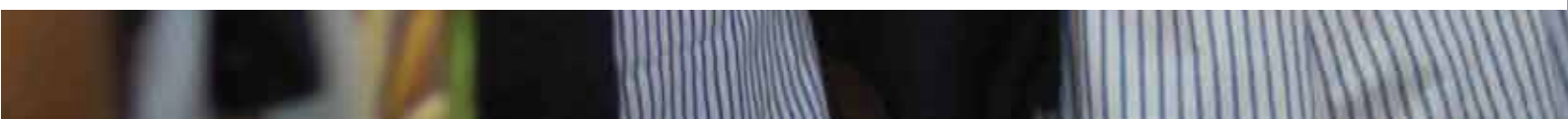
Perspectives on Better Education through CSR, in India

Assessment of needs & opportunities for investment in education, 2018

A study report compiled by
United Way Mumbai and CSR Box

United Way Mumbai

CSRBOX



FOREWORD

The education sector is vast and complex, with varied interventions being undertaken across the country by multiple stakeholders. With 200 million children in primary and secondary schools across the country, India has the mammoth task of providing quality education to these children.

Education is widely held as a critical cause and receives attention from both, public and private stakeholders. This is reflected in the quantum of investment made by corporates in the domain of education, through CSR spends and by NGOs, through the number of on ground projects, with the government being central.

The need to understand perceptions and expectations of CSR representatives towards those executing CSR mandates on the ground, and vice-versa has been felt for a long time. While studies mention the quantum of investment being made in the sector by both, CSR and NGO functionaries, not much evidence is available on trends and gaps in the sector, which could help companies identify the right social needs and relevant opportunities for interventions. This report attempts to gauge perspectives of functionaries from CSR as well as NGOs, who are directly involved ineducation projects to assess needs, challenges and opportunities in this domain.

We are hopeful that this report will help in developing an understanding of the current challenges and opportunities in sector for both sides, while highlighting the major matching points and divergent opinions on key aspects related to education sector. We are grateful to all the respondents of this study.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASER - Annual Status of Education Report

CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility

CWSN - Children with Special Needs

ICDS - Integrated Child Development Services Scheme

M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation

NAS - National Achievement Survey

NGO - Non Governmental Organization

RTE Act - Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

U-DISE - Unified District Information System for Education

UNCRPD - United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

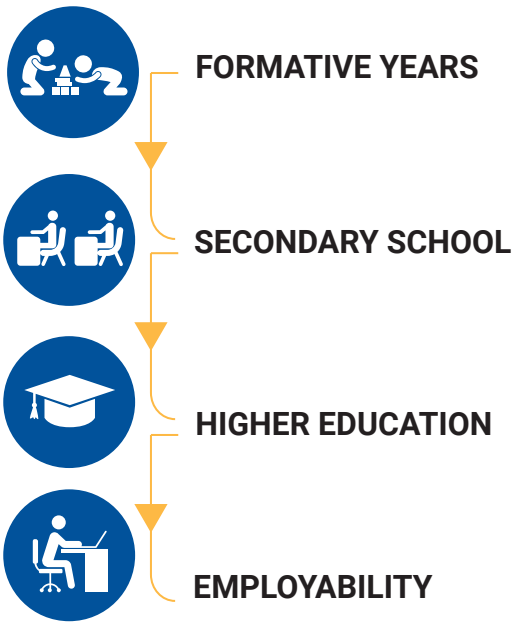
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

The education sector in India has evolved substantially over the years. Constitutional commitment guarantees free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. With 200 million children in primary and secondary schools living in over a million habitations across the country[1], India has a mammoth task of providing quality education to these children. The task is not just achieving the universal education goal but also about ensuring the quality of education. With one of the largest K-12 education systems globally, the Indian education system is replete with enormous challenges and opportunities. These can be evaluated through an assessment of developmental milestones/phases in the education sphere from birth to gainful employment of a person. Each of these milestones/phases requires a study in itself and are too vast to comment upon at one go. Issues such as accessibility, enrolment, quality, retention, quality of teachers, pedagogy, school infrastructure, employability, community readiness and participation etc. provide lenses through which each education milestone/phase can be evaluated, to determine the challenges and opportunities in the sector.



THE FORMATIVE YEARS:

Low learning outcomes at both primary and secondary levels have always plagued literacy levels of school children and have been flagged by Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) constantly for the last decade. This raises a fundamental question - Are we, as a community preparing our children enough for learning in formal educational setups in their formative years? The period from birth to eight years is critical, as it determines how the child grows up and lays the foundations for future learning and holistic development.[2]

In India, the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) is the flagship state run programme with a mandate to deliver services for children below six years of age, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls. The services offered are health, nutrition, immunization and non-formal early education. These services are offered through an Anganwadi (courtyard shelter) Centre, by a field worker called the Anganwadi Worker. This is perhaps one of the largest state run networks offering services for early childhood care and development. Typically, a centre is available per 1000 population, thus making it not only the largest free service provider, but also the most accessible one. For various reasons, however, it has been documented that the delivery of services of early childhood education faces several challenges. The reasons for this can be - lack of human resources, lack of adequate training and capacity building, lack of awareness regarding the importance of early years with regard to education, etc.

