become more clinging, attention seeking and more dependent on their parents due to the long-term shift on their routine. Once the COVID-19 lockdown gets over, the children might resist going to school

and many will face difficulty in establishing rapport with their mentors after schools are reopened. Consequently, the constraints of movement imposed on them can have a long-term negative effect on their overall psychological well-being and holistic development<sup>8</sup>. Children are anxious regarding cancellation of examination and/or multiple postponement/changes of examination schedules, exchange program and academic events.<sup>2,7</sup>.

### **COVID-19 impact on Education, mental and physical health of Underprivileged children**

In many urban areas of India, the underprivileged children which includes street and slum children, children of construction labour mainly belong to short term or long-term migrant labourer family who have migrated from rural to urban (from other states and /or within states/region) for better life/earnings. They live in cramped houses or shabby dwellings, without proper sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, electricity etc.<sup>11, 12</sup>. Mainstreaming these children in development process is a big challenge in attaining the goal of universal primary education and inclusive growth in India.<sup>13</sup>. The underprivileged children who are economically, socially and regionally in an unfavorable situation compared to the rest of the population of the society, are always denied or deprived of the privileges available to the people of upper class.<sup>5,14,15</sup>. The underprivileged children have low motivation to learn, low cognitive abilities, low self-esteem, poor readers and slow learners. However, they have greater sense of independence and responsibility.<sup>5,14,15</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown the world has experienced, has worsened the pre-existing social inequality. In developing countries, with the impose of lockdown, the underprivileged children face acute deprivation of nutrition and overall protection. The prolonged stress could have a long-term negative impact on their immunity and holistic development<sup>8</sup>. In India, which has the largest child population in the world with 472 million children, the lockdown has significantly impacted 40 million children from poor families.<sup>16</sup>. Due to no earnings or loss of jobs of their parents/guardians in COVID-19 lockdown, the underprivileged children to face abuse and mental health issues with greater vulnerability and exposure to unfavourable economic, social and environmental circumstances.<sup>17,18</sup>. Due to closure of schools and limited resources of NGOs for organizing online classes, the underprivileged children are more affected in-terms of their education and overall well-being. A study is undertaken at the hostel premises of an NGO to understand the extent of impact on education, mental and physical health of the underprivileged children

staying at the hostel premises and how NGO functionaries and the children are coping up with the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic lockdown challenges.

### **Study of Vadodara based NGO**

The focus areas of NGOs in general are education, community development, healthcare, nutritional food for children, sports & cultural activities, women empowerment, environment, relief activities, advocacy, financial support to bright children for higher studies, child labour protection, child abuse and sexual harassment, family planning etc.<sup>11,19,20</sup>. The main focus of the Vadodara based NGO selected for the study, is to up-lift the underprivileged section of the society and work towards educational and holistic development of the underprivileged children.<sup>11,21</sup>.

### **Objectives of study**

1. To study the educational set-up at hostel premises
2. To study the effects on children's education and health due to prolonged school closure because of COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown
3. To study the challenges faced by the functionaries of NGO during COVID-19 pandemic and how they are coping-up with the challenges
4. To study the initiatives and measures taken by the NGO functionaries to keep the children engaged for their better education, mental and physical health

### **Design of the study**

A case study gives an indepth investigation of a single individual, group or an event to explore the cause of underlying principles and commonly used in social study. The researcher has chosen case study method in his research design to make an intensive study of the case to explore the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on residential institute of underprivileged children and its functionaries managed by an NGO

### **Procedure for selection of the case**

Vadodara city being a fast-developing urban area of Gujarat state, population of underprivileged children who stays in slums/on streets is in the rise due to their migration with their parents/relatives from other states and/or from other part of the state for job opportunity and better life. Though there are no recent data available about the number of underprivileged children who stays in slums areas or on streets of Vadodara city, 2016 survey conducted by

