

Documenting success of the Towards Action And Learning (TAAL) project
“Empowering the excluded : Reaching out”

TAAL (Towards Action And Learning)

DOCUMENTATION BY SATHI ALL FOR PARTNERSHIPS

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Ramlesh could not have lived for another week of her 18 months life if her mother waited more to avail the benefit of Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC). It took consistent follow up work of an NGO called TAAL that the parents of Ramlesh decided to avail the entitlement of 14 days of supervised feeding at the NRC Kolaris got Ramlesh’s weight back to normal. The Anaganwadi



wokers and TAAL staff supervise her wellness ever since.. This Sahariya tribal household from Sesai Sadak village of block Kolaras in Shivpiri, MP survives on daily wage and this struggle itself leaves them no time to think about the child’s survival. Hunger occupies the adult enough to leave a malnourished child in neglect.

Meeting Ramlesh at home is difficult as she goes with her mother. One day she and her elder brother were by their mothers side when she was harvesting the peanut crop in a landlords farm and the next day a vehicle came to take a group of labor 20 kilometers away to dig pits at a highway. The elder sibling would hold the child while the mother worked. Most of these days the children and mother go without food as the money earned would get them the food

grain on their way back. The family has a ration card that fetches them 30 kgs grain instead of 35 kgs they are entitled but this is not enough to feed the seven people in the family for the month. The Sahariya families seldom get sugar and rice from the PDS as these are always out of stock at the ration shop when they manage to reach them. The family like all others will surely have a MNREGA card that is deposited at the Sarpanchs house. That card will have money entered that is shown to have been paid to the family but not received by them. No wonder every day the elders go where ever the labor jobs take them in the local area. Sahariya tribe, one of the Primitive Tribe in India, faces extreme poverty and serious child malnutrition. The absence of regular income from land produce promotes tribal peoples exclusion. They have to depend on the land owning village families or labour contractors for migration work to feed themselves and their families. Government schemes for food security for the poor are controlled by the panchayat is made up of non tribals. The anganwadi worker, the Yashoda or the Asha worker do not talk with children of the tribe so tribal children are not immunized. Shivpuri district alone has 9500 children who are severely malnourished as a survey by the Women and Child Development Department informs. It shows that 65 percent of the children are malnourished, out of which 20.7 percent suffer from Acute Malnutrition. Long distances, unaffordable medical fees at public health institutions and negligence of medical officers are obstacles for the tribes which make them reluctant to go for treatment. The private doctors more often than not are non-qualified quacks but usually more friendly and available to the tribes.

The NRC of Kolaris receives cases referred by the TAAL staff, who invite officials running such schemes to their awareness meetings at the village level. The presence of TAAL has sensitized the tribal families to avail the NRC facility and register children with the anganwadi. The information that these entitlements for them and their children were provided by the Baal Samooch or a children's group members of TAAL who were meeting at the Bal Kendra or children's centre when Ramlesh's mother come back from the NRC. Ramlesh's mother was introduced to the anganwadi worker next doors so that the follow up of her case could be done at the NRC regularly.

The NRC intervention is able to tackle malnutrition when the patient and the mother reach their doorstep. The task of motivating the mother to give up all what she has to do and tend the child for 14 days is a challenge. The government offers Rs 100 as an incentive to the anganwadi worker for each admission to the centre. This fact did come in the way of the smooth admission of Ramlesh to the centre as the admission was to be done on the reference of the anganwadi worker. The worker was on leave but TAAL worker had no time to loose as she could make out that if Ramlesh did not get immediate help she may not survive. This story just goes to prove that if there are trained and sensitized CBOs focusing on children they can lead to creation of intervention where the survival of children can be ensured.



FIGURE: NRC KOLARIS

This awareness activity is part of the project supported by UNICEF that set up 6 Village information and child centres (Bal Kendra). The project works in 65 villages in 3 blocks covering 30 panchayats to build capacity to reach entitlement to the vulnerable and develop a system to track the progress of its work.

Developing the will to work with a concern for children

The experience of Chitra Khanna of TAAL informs her that child right has no space or vision in the culture of silence of the excluded that prevails in the district. Shivpuri has rocky land with very less soil cover. The stone mining work flourishes in the region. Besides rain fed agriculture is practiced with soya bean, corn and peanut. This year it has rained after seven years of drought, washing away the soil causing slush and marsh in the area. The economic and gender relations have continued to follow a set pattern. Feudal relations have transformed to some extent but this has got replaced by newer governance structures that are replicating old patterns of power relations. The reservation of seats in the local governance elections assists in inclusion to an extent. The women and members from the schedule caste and minority are represented in the gram sabha. This representation has yet to transform the economic base of communities that were excluded. There is a stated fear that criminal elements patrol the area on motor cycles cause petty theft and more to intimidate the disempowered in the district. Migration seemed the only option for the poor to fend for themselves as entitlements did not reach them. In such a situation, participation of the child in governance was a challenge that TAAL took on.