This points out the urgency of helping children, especially from first generation learners to develop school readiness through a good quality early childhood

education programme, to enable them to make a smooth transition. Globally, early childhood care and school readiness is gaining currency as a viable strategy to close the learning gap and improve equity in achieving lifelong learning and achieve full developmental potential among young children.

PRIMARY EDUCATION:

By the "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009", children were guaranteed their right to quality elementary education, significantly improving enrolment and retention numbers. The push for better education in India relies largely on building overall infrastructure and educational equity. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, is the Government of India's flagship scheme to achieve universal quality education for all Indians. It is complemented in this effort by targeted schemes on nutritional support, higher education, and teacher training.

While these interventions have encouraged increased enrolment rates, challenges concerning the quality of education and monitoring and evaluation and curriculum have been well documented. These challenges have serious consequences on the growth and development potential of the country. Gender inequality has also played a huge role in depriving the girls of their educational rights. These challenges require intensive efforts and funds with targeted sectoral interventions from varied sources along with the Government of India.

Needless to mention, secondary education cannot be expanded unless the upper primary education system is efficient enough to send the adequate number of elementary graduates to the secondary level. Once the students complete elementary education, they are expected to transition to secondary classes in subsequent years.

SECONDARY EDUCATION:

The challenges in the sector are exacerbated when we analyse higher education, especially related to retention of those children enrolled in primary schooling eventually making it to secondary school. Even amongst those who persevere, only 16% of Class X students across all types of schools could correctly answer more than half the mathematics questions put to them as per the Government's National Achievement Survey (NAS) of 2014.[3]

In secondary education, the first need is access. The Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) indicates that school provisioning at the secondary stage is low: in 2015-2016, while approximately 80 percent and 40 percent of schools in India offered education in primary grades (Std 1-5) and upper primary grades (Std 6-8) respectively, only 16 percent schools offered secondary school grades.[4]

To review quantitative and qualitative expansion of secondary education, a study of the details on availability of schooling facilities, unserved habitations, schools according to type and management, physical and teaching / learning facilities, average number of instructional rooms and ratio of upper primary to secondary schools is important. Also critical is the assessment of pupil-teacher ratio, average number of teachers in a school, trained teachers, subject specialization & qualifications of teachers, student enrolment, retention rate and and availability of functional library and laboratory facilities

Ensuring equitable access to higher education is of prime importance. As the ASER 2017 findings suggest, while on average the difference between enrolment levels of boys and girls at age 14 are

declining, by 18, 32% girls are not enrolled—compared to 28% boys.[5]

Girls face a multitude of challenges to stay in school as they grow. Secondary education for girls is almost like a vaccine against early child marriage, poor maternal and child health and it provides a degree of economic independence. Communities however won't be convinced of the value of secondary education if they don't see it leading to better jobs. The costs of secondary education and the distance they have to travel especially in rural areas, also acts as a deterrent. This can be addressed by adding infrastructure and providing financial support that encourages students to continue studying.

We need bridge courses to help enable children who have missed years of schooling to reenter the education system. It is also important for schools to equip students with skills required in the job markets of tomorrow in order to make them relevant and aspirational for students. Developing scientific temper among children is another aspect which requires attention. A key component of this is quality STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) teaching and learning.

Board examinations in classes X and XII focus on completion of syllabus. However attention on the learning outcomes, needs and aspiration of the students are critical too. This is where the need for systematic career guidance is realised. However, this does not happen just in Grade 10 through one test and a report given to the child, rather, it has to be developed over a period of 2 to 3 years where one needs to work with a child on goal setting, understanding themselves and their aspirations while cultivating ambition and drive.

EMPLOYABILITY:

Employability indicates the skills, abilities and attributes of a person to be gainfully employed. Nearly 75% of the youth entering the workforce every year are considered unemployable or not job ready. Employment potential depends on lot more than technical skills. It requires the ability to work effectively, have good interpersonal skills, communication and creative skills. Lifeskills, if integrated into the school programme, can help prepare young students.

India's demographic dividend has been vastly commented upon. However, a demographic dividend does not mean just people; it means educated, employable youth. Quality education and gainful employment is at the centre of the vision of capitalizing on India's demographic dividend. Availability of educated and employable youth is a direct function of the quality of education systems they have been part of.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education, according to UNESCO, refers to the process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners.[6] All children need to be treated with respect and ensured equal opportunities to learn together. Inclusive education refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Estimates suggest that there are at least 93 million children with disabilities in the world, but numbers could be much higher. They are often likely to be among the poorest members of the population. They are less likely to attend school, access medical services, or have their voices heard in society. Their disabilities also place them at a higher risk of physical abuse, and often exclude them from

receiving proper nutrition or humanitarian assistance in emergencies.[7] Disability is recognized as one of the least visible yet most potent factors in educational marginalization. The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was entered into force in 2008, was ratified by India in October, 2007.[8] Anecdotal evidence suggests that a wide gap in policy and practice exists in the country with respect to inclusive education.