National Child Labour Project Society in Vadodara, under Ministry of labour and Employment, found that 1,611 children between age group 6-14 were residing on the streets of Vadodara city. In Vadodara, the NGOs who are engaged in educational development of the underprivileged children of the society, have taken various initiatives towards the social upliftment of these underprivileged children through education. Purposive sampling helps to make most out of a small population of interest and arrive at valuable research outcome. Purposive sampling also helps in filtering irrelevant responses that do not fit into the context of the study. Therefore, the researcher has chosen purposive sampling technique to choose one out of three NGOs who have established residential facilities for the underprivileged children in Vadodara for their holistic development with education as main focus. The main reason of not covering other two NGOs are, a) majority of the children went back to their home during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, b) permission for carrying out the study was not given by the gatekeeper due to COVID-19 restriction and fear of infection, whereas all the children and resident functionaries of the case selected for the study, stayed back in the hostel and permission obtained from the gatekeeper of the case, Srotoshwini Trust, a Vadodara based NGO, for carrying out the case study. The case was registered as an NGO in the year 2010 under Indian Society Act 1950, and are active for 10 years in the field of education of underprivileged children of Vadodara city. The NGO studied satisfy the stringent conditions of transparency, governance and demonstrate impact on beneficiaries and represent most mature Vadodara based NGO in the sector in-terms of size and scale.

### **Background of the case**

Srotoshwini Trust, Vadodara was formed as an association in the year 2006 by a group of likeminded empowered women of Vadodara city and their main activities were promoting and performing cultural programmes, raising funds and donating to charitable organisations. In the beginning of 2010, the Trust registered as an NGO and started working for the educational and holistic development of the underprivileged children which includes street children, children living in slums, children belong to economically weaker section and children living at construction site of Vadodara city. In the year 2019, the Trust established a residential campus “Pathshala” in village Lasundra, Savli Taluka of Vadodara district with a capacity for 100 underpriviged children and nine resident functionaries, teachers and staff. As of June 2021, 94

underprivileged children, both girls and boys, are staying at “Pathshala” hostel premises. President of the Trust who stays in the hostel remarked during the interview,

The residential facilities along with various infrastructures for extracurricular activities for underprivileged children are necessary for the holistic development of these underprivileged children. The main aim of the Trust is to provide basic needs for education, nutritional food, medical support, extracurricular activities, soft skill development, career path counselling, livelihood generation training and mainly emotional needs, which are generally available to the mainstream children of our society.

### **Educational set up at Pathshala hostel**

The NGO has developed their own curriculum and followed the syllabus of the Gujarat State Education Board. The children are attached with a school which follows Gujarat State Education Board syllabus and National Institute of open schooling (NIOS) education system. The president of the Trust said, “We preferred NIOS education system for these underprivileged children due to their age and learning level”. NIOS, a non-formal education system set up by ministry of education, government of India in the year 1989, is one of the three boards at national level. The main objective of NIOS education system is to remove the obstacle related to age, financial, geographic, infrastructure and time. The children who are unable to attend conventional formal education can complete primary, secondary and higher secondary level examination through NIOS board and the examination certificate issued by NIOS board is considered at par with the certificates of formal education board such as CBSE/ICSE. In view of the above, all the children of Pathshala are enrolled with NIOS examination board. In addition to school teaching, which is presently closed due to COVID-19 lockdown, the paid teachers and volunteer teachers appointed by the NGO, visits hostel premises from 9 AM to 12:30 PM and impart teaching to the children according to the curriculum. The Trust has launched new initiative “UDAAN”, a career counselling programme for the children of standards VIII to XII. This is now a part of the curriculum. The Trust has developed basic educational infrastructure, online teaching for standards VIII to XII children, sports infrastructure, art & craft section, livelihood generation training such as pottery, stitching, painting etc. Trust appoints teachers who are proficient in Gujarati and Hindi for majority of the children are studying in Gujarati medium and few in Hindi medium. For

managing the hostel activities, two resident teachers, two functionaries, two female supervisors, and two male security staffs are staying at hostel.

### **Sources of data**

The study was conducted at NGO's "Pathshala" hostel premises at Lasundra Village. The sources of data were the resident functionaries, teachers & children of the NGOs and the documents of the NGO.

