



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.) *

Programme: Take It Eazy

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

India – Demonstrated in Tamil Nadu, reaching 620,000 15 year-olds; and Replicated in 3 more states for 13-17 year olds - 1,793,152 in Bihar; 147506 in Jharkand; and 37,153 in Jammu & Kashmir

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 in technical partnership with CSO - NalandaWay Foundation;
and collaboration with Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan - Department of Education, Government of Tamil Nadu; During replication, State Governments of Bihar, Jharkand and Jammu & Kashmir

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

Aims:

Help de-stress, build hope and confidence among adolescent students in government schools

Modalities:

Phone-based support for emotional well-being and self-care

Target group:

Most marginalized adolescent students in government schools: 620,000 in Tamil Nadu; and 1,923,811 students during replication in 3 more states

6. What makes it a best practice? *

It understood adolescents' reality during the pandemic and demonstrated urgency in response. It introduced a creative strategy, harnessing cost-effective technology to reach out to the most marginalized adolescent students, even during school closures. It put government's own data to strategic use at scale during an emergency, opening out new pathways to connect with students. The daily messages through cost-effective mode (IVRS) were presented like 'infotainment' or 'edutainment', rather than teaching or advice which adolescents loathe. It disseminated the programme access widely, and created demand among students to call back for receiving the inputs. Program did not need one to have smart phones to receive the messages. It helped students to stay calm and be ready to give the public exams during a highly uncertain period of school closure due to COVID. Baseline and end-line scores for a sizable sample proved the effectiveness of this intervention to connect with the emotional well-being of students. UNICEF roles were strategic and clear in getting government to collaborate. Due to its success in Tamil Nadu, it was replicated in three other states, translated in other languages with content contextualization in Bihar, Jharkand and Jammu & Kashmir

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? *

Context: Class 10 Board exams have always been stressful for students across generations. New multiple stressors during Year 2020 included overwhelming news about Covid-19, especially without vaccines; domestic violence and abuse, forced labour, early marriage; inability to meet friends, talk or play, especially for girls; uncertainty over parents' livelihood and displacement; digital divide; and a deficit of care and guidance to deal with oneself.

i) Which population was affected?

Adolescent age students, particularly in Class 10 (in Tamil Nadu).

ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?

As schools abruptly closed due to COVID, students of Class 10 did not get the usual teaching and exam-time support. Digital divide excluded many students in poor families. State's e-learning through TV, YouTube, WhatsApp etc taught subjects, and did not address the psychology of students. Suffice this to add that Tamil Nadu is high on incidence of suicide among young people, and also other negative coping behaviours like substance abuse, due to anxiety and depression.

iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved?

As a Social Policy office, UNICEF Chennai aimed at demonstration in a new niche area. A creative virtual-mode strategy was discussed with senior officials of the Education department, highlighting how adolescent students could be kept better motivated. Thanks to credibility of UNICEF, contact phone numbers of all the 620,000 students in class 10, stored on the State's Education MIS, were shared with us. Almost 3/4th of these were active numbers. Immediately we activated an interactive voice response system (IVRS).

UNICEF's life skills education framework served as the base to prepare 30 messages, delivered through humorous conversation between a girl, who is posed as a Class 10 student and her naughty younger brother. Every day they enacted challenges of adolescents during the extraordinary lock-down. Following this, a child-friendly narrator presented tips for doing certain activities that could help them stay stress-free, not only for exams but for a hopeful life ahead.

Listening to "Take it Eazy" was easy. Students gave a missed call to a number widely circulated among them, and the IVRS placed back an automated call to their mobile phones within 10 seconds, and played the day's story. Each story was under 6 minutes. Themes included relaxation, mindfulness, communication of difficult moments, etc as well as goal-setting, study-techniques, etc. Art-based methods, doodling, journaling, poem-writing etc. were suggested to complete each exercise.

The main objective, namely to connect with and empower adolescent students with confidence and well-being during school closure was well reached. A girl student from an educationally backward district voiced this: "I felt like they listened to me. They gave useful tips for exams, how to study, how to write etc. I've called and listened to the program again and again - I really enjoyed it. I would have listened to each episode almost five times."

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? *

Main activities were creative production using UNICEF lifeskills framework, setting up IVRS for delivering messages to a large number of phone numbers, and close collaboration with the government and partners to disseminate and ensure reach across the state. Activity details have been provided under the last question also. Thanks to the promos by popular actors who served us pro bono – <https://youtube/R-uJKbbDc5s-> , and the active dissemination by the Government itself, `Take It Eazy` started with a bang. It went live on May 17 and ended on June 16 of 2020.