There are a number of challenges that hinder proper practice of inclusive education. A rudimentary problem in this sphere is the requisite skills of teachers for inclusive education. As per the study by Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013),[9] 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Curriculum adaptation, difficulties for physical access to school environment, information and communications technology availability and related competencies and other support services are major challenges. Perception, attitude and behaviour towards CWSN remain a perennial problem and steps towards sensitisation are few and far in between. Needless to mention that all challenges in the education sector highlighted earlier get enhanced for CWSN.

EDUCATION AS A PRIORITY IN CSR

The Companies Act, 2013 opened doors for businesses to positively impact society and develop good relationships with stakeholders by mandating CSR for a particular set of companies. The Act provides mandatory contribution towards CSR with education being specified as an eligible activity. The education sector (including higher education) has been the major beneficiary of this mandatory CSR provision resulting in improved funding for the institutions. Recognizing the role of corporates in India is crucial in improving the educational conditions; several private organizations have also joined hands with the Government to make that ultimate dream of offering quality education in India come true. This is also because education forms the stepping stone for the country's economic growth and better adoption of other government interventions.

As per the India CSR Outlook report 2017, education projects (with skills development) received 32% of the CSR investments in the 2016-17, forming the highest contribution of CSR to any sector[10]. According to a NASSCOM Foundation study, 60-70% of companies' CSR contributions are spent on education initiatives.[11] This large chunk into the education sector is due to the corporates' perception that there is huge potential for change with a skilled knowledgable society and belief in the education system being the root that needs strengthening.

CSR in Education has mostly involved steps to promote education, scholarships, sponsorships, increasing access to education and higher education. Other CSR practices for the education sector gaining increasing popularity include promoting gender equity by targeting girls, providing toilets or other infrastructure, establishment of institutes for teachers, libraries for rural school education etc.

Trends also show increasing investment towards STEM education, digital education, capacity building of teachers. Upgrading and capacity building of the school management and leadership development is another essential component which requires much attention and action.[12-14]

MAJOR CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

The issues in the education system related to accessibility, quality, retention, poor capacity of teachers, academic issues - especially a curriculum that is not updated, enrolment, pedagogy, girl enrolment and retention issues, skill building etc. have serious consequences on the growth and development potential of the country. The magnitude and scale of such challenges require concrete efforts and funds from all stakeholders and collaborations between government, educational institutions and corporate to help accelerate educational reform and bring about the desired social development. Even though the education sector receives maximum attention in terms of CSR spends, mere involvement from financial perspective to strengthen the education system is not enough.

CSR models need to address long-term issues across the systemic chain to accelerate change in the education sector. Not much evidence is available on trends as well as gaps that could help companies perceive the right social needs and identify relevant opportunities for interventions. With the quantum of CSR investments, it is vital for the companies to make informed decisions. Along with focus on classroom construction, providing books or scholarships, attention should also be given to supporting processes or organisations with clear, easily measurable learning outcomes. Behaviour change communication has also not gained much attention in this context.

ABOUT THE STUDY

NEED

Along with the need to invest at all levels of education, it is essential to identify gaps and understand the CSR focus in generating sustainable, scalable and impactful education models to help drive the country's economic growth and address issues plaguing the sector.

Several stakeholders are working towards an overall improvement of education in India, with the Government being central. Many NGOs undertake projects and initiatives addressing one or multiple challenges highlighted earlier. In addition, companies invest substantial resources through CSR to enable NGOs to achieve maximum impact in the communities they operate in.

Studies comment on the CSR investment in the education sector in terms of quantum of investment made in various categories within the sector. Similarly, several studies discuss high impact, innovative projects at scale. Secondary literature reviews of CSR spends and annual reports form the basis of observation on trends in CSR investment in education and other sectors.
However, there is a dearth of literature on stakeholder perspectives from both ends on the current gaps, difficulties and opportunities in education for investment and execution purposes.

This study, therefore aims to elicit responses from CSR and NGO functionaries who deal with education projects through various sector specific lenses. The aim is to develop an understanding of current challenges and opportunities in sector for both sides, while highlighting the major commonalities and divergent opinions on key aspects related to education.

STUDY METHODOLOGYGY

The scope of this study is to understand current interventions in the education system, emergent needs and areas that require engagement by stakeholders and how to assist corporates and NGOs to take an informed decision while planning projects in the education sector.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

To understand diverse set of perspectives to determine needs and opportunities of investment in the sector, the following objectives were determined:

Map the perspectives of CSR and NGO functionaries on better education through CSR

Develop an understanding of the needs & opportunities in the Indian education system

Assess and analyse thematic areas for collaborations and investment

STUDY DESIGN

The study is based on primary research and assessment of secondary data related to the thematic areas that emerges from analysis of the primary research. The study attempts to describe the role of CSR and NGOs and their perspectives for education enhancement across the country.

Nature of this research is both exploratory and descriptive as it attempts understand divergent opinions and endeavours to substantiate emergent themes.

