PROJECT TEACH GAJAPATI
GAJAPATI, ODISHA

G ajapati District is one of the most backward districts of the State of Odisha. Mostly hilly in terrain, and inhabited largely by tribal population, the district faces several socio-economic developmental deficits. This includes shortage of subject specific teachers in many of its schools, especially those located in the interior pockets. This has been a primary cause of significant learning deficits amongst pupils. To bridge this important gap impacting learning outcomes amongst school students **'Teach Gajapati'** campaign was conceived and rolled out. The project required detailed and meticulous planning. As a first step, the details of subject wise needs were ascertained in consultation with the Education Department and ST & SC Development Department of Govt. of Odisha. Having done that, eligible individuals were invited to participate in the project as Teaching Volunteers. This was done through advertisements posted on district's website, facebook page and twitter handle as well as in other forms of media. The response was pleasantly robust and in a few days only as many as 178 applications poured in. After due scrutiny of willingness forms and considering the subject wise requirements, 60 Teacher Volunteers were appointed to take teach the desired subjects in 53 schools. Each Teacher Volunteer was assigned the task of taking 15 classes over a period of 3 months and at the end of it, conduct an examination. In total, 572 classes have been undertaken by Teacher Volunteers to the benefit of more than 3100 participating students. Continuous feedback was taken from students from time to time on their experience being a part of Teach Gajapati, and its effectiveness. The examination conducted at the end of the classes gave a clear picture of the impact of scheme and also generated useful pointers for future improvements.

This initiative led to an overall improvement of teaching atmosphere in schools. This was because:

• Regular de-briefing and review meetings were conducted in order to take feedback from Teacher Volunteers and to assess the progress of the campaign. For the sake of transparency as well as publicity, media persons were invited to attend all review / progress meetings.

• Regular visits of senior officials to schools during classes taken by Teacher Volunteers led to a robust monitoring of the project and also helped enhance its outcomes.

Teach Gajapati also had some unintended welcome consequences. It not only reduced the gaps in subject specific teaching, it also helped address many other chronic issues like absenteeism among regular teaching staff and cleanliness/ hygiene in school premises. Optimal use of *new age* communication tools like Google Docs, Whatsapp etc. was made for data assimilation, information sharing and monitoring.

OBJECTIVES

• BRIDGE TEACHING GAPS IN SCHOOLS.

• CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEM.

• CREATE A CADRE OF VOLUTEER TEACHERS AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL.

Other improvements that flowed out of the project were:

• Proactive participation of students / parents.

• Development of more robust feedback loops.

• A student community inspired by professionals from various walks of life coming to teach them.

To create awareness about the initiative, numerous steps were taken to give publicity to various dimensions of the project in the media wherein facebook and twitter handle of Gajapati district were also used. All information related to 'Teach Gajapati' campaign was uploaded on the district's official website. In order to create a buzz about the project, customised T-Shirts and bags were designed and given to all Teacher Volunteers to wear / carry while taking classes. Few of the 'Teacher Volunteers' were felicitated during Republic Day celebrations in the district.

The modus operandi of the scheme is simple and based on basic administrative management principles.

Since 'Teacher Volunteers' render their services voluntarily, Project Gajapati has almost no additional burden on the state exchequer. Teach Gajapati is a sustainable and easily replicable initiative with potential for being implemented at a much wider scale to enhance the pedagogical capacity of school education system.●