### **Nature of data**

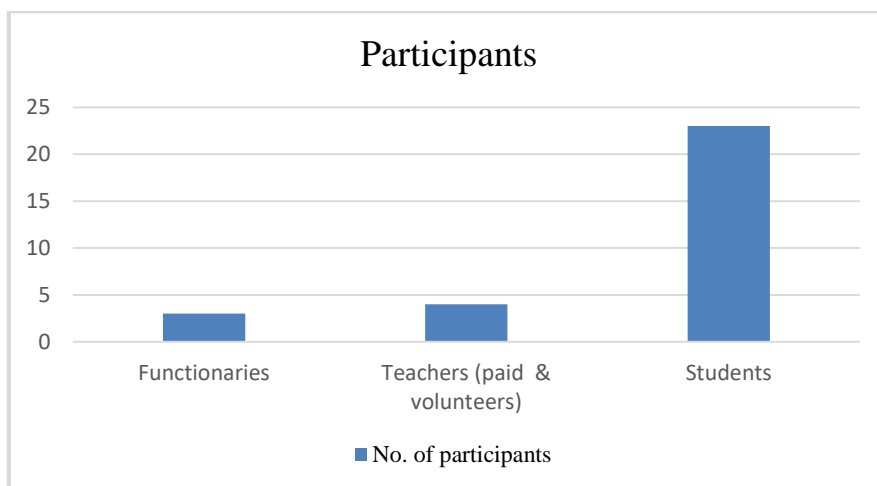
The nature of data - Qualitative

### **Participants of the study**

The participants of the study were functionaries, teachers & students of "Pathshala" hostel managed by the NGO. Total participants were thirty ( $n=30$ ). The details of participants are given in Table 1 below.

Sl.No	Description	Numbers of participants
1	Functionaries (Trustee members / managing committee members)	3
2	Teachers (paid & volunteers)	4
3	Children ( $n1$ )	23
4	Total:	30