SAMPLING

Convenience sampling or availability sampling was used to elicit responses from representatives of corporate and non-profit sectors. 36 responses each were received from corporate sector and non-profit sector representatives. Totally, 72 responses were received in comparison to 100 expected respondents.

MAJOR RESEARCH POINTERS FOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The study is expected to provide insights on various pointers listed below, on the basis of which detailed questionnaires (one each for CSR and NGOs) were developed. Please note; these indicators are not exclusive . However, for the purpose of the research, they have been studied in depth.

For CSR and NGO functionaries:

- ✓ Factors driving CSR decision-making.
- ✓ Current CSR focus/investment area in education, nature and quantum of investment.
- ✓ Process and factors in selecting an education project and project partners.
- ✓ Drivers and barriers in committing long-term funding for education.
- ✓ Challenges and gaps in understanding the education sector.
- ✓ Prioritising sub-sectors of education
- ✓ Potential funding areas for businesses for better education in India.
- ✓ Opportunities for key actors in education.

These pointers were captured through a structured interview schedule / questionnaire prepared for respondents. The survey tool was administered online through Google Forms and analysed through simple frequency tables.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESPONSES

Responses have been assessed and analysed to understand emergent thematic areas. Efforts have been made to discuss these themes in detail with mapping of the sector and linkages to available secondary literature.

MAJOR FINDINGS & EMERGENT THEMES

This section provides a detailed overview of the major findings and emergent themes of this study. A comparative narrative between responses of representatives from the CSR sector and NGO sector has been presented in detail, for common variables. Based on the questionnaires, the following themes were used to group responses from both sectors and have been explained in detail, subsequently.

Profile of the respondents and investment in the education sector

Nature and types of projects supported

Priorities and challenges in the sector

Opportunities and expectations in the sector

PROFILE OF RESPONDENT ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR INVESTMENT IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

In all, 72 responses (36 responses each, from the corporate and NGO sectors) were received from various organisations. Respondents mainly belonged to companies and NGOs directly involved in the education sector. The NGOs, respondents included representatives from organisations with active, education related projects; for those in the CSR domain; representatives were from corporates actively invested and engaged in the education sector.

Method of undertaking education projects

91 percent of the NGO representatives mentioned that these projects are undertaken in a direct implementation mode. 38 percent of the respondents also mentioned that they collaborate/partner with government authorities and 33 percent collaborate/partner with other NGOs/CBOs to undertake such projects.

From the corporates, 86 percent of the respondents mentioned that they support NGOs to undertake education related projects. Among these respondents, 30 percent also mentioned that an in house foundation works on these projects along with NGOs that they support. 20 percent of the corporates also mentioned that few projects are undertaken in direct implementation mode.

NATURE AND TYPES OF PROJECTS SUPPORTED

NGO respondents were asked to classify their interventions in categories like own flagship project, projects co created with other entities, etc. 89 percent of respondents mentioned implementing their own flagship education projects. Of these, 33 percent mentioned designing projects in consultation with the government. Almost 20 percent of the respondents stated that they work on projects co-created with corporate partners.

Almost 42 percent of the CSR respondents mentioned that they support projects designed by an internal CSR team. This trend is noteworthy, considering the increased focus and involvement of corporates in mandatory CSR initiatives as provisioned in The Companies Act, 2013. 72 percent of the respondents also mentioned that they support projects co-created with their NGO partners. This may include need assessment, community stakeholders' consultations, project designing, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation etc. Almost 20 percent of the respondents affirmed that they also support standalone projects of NGOs where they are principal donors.

Areas of education for investment

Education being a vast sector has many facets, as discussed earlier in this report. To understand specific areas of investment in education, by both NGOs and corporate sectors, a list of areas was shared with the respondents, who were required to select the options in which they are currently involved or have invested. These areas were identified based on the secondary literature review of existing projects implemented and supported for education enhancement. While the list of areas under education can be ever expanding with credible impact in the communities, the following were identified for the purpose of this study.

Table No. I Areas for Investment in Education

AREAS OF EDUCATION	CSR RESPONDENTS	NGO RESPONDENTS
a. School infrastructure –school building, classrooms, furniture etc.	48.6%	19.4%
b. Provision of teachers to the schools	34.3%	25%
c. Running of a school	17.1%	19.4%
d. Sanitation infrastructure and WASH interventions	57.1%	19%
e. Early childhood education	34.3%	50%
f. Education sponsorship / scholarships	34.3%	41.7%
g. STEM related interventions & remedial classes	45.7%	30.6%
h. Digital education/Computer classes	60%	52.8%
i. English improvement	31.4%	63.9%
j. Reading and libraries	45.7%	36.1%
k. School / career counselling	22.9%	38.9%
l. Teachers' trainings	34.3%	63.9%
m. Non formal education	17.1%	44.4%
n. Promoting arts, culture & heritage	25.7%	16.7%
o. Promotion of sports & education through sports	31.4%	25%
p. Awareness and advocacy	8.6%	36.1%
q. Technology in education	28.6%	27.8%
r. Strengthening of school management committee & school leadership development	22.9%	36.1%
s. Career counselling	22.9%	19.4%
t. Capacity building of NGOs working on issues pertaining to education	8.6%	19.4%
u. Any other	Vocational training, developing tribal model school	Skilling, life skills, community mobilisation, using 'Play' in learning, mid-day meal in govt. schools

