Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Goshticha Shanivar or Reading Campaign

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

India

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

☐ Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

☑ Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

☐ Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

☐ Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation

☐ Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

UNICEF and Pratham Books with Government of Maharashtra, India

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

- Reading campaign
- Reading for joy
- Government elementary schools
- 2.5 million children
- COVID-19 school closures
- Mental well-being
- Story books

6. What makes it a best practice? *

The reading campaign has been one its kind programme at scale in the government where almost 2.5 million children were reached through the government system during the COVID-19 school closures.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)
   This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the
   practice and address the following issues:
   i) Which population was affected?
   ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
   iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Goshticha Shanivar (translated as 'Story Saturdays'), is a reading campaign which was launched by the state of Maharashtra, India in October 2020, to encourage the joy of reading among children. The campaign was designed to provide children with one story book every week, which especially during the extended school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was critical in the promotion of mental/ emotional well-being of children as well as critical in supporting language development amongst them.

The intervention was implemented by the Department of School Education for elementary school children and by the Women and Child Development (WCD) department for children aged 3 years to 6 years (government pre-school centres) , with technical support from UNICEF and its partner agency, Pratham Books. As the name suggests, under this campaign, one story in Marathi for Anganwadi children and one story in each in each of the three languages of Marathi, Urdu, and English each, was shared with children in grades 1-8, every Saturday. The stories were curated by the Pratham Books' StoryWeaver team and categorised into 5 reading levels.

E-stories were shared via WhatsApp with children through Supervisors and Anganwadi Workers for children in the government pre-schools and by District Coordinators, Block Resource Persons, Cluster Leaders, and teachers, in the case of elementary school children.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)
Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:
i) What are the main activities carried out?
ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? *

The intervention was implemented by UNICEF with its partner agency, Pratham Books and the state Department of Education and Women and Child Development department. Although the campaign was planned for 12 weeks, given the demand from the field, it was extended to 23 weeks during the 2020-21 school closures. As a part of this campaign, one story in Marathi, Urdu, and English, was shared every Saturday with children in pre-school and grades 1-8 (from Marathi and Urdu medium government schools). The stories were curated by experts and categorised into 5 reading levels – for pre-school, grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8 for each of the languages.

The programme was launched in October 2020 by the State in an online event. For effective dissemination of the stories, weekly stories were shared with the District Coordinators or DCs, who were responsible for coordination and monitoring of the intervention at the district level. The stories were then shared with the block level coordinators, cluster resource coordinators (CRCs), teachers and pre-primary centres teachers, via WhatsApp as pdf files and links to the Pratham Books StoryWeaver website. Teachers were then expected to share the stories with the children via WhatsApp, where devices and Internet were available and with the support from community or through home visits or phone calls, where connectivity via WhatsApp was limited or absent. Along with the story books, activities on the theme of the weekly books were also shared. These included, drawing activities, and language activities, such as writing and talking.

The intervention was closely monitored through the DCs through a weekly online Google sheet to collect data; the data was analysed by UNICEF and presented as a State Report Card, in a weekly on-line meeting with the DCs. The weekly achievements and challenges from each district were shared and discussed.

Teachers and other district officials actively participated in the implementation and also innovated to ensure that the stories reach all the children. In many places, school libraries were reopened (in areas where the COVID-19 cases were low) to allow children access to other story books or providing printouts to the children in remote blocks. Teachers from other mediums such as the Gujarati medium and Tamil medium, took inspiration from the programme and under the guidance of the UNICEF-Pratham books team, initiated a reading campaign for their students, using books available in these languages. Temple and mosque loudspeakers were also used to read stories out loud to the entire village, which did not have internet connectivity, bringing the community closer. To recognize the efforts of teachers and district officials, certificates were given to them and a few selected based on the number of children they reached every week, to participate in a Master class on story telling.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)
   To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:
   i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
   ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
   iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

In the course of the 23 weeks of the programme, 2.5 million children accessed the books shared through the campaign, across all the 36 districts of the state of Maharashtra. As mentioned above, the intervention was closely monitored through the DCs through a weekly online Google sheet to collect data; the data was analysed by UNICEF and discussed in a weekly on-line meeting with the DCs. The weekly achievements and challenges from each district were shared and discussed. Teachers also reported that children would wait for a new story every Saturday and re-tell the story multiple times to their younger siblings and family members.