The programme information was circulated by School Education Directorates in their closed user group (CUG) numbers, parent-teacher association boards, relevant website pages, and in the WhatsApp and Facebook groups among all teachers. The School Education department's E-learn website – <https://e-learn.tnschools.gov.in/> - that was opened out to teachers, students and the public, during the lock down period, carried the `Take It Eazy` video in its landing page, and the lilting jingle became popular. The promo video in fact went viral, and was spotted in certain TV channels as a scroll down message! Civil society networks and local media promoted it in several districts. As an icing on the cake, a national webinar on `how can we serve children who are beyond the Edtech reach?` organized by a former Education Secretary of Government of India, threw light on `Take It Eazy` as an innovative good practice.

UNICEF invested about USD 20,000, from an emergency donor fund. It proved to be one of the most cost-effective programmes, considering its reach at scale.

It served as a replicable model for 3 other states, which used their resources, and UNICEF reached a whopping 2 million students in different parts of India.

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? *

When the pandemic struck and exposed the digital divide, the highlight of this approach is, it did not need students to have smart phones to place a missed call and hear the day's support. Older messages remained on the platform for easy access at any time by any student. The students' voice response could also be recorded and sent back to the IVRS platform immediately. This showed that the programme made a difference even for those living in remote locations of the state and in difficult family circumstances during this crisis.

As the programme promoted a 2-way communication, the voices recorded by students helped to alert attention on those who needed care and referral services. Teachers were involved to take note and act according to the need.

One concrete result was the very acceptance of a new virtual-mode strategy by the school education department. They had not used the IVRS before at such scale. At a broader level, the state education department recognised the criticality of addressing the emotional well-being of students, and not just their learning needs.

In terms of immediate output, we were able to reach several students and provide them with much needed hope and emotional balance in the troubled times. Within a quick 30 days and less than 6 minutes per message, we had reached 122,072 target audience across Tamil Nadu. About one-third of them were active listeners tuning in and repeatedly listening to the daily messages. When it was replicated in 3 other states, it reached 2 million target adolescents.

Further, in terms of visioning for more for the future, the programme gave UNICEF a huge entry point. Several robust programmes and innovative strategies for addressing the emotional well-being of adolescents in vulnerable rural pockets and urban slums have followed this in Tamil Nadu.

Base-line and end-line evaluation, using Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, on about 10,000 listeners, and data analysis using paired-sample t-test, pre and post intervention, showed significant increase in the adolescents' overall well-being, improved social relationships, problem-solving and decision-making ability. Some students continued to feel less optimistic about their future.

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? *

The key triggers for transformation were: the sharing of phone numbers of students by the government; the program's appeal on social media; the creativity of age-appropriate and gender-sensitised presentation; and the space for adolescents to let their voices be heard through the recording feedback option.

What worked well: It reached so many thousands of students with a fresh perspective and innovative strategy that appealed to young listeners. Besides supporting the emotional well being of students, the programme demonstrated to the government about use of EMIS data for strategic interventions with adolescents.

From system strengthening perspective, it highlighted the gaps in data stored by the education department MIS. Close to 25% of the phone numbers were not functional and needed updating. This effort at system strengthening contributed to rolling out a critical exercise by the government for e-profiling all students in government and aided schools across state. It triggered government to engage on alternative modes of reaching distant learning to all students during the lock-down period.

What did not work so well: In terms of sustainability, although the material is left with Education department, there is no mechanism to drive repeated usage among more students (not necessarily Class 10). The education department is not using the material for blended mode engagement, post-school-reopening too. There is vast potential in integrating such methods into regular school strategies.

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)? *

It is creative new idea and use of simple technology that triggered the connect meaningfully with more than 100,000 students within a small period of 30 days, and when replicated could reach 2 million adolescents, thus indicating its scope to go at even more scale by any other interested national or state education departments.

Although it was introduced as an emergency touch-base for students in stress, it has the potential to be used as a permanent resource for influencing life skills and emotional well-being among all adolescent students.

It did not need smart phones or sophisticated technology, but any simple phone and IVRS platform, thus showing a cost-effective and government owned intervention.

It is recommended to serve not only for meaningful engagement with adolescents but also as an excellent teacher support tool for blended learning. It can help teachers identify those adolescents who may need further hand-holding and emotional support, during face to face.

Since it is phone-dependent, it would need regular updating of phone numbers. But that also throws out a promising scope to track students through phone numbers in-use, when seasonal migration, dropout or other challenges occur, and students miss school.

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. *

1. Government of India, 2021: India Report, Digital Education: p. 174:
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/irde_21.pdf

2. Media and Newspapers reported on the intervention – 1 example below
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/take-it-eazy-for-students-feeling-stressed/article31668920.ece>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tamil-nadu-toll-free-number-for-class-x-students-to-cope-with-pressure/articleshow/75934032.cms?frmapp=yes&from=mdr>

3. Partner NalandaWay website
<https://nalandaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Take-it-Eazy-Eval-Brief-1.pdf>
<https://nalandaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Take-it-Eazy.pdf>

4. UNICEF India SharePoint / ECM page case story
https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/teams/IND-Programmes/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BF8EF720B-8F1E-4592-9A6C-87CB3118D8B5%7D&file=take%20it%20easy-note-ent%20chennai%2003062020.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true