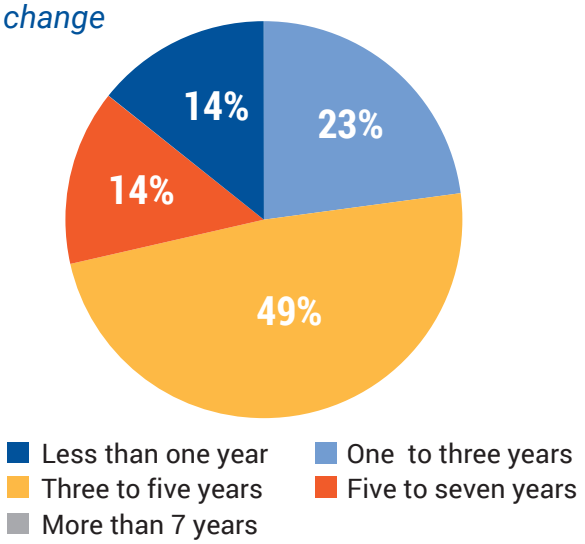
Table I depicts a comparative analysis of sub areas of education that CSR and non-profit sectors invest in. It is important to note that, most of the NGO investments are supported by Corporates under CSR. 48 percent of CSR spend goes towards school infrastructure, while NGOs invest 19.4 percent in the same. 57 percent of the CSR spend is focused on Sanitation and WASH infrastructure, while 10 percent of the same comes from NGOs. Similarly, Digital and Computer education attract major investment through CSR. The Central Government and State agencies have strongly promoted initiatives in the areas of cleanliness and digital education, through campaigns of Government of India such as Swachh Bharat, Digital India etc., possibly influencing the CSR deployment from companies.

The situation is reversed when it comes to interventions such as improvement of English language skills among children, capacity building of school teachers and awareness and public advocacy. Here, the NGOs' quantum of investment is much higher (63.9%, 63.9%, and 36.1%, respectively) compared to that of the CSR sector (31.4%, 34.3% and 8.6% respectively).

Time period for investment in /support toward education projects

An education project not only needs substantial investment, but also requires time to create full impact. The spectrum commences from a person's early childhood education to their gainful employment. For impact to realise in any phase of a person's education, time investment is varied. For this, the CSR respondents were asked to mention the time period of investment in an education project, while the NGO respondents were asked to share their perspective on the time needed for an education project to fully realise its impact.

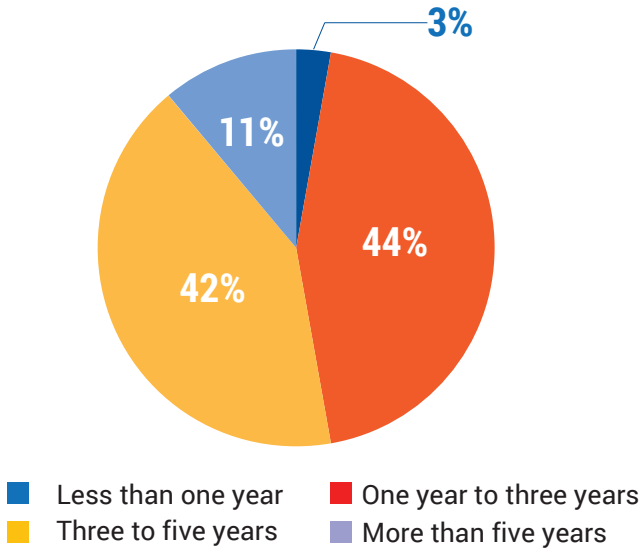
Graph I: Time period for an education project to realise measurable, sustainable change



The comparative analysis of average period of support provided to education projects and the perceived time period required to realise lasting change through such projects depict a significant gap in the perception of the life cycle of a project.

86 percent of the respondents from the CSR sector mentioned that the investment support for education projects is largely from one year to five years. 11 percent of the respondents mentioned that they support a specific project for more than five years.

Graph II: Average period of support provided for the education projects under CSR



In comparison, majority of respondents from NGO sector (49 percent) opined that it takes anywhere between three to five years to realise measurable and sustainable change through education projects. Significantly, 28 percent of the respondents also mentioned that it takes more than five years to realise lasting change.

PRIORITY AREAS WHERE SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENT IS REQUIRED:

This section enumerates perspectives related to priorities and challenges in the education sector..

For this, respondents from both sides were asked to highlight five areas, which they perceive as priority and require substantial investment.

Please note: the purpose of this summary is not to value one area of education over the other. While the following list is not exhaustive, it merely depicts individual perceptions and should only be reviewed from this point of view.