Understanding that children do not speak up much when their rights are violated, TAAL has initiated a convergence approach to evolve partnership between children and adults on entitlements. For this reason the kind of issues brought to the village information and child resource centre are not issues of young people but issues of gaining entitlement for all. The issues when discussed may include children along with adults and therefore children get an orientation to ways of working on governance issues. The elders in a village are organized into a Bal Sahayata Dal (BSD) or Children Help Group who received training from TAAL. This training lets them know how to apply for different schemes and what is the best approach of following up on request for entitlement. The approach is one that does not confront people incharge but stand firm on follow up sticking to adequate paper work being followed through. At times some adults take help of children to write applications and fill in forms.

The central fulcrum of TAALs activity is the Baalsamooch or the children's group. This is a small group of children who have been trained on child rights by TAAL. These children have the context of entitlements and rights framework and are supported by the BSD to think and learn to participate in governance issues that concern the children. Children have begun a process in the project area and adults have supported them. The adults have a long way to to understands importance of child rights being implemented in the area. Child labor continues in the area as the poverty stricken families have yet to understand rights and entitlements for themselves, Children continue to take on labor jobs and come to school just for the mid day meal as they are valued less. Adult livelihoods

needs to be ensured to deal with child survival and protection. Both of these are issues where interventions have to be taken on an immediate basis. Adult livelihoods should be part of the medium and long term strategy to deal with Child protection and Survival on a long term and sustainable basis. Community initiatives show the way towards the change the project visualizes.

Community initiatives : in accessing entitlements, in monitoring services, in getting works done for children

The village Khokar in Kolaris block reports no migration as the BSD of the village trained by TAAL, today aspire to develop it as a model village. A punchayat member explained that the community has developed a concern for children after they listened to the members of bal samaooh and wish that in future the Bal Kendra becomes a centre run by community that is managed children with help from the elders.

Through a participatory process 17 vulnerable families of Khokhar were identified. These families have children in the age group of 0-18 and the project helps them to be linked to selected schemes of social protection. This work first require an understanding why and how an excluded person gets an entitlement and how the person could apply to get supported under the government scheme.

The project identified 803 families who were considered most vulnerable by the children and the BSD. The criteria for the selection of the families was evolved through discussion with the village governance committee to identify families that could avail the benefit from 12 selected schemes - PDS, MNERGA, Angan wadi, mid day meal at school, Pensions (widow, old age and disability), Janani Surakhsha Yojna, Ladli Luxmi Yojna, Nutrition rehabilitation centre, inoculations, and Indira Awas Yojna. A monitoring system was set in place to track progress of work to reach entitlements to the excluded in the village.

The TAAL family card to monitor delivery of services and entitlement:

The family card is a tool for the project staff to monitor and track the monthly delivery of the services to the identified families. The data of delivery of services is entered once a month in the card. The card is maintained by cluster coordinators at the village information and child centre and can be accessed by anybody.

If you asked for the cards of the village Khokar today you could get the information either entered in an MIS system or have a set of 17 plastic jacketed cards, printed and filled up by the village information child centre personnel that you could carry to village meeting.

The card has information of the geographical area, head of the household, number of children and adults with table on age and entitlement availed by the children. I looked at these family cards of Khokar village and could understand that caste and economic profile of the identified families. 3 of the 17 households did not have children as the head of the family was either a widow, single man and man living with his brother and mother. In each card an entry was made for every month to



tracking the delivery of the 12 identified schemes. In five minutes I found out that Ladli Luxmi scheme was availed by one girl and Janani surakhsha yojna has been availed by 3 mothers in this year while 4 children have got inoculated. 2 households received widow pension, two have applied and two others who did not get it were listed for follow up work to secure their documentation. One household got the benefit of Indira Awas Yojna house after getting 5 acres land sanctioned by the gram panchayat.

The family gain from having a family card is that they can train themselves to understand and follow up their entitlements. Some members while photocopying forms to apply for schemes also had their form photocopied to do follow up work themselves at their individual level. Even if they forget the TAAL worker in any case maintains a record. The panchayat representatives have seen the cards and are appreciative that a system to monitor some schemes has been suggested in a way that information can be accessed by people for reference. The card is already proving to be a good tracking devise that can be replicated as the state and district level by the government and the gram panchayat as it can be a tool to ensure monitoring by each line department that the scheme reaches the intended beneficiaries.