Given the relatively simple implementation modality and flexibility in its approach, teachers and other officials actively participated in the campaign and devised effective ways at the local level to reach children.

To mark the success of the programme, an online event was organized at the state level, where the Minister for Education announced that reading be included in the school timetable and urged for the continuation of the programme. Towards this end, UNICEF re-launched the programme with the government in September 2021, which has reached over 2.7 million children. In the second phase of implementation, the district coordinators were given more inputs on independently implementing the intervention, including curation of books and monitoring. A plan is now in place for the next round of implementation with the DCs in the academic year 2022-23. Another major success of the campaign has been that the issue of child-friendly libraries and, availability and access to good children's literature at the school level has come under the focus of the state. The state has requested UNICEF to undertake a study on the status of libraries across all its schools and recommend ways to address some of the identified issues and enable more effective and efficient use of state resources.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

   To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:
   i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
   ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
   iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

   Key triggers:
   a. COVID-19 pandemic school closures encouraged such an intervention as children and teachers were in need of activities for ensuring learning continuity at home.
   b. The inclusion of child-friendly story books curated by experts keeping in mind local diversities, created a natural affinity towards books among the children, further encouraging teachers to innovate and children to keep reading.

   What worked well:
   a. The simplicity of the implementation model that allowed space for innovation at the local level- unlike many large-scale programmes that include strict guidelines, this programme relied on local solutions to reach maximum student reach.
   b. Weekly monitoring helped in immediately addressing issues at the field level and also created a healthy competition among districts to increase their reach.
   c. Recognition of teachers' efforts through certificates and organizing of a Masterclass on Story Telling helped motivating teachers to become more innovative in reaching children and further engaging them with books.

   What did not work:
   Despite the best efforts of the teachers, in some remote areas of the state, due to the pandemic situation and lack of devices/ internet connectivity some children were left out of the campaign.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

   Please describe why may this intervention be considered a "best practice". What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented "best practice" or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

   a. Effectiveness: implementation of the programme achieved the aim of the programme, which was to ensure access to story books for children during the school closures.
   b. Relevance: the programme was able to effectively respond to the field need in a situation where children were out of school and learning continuity was at risk.
   c. Sustainability and scalability- the programme was sustained through the efforts of the government/ district coordinators, who were trained as a part of this programme.
   d. Involvement of other stakeholders- teachers engaged actively with the community to reach children through young volunteers as well as religious leaders who gave their loudspeakers to help broadcast the weekly stories.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the "best practice" for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

Video film- https://youtu.be/2wNEbEsTCE4

Read about this initiative here:
https://unicef-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/ragarwal_unicef_org/Efu737f9_xBMrdcpLizaTLMBRBA0NLNX1VtgLyxkO3idUQ?e=xNrswp

https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/IND/SitePages/Goshticha-Shanivar-or-Reading-Saturday--A-Reading-Campaign-to-Build-a-Culture-of-Reading-Among.aspx

Other media coverage:
- Sharing below the story published by TOI on Goshticha Shanivar:
https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/unicef-maharashtras-story-telling-initiative-a-success/articleshow/81723115.cms
- Miday has covered yesterday's event details https://origin.mid-day.com/amp/mumbai/mumbai-news/article/mumbai-diary-saturday-dossier-23164559
- https://www.saamana.com/storytelling-encouraged-school-education-department-varsha-gaikwad/
- https://twitter.com/VarshaEGaikwad/status/1373137354819391488?s=19; Unicef India retweeted
- https://twitter.com/PBStoryWeaver/status/1372899054514925572?s=1002