Table No. II Areas where substantial investment is required

AREAS OF EDUCATION	CSR RESPONDENTS	NGO RESPONDENTS
a. School infrastructure –school building, classrooms, furniture etc.	47.2%	36.1%
b. Provision of teachers to the schools	25%	27.8%
c. Running of a school	19.4%	13.9%
d. Sanitation infrastructure and WASH interventions	44.4%	19.4%
e. Early childhood education	44.4%	38.9%
f. Education sponsorship / scholarships	38.9%	11.1%
g. STEM related interventions & remedial classes	44.4%	30.6%
h. Digital education/Computer classes	47.2%	27.8%
i. English improvement	30.6%	38.9%
j. Reading and libraries	19.4%	5.6%
k. School / career counselling	5.6%	11.1%
l. Teachers' trainings	41.7%	72.2%
m. Non formal education	8.3%	27.8%
n. Promoting arts, culture & heritage	2.8%	5.6%
o. Promotion of sports & education through sports	13.9%	8.3%
p. Awareness and advocacy	5.6%	27.8%
q. Technology in education	5.6%	19.4%
r. Strengthening of school management committee & school leadership development	27.8%	33.3%
s. Career counselling	2.8%	8.3%
t. Capacity building of NGOs working on issues pertaining to education	16.7%	19.4%
u. Any other	Vocational training, skilling	Skilling, parents' engagement nutrition for the children

The table summarises perceived priorities in the education sector from both sides. A comparative analysis of the sector priorities shows that these perceptions are very similar for most of the areas.

However, areas such as provision / enhancement of sanitation infrastructure and WASH interventions are considered more critical by those in the CSR sector (44.4%) as compared to those from the NGO sector (19.4%). Sub-areas such as capacity building of school teachers and awareness and advocacy in the education sector are considered more vital by representatives of NGOs (72.2% and 27.8% respectively) in comparison to CSR representatives (41.7% and 5.6% respectively). This difference may be largely due to the fact that these interventions do not provide tangible immediate impact on the ground and can be hard to measure.

THREE MAJOR CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING THE PRIORITIES MENTIONED

Based on the priorities highlighted, respondents were then requested to enumerate three major challenges in addressing these areas. The question was open ended and the responses have been grouped in categories for ease of reference. The following section discusses the major challenges highlighted during this study.

Investment and time period to demonstrate impact:

A major challenge mentioned by respondents is the continuity of investment in education projects for a long term and increasing the life cycle of an education grant. Education projects require consistent investment over the years to realise measurable and sustainable impact for children.

Improvement in children's learning outcomes and betterment of quality of education across schools are the two most critical factors of success in this space and which can be realised in the long run. It is a continuous process and requires sustained, targeted and rigorous interventions. Most of the other sub-areas contribute to these outcomes directly or indirectly. However, the investment, whether substantial or not, is made for a short period of time, as highlighted by respondents. For NGOs, this becomes a major challenge when measuring depth of impact.

Exit strategy/Sustainability of education projects:

A major emergent theme has been of issues related to sustainability of education projects and the need for a clear exit strategy. Most respondents mentioned that the issues pertained to the lack of a clear, robust exit strategy for education projects. While the projects provide excellent outputs in terms of deliverables, a lot is to be desired when it comes to the sustainability of those outputs. School authorities and community members persisting with the model developed on the ground, even after the NGOs have exited, has become a major challenge.

Closely linked to sustainability of education projects is the community participation and ownership. Lack of both these factors will adversely impact project outcomes. A few respondents also mentioned the perceived value of education projects among community members as one of the major challenges. In such cases, community members perceive education projects as having limited or no relevance or value to them, posing a major challenge.

A major trend highlighted by respondents from the NGO sector is that of significant investment being made towards classroom and sanitation infrastructure within the school. Such interventions are tangible with high visibility and demonstrate impact in a short term. While these interventions are much needed, a major quantum of CSR spend being made for these projects leads to lesser investment in other areas which may be less visible but strive for long term impact. Another challenge depicted in alignment of this issue is the geographic concentration of education projects supported through CSR. The CSR provision stipulates supporting projects in communities where corporates are located. In few instances this has led to projects being undertaken in urban areas and areas with no presence of corporates, such as rural and tribal communities, being left out.

Demonstration of tangible outcomes in the overall growth and development of children has also been recognised as a major challenge. This is closely aligned with difficulty in monitoring and evaluating education projects in communities. Both factors have been highlighted by most of the respondents from the CSR sector.