**Table 1: Details of participants**



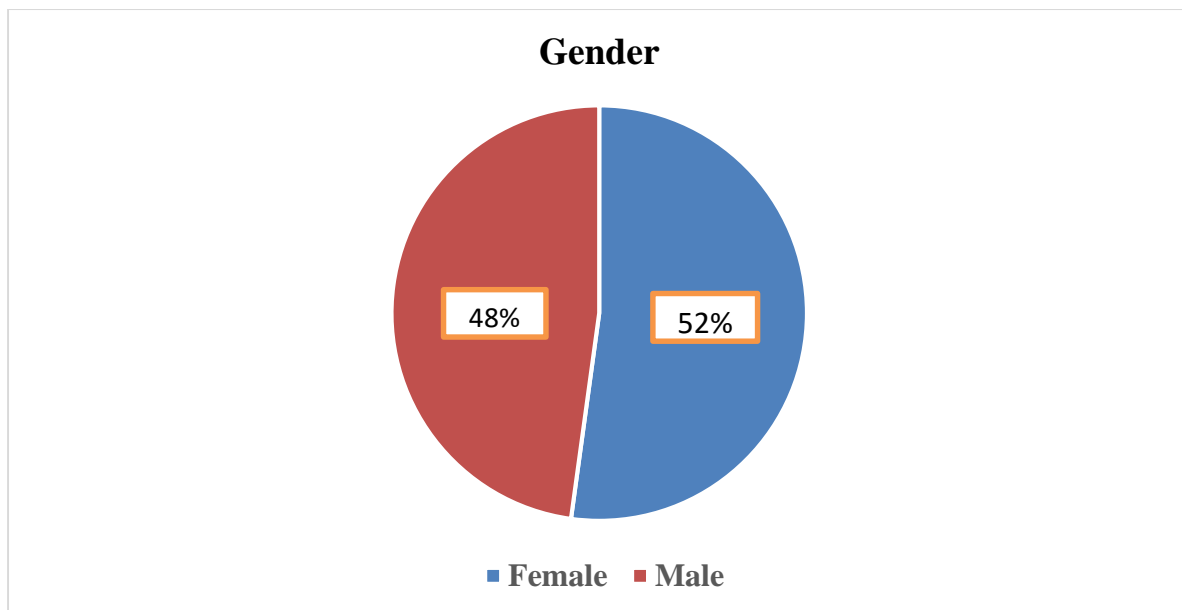
**Figure 1: Number of participants**

The class, age and gender of children ( $n=23$ ) is given in Table 2 below. The percentage of female and male children is given in Figure 3 below. Out of 94 children staying in the hostel, 47 children who are aged below 11 years and studying in class junior Kg to class III and 18 children who are of age 11-12 years but studying in class 3 or lower class depending on their knowledge level, were not covered in the study. 23 children of age between 8-18 years and studying in class IV-XI were selected from the balance 29 children using purposive sampling technique to have better insight and more precise research results, and also to filter out the irrelevant responses which do not fit into the context of the study. The details of children’s gender, age and class are mentioned in Table 2 below.

	Age			Class			Total
	8-11	12-15	16-18	IV-VI	VII-IX	X-XII	
Girls	2	6	4	5	3	4	12
Boys	2	6	3	5	3	3	11
							$n = 23$

**Table 2: Details of children’s gender, standard and age**





**Figure 2: Percentage of female and male children**

When the study was conducted in June 2021, 94 children, both girls and boys, were staying in the hostel. To have a reasonably accurate data, the sample sizes of girls and boys are made almost equal. The data collection period spanned from 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to 21<sup>th</sup> June 2021. The primary data collection tool used in the study is field notes.

### **Tools**

The COVID-19 pandemic which is a global issue, is altogether a new experience/challenge for the residents of Pathshala hostel and the researcher. The researcher has used unstructured interview as tool to get qualitative data spontaneously from the participants. The other purpose of using unstructured interview is to develop questions during the interview which are based on the interviewee's responses. However, the researcher has used few pointers based on the objectives of the case study. English & Hindi languages were used for interviews with the functionaries and teachers. Gujarat and Hindi languages were used for interviews with the children. The researcher is reasonably proficient in English, Hindi and Gujarati language, hence no translator(s) are used for translation of data.

### **Data collection**

Two-way data collection was made: a) Primary data collection by un-structured interview, b) Secondary data collection from quarterly newsletters, annual reports, brochures, and web site. The main pointers or the frame work within which the unstructured interview was conducted

are a) Effect on children education, b) coping up with mental stresses, c) keeping healthy, d) fear of COVID-19 infection, e) face-to-face teaching Vs online teaching, f) positive effect of COVID-19 lockdown etc. The unstructured interviews with functionaries and teachers were of 40 to 60 minutes each. The unstructured interviews with children were of 15 to 20 minutes each. The data collection period spanned from 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to 21<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and the site of the unstructured interviews was Pathshala hostel campus, Lasundra village, Savli Taluka, Dist. Vadodara.

### **Data Analysis**

The data and documents collected in the study were analysed using the technique of content analysis.

### **Findings of the study**

The major findings of the study are presented below.

#### **Effect on children's education and health due to prolonged school closure because of COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown**

The summary of findings of the effect on children's education and health due to prolonged school closure because of COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown, and how the children are coping up with the challenges are mentioned below.

- The education of the children is affected substantially due to closure of school. Children of class IX-XI are worried for re-scheduling of examination and/or cancellation of examination. They are of the opinion that there is a negative impact on their education level due to school closure. During the interview with Ajay, 18 years old boy, student of 1<sup>st</sup> year Diploma in Mechanical Engineering and class XI standard (NIOS system), mentioned,

There is an impact in our education level due online teaching process of various engineering subjects and postponement of examinations on account of COVID-19 lockdown. Engineering drawing, practical courses are difficult to understand in online classes. The teachers completing the course rapidly without verifying our understanding level. We do not know when the examination will take place. We lost nearly one year.

Rani, 18 years old girl, studying in class XI also expressed her unhappiness during the interview,

I worked very hard to get more percentages in 10th examination. But no examination held. There is a mass promotion based on class performances. I got only 53 % whereas I worked very hard targeting more than 80 %.

