

Collaboration with Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action (IELA)

The collaboration began when the Deputy Managing Trustee of IELA took an assignment for ‘*Ecological Assessment of Pasturelands of Mandali Watershed, Sarada, Udaipur, Rajasthan*’ a project implemented by Gayatri Seva Sansthan (GSS) for NABARD. The association helped GSS to develop an ecological perspective to livelihood and conservation. In order to take this further GSS had a discussion with IELA (<http://ielaind.org/>) as to how the work of GSS could be put on an ecological framework. Accordingly, a number of field visits were arranged in GSS project areas to understand the complexities related to the biodiversity and issues related to eco-restoration, keeping in mind livelihood and health concerns.

In the recent context of COVID19 IELA shared the experience of Chhota Udepur (Gujarat) where it is collaborating with a tribal organisation Adivasi Jan Utthan Trust (AAJ) to advocate with the district administration for the introduction of local foods like Drumstick (*Moringa*) into the mid-day meal diet of the schools in the region.

Separately IELA introduced GSS to the National Inclusive Children’s Parliament (NICP) (<https://www.nineismine.in/campaign/childrens-parliament/>), a platform of Children’s Parliaments across the country which focuses on the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. At the recent annual program of the NICP where GSS also participated (<https://www.facebook.com/incpindia/>), a presentation was prepared for the voluntary national review of the SDGs (Niti Aayog Govt. of India had previously asked children’s organisations for a consultation on the SDGs. This was one of 13 consultations organised by them. At that consultation the NICP gave an invitation to the Niti Aayog to participate in the process organised for and by the children). As part of this program training was given to all the participants on SDGs and the sociocracy process (*Sociocracy also called dynamic governance, is a system of governance which seeks to create harmonious social environments and productive organizations. It is distinguished by the use of consent, rather than majority voting, in decision-making, and of discussion by people who know each other*). The participants were asked to develop Children’s Parliaments in their region. GSS has initiated the process of developing Children’s parliament in its project areas and sharing the same with the Central Zonal Coordinator of NICP. GSS is also in the loop in relation to the initiatives being taken by IELA to develop rural modules for the SDGs which can be monitored by children.

As a result of COVID19 a number of issues have emerged in relation to the education of children in the region. A survey recently done by GSS, ‘*Situation Analysis of Destitute Tribal Child Labour during COVID19 in Southern Rajasthan*’ in 89 villages of two districts namely Udaipur and Pratapgarh, showed that 909 children aged between 10-18 yrs have returned to their native villages. The new Education policy 2020 of the Govt. of India poses a number of challenges for the rural children. GSS discussed this matter with IELA and it was proposed

that a flexible approach be developed which can take care of the immediate situation arising out of COVID19 and work towards a more long term approach integrating the work being done by GSS with children.

Options discussed included (1) Development of Child Friendly Panchayats. The concept of Children's Parliaments can help children to engage with the panchayat and bring in child friendly changes. (2) Community participation in the schools through a process of involving parents in the education process. GSS has a system of School Inspiration Committees at its non-formal schools that assist the schools in facilitating planning and monitoring. Currently GSS is working in 301 Panchayats in three districts for facilitating education to children in remote areas and mainstreaming them by the 5th standard (3) GSS is a member of the Child Right Commission in Rajasthan and hence can give shape to 'Right to Education' and other right based issues emerging from the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keeping this in mind the prototype approach developed by GSS in relation to Child Education 'Shikshalaya' is to be used as a base and the concepts up-scaled to incorporate issues related to environment, health and livelihoods keeping in mind the concerns emerging out of the COVID19 pandemic and how an innovative and participatory approach can be developed with the help of IELA to address long-term concerns related to critical cognitive and analytical capacities of the children.

Considering children to be the long-term future of the region, an approach with children also engaging with the governance mechanism at the panchayat and higher levels of governance would have to take the parents into the framework as well. The NICP provides the framework where children can be trained to be responsible citizens of the country in future. Association with adults would help the children to practically place their understanding and issues in current governance platforms. Keeping in mind the NICP format, a group of Children's Parliaments will be formed in Udaipur district to start with and these will be federated at the district level. The district level federation of Children's Parliaments will be represented at the NICP.

IELA is in discussion with PRATYeK (<https://pratyek.org.in/>) who as the convener of NINEISMINE campaign facilitated the creation of NICP (<https://www.nineismine.in/about-us/>). In these discussions IELA has mentioned that it will be taking the help of GSS and some other organisations to develop modules related to SDGs which can be used for training the rural children.