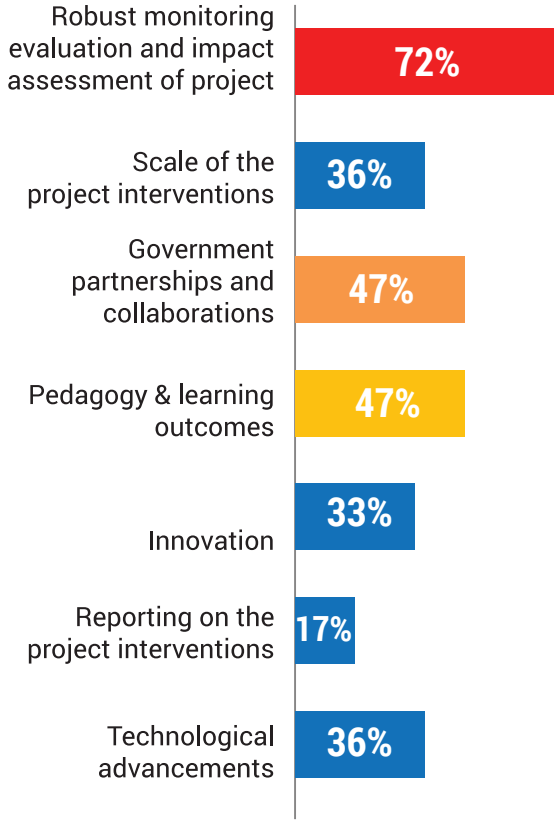
The need for more early childhood education related interventions was identified. India, as a nation, has struggled with school drop-out rates and low learning levels. ASER has also been raising red flags regarding the literacy levels of our school-going children for over a decade. A weak educational foundation during the early years is directly related to low levels of education and a high number of drop outs in later years of schooling.

Other challenges highlighted included need for collaborations and partnerships among NGOs for education projects, limited support from the government, need for technical advancement, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPECTATIONS IN THE SECTOR

This section elaborates on perspectives of respondents related to expectations and opportunities in the education sector. CSR representatives were asked to mention three key areas where education projects can be strengthened further. Multiple answers were received and responses were grouped to depict major themes.

Graph III: Areas to be strenghtened



A major theme highlighted through the responses is the need for robust monitoring and evaluation of education projects:

72 percent of the CSR representatives highlighted the need for robust monitoring and evaluation as most critical. This trend directly links to the challenge of demonstrating tangible outcomes in the overall growth and development of children. 47 percent of the respondents highlighted the need for government partnerships and intra-sectoral collaborations, which becomes critical in scaling best practices and successful models. 47 percent of the respondents mentioned pedagogy and learning outcomes as a major area needing attention.

On the other hand, NGO sector respondents were asked to highlight areas needing attention and strengthening. Responses were grouped to depict major themes. The responses did not vary significantly from those of their counterparts in the CSR sector, with major areas for strengthening including the need for monitoring and evaluation, collaborations, improvement in the learning outcomes, etc.

One key theme emerging from the NGO responses was that for the need to invest substantially in capacity building of school teachers. It was emphasised that the reasons for improved learning outcomes and retention are not limited to classroom infrastructure, resources, books, etc. and largely depend on the quality of teaching itself. This area needs a lot of attention from all stakeholders involved in education projects.

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE CSR SECTOR

All NGO respondents were asked, in an open ended question, to highlight their expectations from the CSR sector. Multiple answers were received and responses have been grouped to depict major themes.

Almost all respondents highlighted the need for long term funding (5+ years) for a project. Such funding is imperative to realise impact in the communities, by focusing on outputs as well as sustainable outcomes.

Most respondents stated that budget provision for capacity building of teachers and school leadership is critical. Closely aligned with this is the substantial provision of remuneration for teachers hired for the projects. Often, budget provisions under CSR supported education projects have limited scope for teachers' salaries. Good quality teachers are the cornerstone of any education project and improvement of learning outcomes depends on them. Not supporting such components limits project outputs and outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) also emerged as a major theme, with a few of the respondents mentioning that education outcomes are occasionally beyond measurement and not always physically quantifiable within a time frame. Hence, it is imperative to devise a realistic and relevant M&E framework for on ground project interventions, jointly with corporate partners rather than following a ready-made M&E template for all projects.

Another aspect highlighted was the need to support projects that look at overall growth of children and not merely academic growth. In this regard, project interventions that contribute to physical development, building life skills and other skills among children become equally critical.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to understand broad range of perspectives of representatives from NGOs, the CSR sector- implementers and enablers in the niche area of educational causes. The cause of education itself is complex and involves multiple facets. In this regard, this study is limited in the following ways:

- The study had proposed 100 respondents (50 each from both sectors). However 72 participants responded to the questionnaire (36 each from both sectors). This sample size is limited in its representation of the sector. In this regard, the major findings and trends captured through this study do enumerate perspectives in the sectors, but should not be used to make generalisations or form conclusions.

- Convenience sampling or availability sampling was used to collect the data for this study.

- Since the study pertained to understanding perspectives of respondents from both the sectors for CSR in education, the questionnaire comprised a few open ended questions; responses to which were grouped to ensure ease of representation.

CONCLUSION

The need for this study, titled, 'Perspectives on Better Education through CSR in India - An Assessment of Needs and Opportunities for Investment in the Education Sector' emerges from the fact that the education sector attracts a majority of the CSR spend in different sub-areas. Numerous NGOs and CSR representatives are involved in this space directly. It was critical and relevant to understand the diverse opinions and perspectives of those directly engaged in the betterment of education and the study aimed to fulfil this gap. With the help of a standard interview schedule administered online, respondents were asked to provide their perspectives related to different facets of the education sector.