The family cards have as yet not been linked to Balsamooch (or children's group) or the Bal Sahayat Dal (BSD), as yet but eventually this work will be taken on as a regular activity for the two groups to work together. The family cards lay the foundation for the community monitoring to monitor which schemes reach where. The demonstration of this system of social audit has already shown results. For example if in the first month of the card entry a widow was identified as not availing the widow pension she was entitled, the Balsamooch asked why is this entitlement not reaching her. On probing it was found that she does not have a death certificate or a independent BPL (Below Poverty Line) card. This matter was then followed up with the BSD and by the fourth month some documentation was created to help the women to process her application. In another instance a child shown as born with the mother availing the Jannai surakhsha yojna was not showing an immunization entry. The TAAL worker queried and found out that the mother was yet to come back from her mother's place. Even as she was away there was discussion between the elder children of the house that the child once back needs to get inoculations and in the following months the card had begun showing entry that this was being done. Thus the cards helped in better targeting of prioritizing.

In all the 17 forms MNREGA columns were blank even as 6 families had the job card that are with the punchayat. After 2007 the gram punchayat has not been engaged proactively in calling people from the excluded communities of Jobs within the schemes. Construction work has got sanctioned but the benefit of the same has not reached the vulnerable locally as there seems to be no system for registration of demand for jobs and therefore the jobs that are given to the persons in the village cannot be tracked in a systematic manner.. Work may get contracted out in a way befit sharing is done among those who can manage a cartel to organize money circulation between a few people.

The columns for PDS was filled up even as TAAL staff has information that food supply may be given less than it is allotted and its supply is not regular so at times the PDS shops opens when the supplies come rather than at fixed duration. There has been some discussion on house hold level

consumption when the village elders are made aware about nutrition needs of each member of the family (men, women and children). These discussion took place at the centre after Ramlesh's case proved to be successful.

The Agan wadi facility too is availed by the beneficiary group. The anagnawadi in Khokar is near the school but the school itself is in a corner of the village boundary. Either elders of the family come to collect the nutrition supplement for the 0-6 yrs child as able bodied mother leave the child and go to work. The doors of the building have been stolen so the anaganwadi worker needs to get all the utensils and things every day from her home. The mid day meal is also cooked by the anagnwadi worker or the elder sibling of the child comes to fetch it after attending the school. The school itself is well attended by children. Each child was confident to either sing a song or recite a poem demonstrating a level of confidence to articulate their skill base.

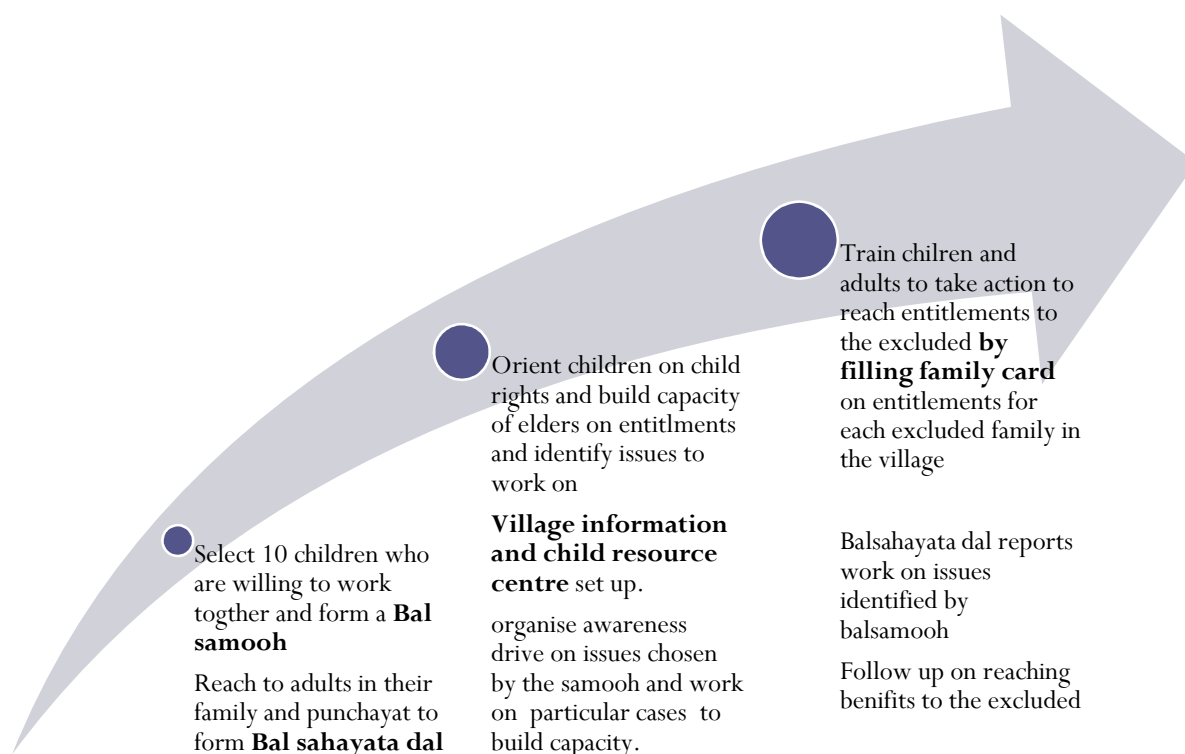
The doors and windows of the anagawai building had been stolen. Men played cards in its verandah this deterred the anaganwadi worker to be present when the men came drunk. TAAL staff members altered the situation after children drew attention to this. They asked for data on how many children are visiting the centre and found that the worker felt insecure and was not regular in her work. The matter was raised by Bal Sabayta Dal at a village meeting and the men asked to shift base.