- All the children are missing the school environment. They prefer face-to-face teaching over online teaching mode. Mamta, 16 years old girl and studying in class XI mentioned,

We are missing the school environment, school teachers who teach us well, explain with examples, we also miss our friend with whom we can discuss our personal matters, we help each other in studies, we study together, eat together and play together. In spite of many facilities are available at Pathshala hostel and the resident teachers are providing motherly care, school environment is different and a different feeling

- Children who are attending school's online teaching sessions facing difficulties due to one sided communication, disruption in audio and video quality, no repeat clarification from teacher due to paucity of time. During the interview with Jyoti, a 16 years old girl, studying in class XI, explained,

Though online education started in COVID-19 lockdown, but we are facing difficulties in math and science. We are not able to understand. For us, face-to-face teaching would have been better.

- Though, more teachers have been augmented by NGO management and various facilities created at hostel premises for more extracurricular activities, children are eagerly waiting for opening of the school. Diva, 14 years old girl, student of class IV expressed her feeling during the interview,

We are missing the bus travel from Pathshala hostel to school. It is a fun for us and a change of outlook. Playing 'Antaksari', scenery etc. during the travel are refreshing. We will prefer face-to-face teaching over online teaching.

- They are not much afraid of COVID-19 infection for they are not going outside the hostel campus, well aware of COVID-19 preventive measure, strictly following the COVID-19 protocol as per the guidance and advises of resident mentors/teachers
- They are worried about their parents/relatives for the fear of their COVID-19 infection. They talk to their parents / relatives once in a week which give them comfort about their

safety at home. Tejal, 14 years old girl and a student of class VIII shared during the interview

We are worried about our parents for they are staying in Village. They generally do not follow covid-19 precaution guidelines. They may get infected with COVID-19. They also can't visit us due to COVID-19 lockdown and fear of infection. We talk to our parents/relatives once in a week. We feel happy.

- The resident mentors / teachers / staffs are taking additional care and meeting their emotional needs which has alleviated their COVID-19 pandemic fear. Children are engaged more in extracurricular and livelihood /skill development training to cope-up the stresses arising out of prolonged COVID-19 lockdown
- During this COVID-19 lockdown period, they have learnt respect for the people, cooking, organic farming, gardening, hostel maintenance activities, understand each other better, team work, music, singing, soft skills, technical skills, use of digital devises, how to cope-up emergency situations etc. They consider these are the positive side of COVID-19 pandemic in-spite of staying in confined place for more than 14 months. During the interview with Hasina, 16 years old girl and student of class X explained,

Though we are staying in a confined space i.e., in hostel premises for more than 14 months, we did not felt boredom for we are busy in extracurricular activities, competitions, dance performances, art & craft, painting, music, pottery making etc. We learnt how to cook, we learnt sewing machine operation, we learnt playing music, organic farming.

Pran, 17 years old boy and student of 10<sup>th</sup> standard mentioned during the interview, The most important benefit of COVID-19 lockdown is that we understood each other better, we learnt how to face the difficult situation as a team, how to handle and overcome pandemic situation such as COVID-19 which is a problem for the whole world. We learnt how to respect all whether younger than us or elder”.

**Challenges faced by the functionaries of the NGO during COVID-19 Pandemic and measure taken to cope up with the challenges:**

- To synchronized with school’s online teaching programme for class IX-XII during COVID-19 lockdown due to lack of digital devices, poor network connectivity, shortage of classroom etc.