A comparative narrative of the responses received from both sectors' representatives, throws up a few critical issues which have been plaguing education projects for a long time.

The need for a robust monitoring and evaluation framework was highlighted by both the sectors. An opportunity was realised, to jointly set up such M&E frameworks for each project based on the nature of interventions on the ground. This way, a relevant and feasible M&E process can be put in place, which has participation from both sides.

Education projects are diverse and cater to numerous sub-areas across communities. Many of the respondents highlighted the need for long term investments, as education projects by nature are limited when it comes to providing immediate, visible impact. Rather, they contribute to the overall growth of children, requiring long term commitment.

Along with long term funding, another aspect highlighted was the need for investment in sub-areas like capacity building of teachers, school leadership development, etc., which are process driven interventions and may not have an immediate tangible output, but, which, if executed well, can result in long term project sustainability. Intra-sectoral and inter-sectoral collaborations are the need of the hour, as scaling and replicating successful models becomes important. This need was highlighted by respondents from both the sectors.

Criticality of supporting projects that look at overall growth of children and not merely academic growth was reinforced. Project interventions that contribute to physical development, building life skills and other skills among children, therefore become equally vital.

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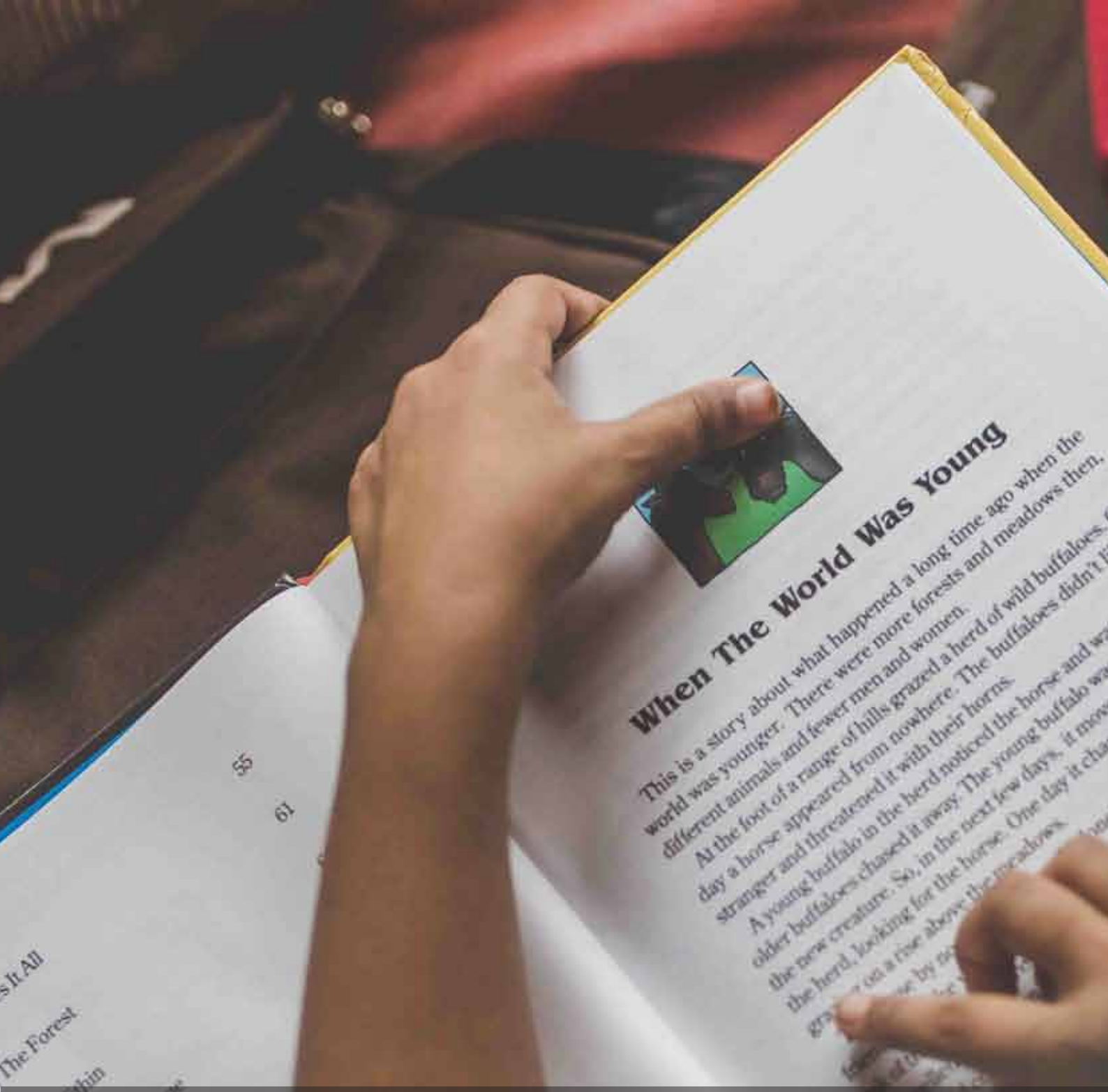

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