- NGO's infrastructure development is mainly funded by the Corporates through their CSR funds. COVID-19 Pandemic was never envisaged by the NGO while making budget in the beginning of 2020 for the financial year FY2020-21, nor they had accrued fund for augmenting their existing IT infrastructure and other facilities to reap the benefit of school's online teaching programme.
- Teachers are facing difficulties in monitoring and assessing the children's learning performance in school's online education system
- Due to limited classrooms / space, children from different standards attend online classes in the same room
- Unable to replicate the school structure at hostel premises. Teachers need to teach multiple classes in a single batch and more than one subjects
- Keeping the children busy 24 hours a day is a most challenging job and that too for more than 14 months. During the interview with the functionary, F1, she remarked, "We, the resident mothers and supporting staffs, find it extremely challenging to manage 94 children for 24 hours. When the school was open, the children use to leave the hostel at 1 PM and returns from school at 7 PM. There was some time available with the resident mothers to take care of other activities. Now the children are inside the hostel premises for 24 hours and more than 14 months. We had to innovate new ideas to keep them busy and engaged them in study, extracurricular activities, competitions, hostel works etc.
- Idea creation to keep the children busy and nurturing their mental and physical health
- Creating awareness among children and staff regarding severity of COVID-19 pandemic and strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols as per the advices of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (GoI, 2020) / World Health Organization (WHO,2020). One of functionary, F2, of the Trust explained the actions taken to prevent / avoiding COVID-19 infection as below,

We conducted multiple awareness sessions at hostel on COVID-19 preventive measures. Strict implementation of measures suggested by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and World Health Organization [WHO] (2020). The basic precautions taken by all children, resident mothers / staffs, visiting persons are wearing

mask, social distancing, regular sanitizing / hand washing, cleanliness, not allowing children to go outside of the hostel campus, restriction on outsider's entry in hostel, periodic COVID-19 check / RTPCR test of children and other residents as and when required. We provide them nutritious food, Vitamin C tablet per day to boost the immunity.

- To arrange fund for augmenting online infrastructures, additional teachers, COVID-19 testing (RTPCR) for the children etc. The president of the Trust explained how they cope up with the challenge,

The existing infrastructures were rearranged, curriculum revised, resident functionaries, hostel supervisors were engaged in teaching-learning process to mitigate the challenge to the extent possible

#### **Actions implemented and new infrastructure / facilities planned by NGO to cope-up with present and post COVID-19 challenges – education, mental and physical health of children**

- Created awareness among the children and resident staffs on various preventive measures to avoid COVID-19 infection. Provided COVID-19 immunity boosting vitamin tablets, nutritional foods etc.
- Strict adherence to COVID-19 protocol for all
- RTPCR testing for all the children and staff. Arranging vaccination (single or double as the case maybe) for children / staff
- Created online classroom set-up with digital devices (computers, smart phones, tablets), internet, audio system etc. for the children of 9th to 11th standard for attaining school's online teaching sessions
- Augmented teaching staff strength from eight (8) in pre-COVID-19 era to seventeen (17) to replicate school structure, career counseling for 10th and 11th standard students, soft skills training, livelihood generation training and engaging the children more in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, singing, dancing, art & craft, competitions, cultural performances etc.
- Involved children in gardening, Organic farming, cooking, equipment maintenance, pottery, skill-based training to keep them active and in good mental & physical health

- Encouraging children for interaction with parents / guardians to meet their emotional needs and alleviating fear about parents' wellbeing in COVID-19 pandemic
- New projects such as construction of more classrooms – one classroom for one standard, more IT infrastructure including smart TV, Network with more bandwidth, enhancing solar power generation capacity etc.

## **Analysis**

Overall analysis of the findings is summarised below.

- Poor network connectivity, absence of suitable pedagogy, and the psychology of underprivileged children emerged as few critical impediments for effective implementation on online education mode and making online education mode a suitable substitute for face-to-face education mode
- Lack of past experience in handling COVID-19/similar global pandemic affected the education of the underprivileged children staying in Pathshala hostel
- COVID-19 pandemic which is a global challenge has made the NGO to reimagine their approach towards the education development programme and well-being of the underprivileged children
- Due to fund constraints and limitation of infrastructure facilities, the NGO could not respond quickly to COVID-19 challenges by creating a school like environment at Pathshala hostel campus
- Unfavourable conditions made the children, resident teachers, functionaries of Pathshala hostel to innovate new curriculum to keep the mental and physical health good and minimizing impact on education/loss of learning of the underprivileged children
- The children learnt new skills which are the positive side of COVID-19 pandemic

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