How a Bal Samooth is set up and linked to a Bal Kendra.

TAAL coordinator Anita Srivastav enumerated how the Baalsamooth is made 'We select children 10 to 12 children in a village who have the capacity to and tell them that they will form a Bal samauh which has no hierarchy of a leader as all will be equal members to understand and articulate issues and problem that concern the children, whether it is of the village or of the children'. At the centre children get together to create new slogans and engage in activity through which children begin to express themselves and structure their thoughts. He further explained that " through a play method we ask what kind of documentation they have and why it is important to take care of the papers like a birth certificate that provides them admission in school and access to entitlement like free school, cycle, uniform and mid day meal. We then ask if they have younger siblings and if they have got nutrition supplement from the anaganwadi and protection in terms of inoculation and keeping a record of weight and height to know if they are nourished adequately".





Activities that take place at the Bal Kendra. (Village information and child resource centre)

The Balkendra at Sesai sadak had information posters plastered all along its wall. It had slogans made by the children testifying that they were explained the four pillars of child rights (A poster on survival, protection, promotion and participation and slogans)

It also had list officers who should be contacted to avail the schemes and monitor that the entitlements reach the beneficiary and had winning entries from a drawing and painting competition on “My ideal village”. The posting on the wall were an adequate indication of the kind of activities that go on in a Bal kendra.



Dinesh Harinkhede cluster coordinator TAAL for Kolaras block said “We give strategic information to children like who is the Sarpanch, who is chief minister and the District collector, what schemes are running and what services are given by the state, which rights are linked to what services and also provide phone numbers of officials”.

The children share this information with their parents who then begin coming to the centre to ask for more.

Once a relationship of trust is established children share different kind of information on physical issues like a hand pump many not be working in the school, the road blocked during monsoon, teacher is beating the students or relationship issues like higher caste children bully the lower caste children, or issues that could be solved like irregularity in getting the midday meal. The school teacher at Kolaris during our visit called out to the TAAL worker to show that the school roof was cracking and needed repairs. Before taking the matter up he wanted information on what he should gather as information and which officer he should address his application for the building upgradation. This picture shows the crack



Hari Singh the coordinator for the project shared that “The children report a number of issues that they may not even perceive as a problem, these need to be analysed and taken to either the parents or the BSD for action. For example in Gaadi Barot many girls drop out of school after primary as the secondary school is in the neighboring village. Women then begin encouraging girls to manage livestock and other household chores. Many times an issue is presented by the child as a problem but we analyze it and sort it at the level of a discussion among the Bal Samooch as a clarification.

Neelams son informed her of the children's centre and asked his mother to visit it as he found the centre joyful. Neelim too began visiting the centre as her home was nearby. Today she is the coordinator for the centre and keeps it ready for both adults and children who come to seek information about their entitlements from the state.



Neelams husband was very appreciative of the work of TAAL in the village as he had seen its workers providing information as well as standing by the village people who they empowered to get the benefits from state schemes like a house from Indra Awas yojna, or widow pension. He therefore had no problems that his wife joined as full time person to manage the centre

14 year old Anil Singh was agitated on why girls get cycles from the government and boys do not. “Should boys discontinue school if they can not walk longer distances?” . The concept of reparations for inequality girls face was explained to him and information that now even boys will get cycles satisfied the anger in the young man. Many confusion get sorted out only by offering a perspective and more information”. Boys are more vocal than girls. Adolescent girls ask for information related to reproductive health. Some mothers who come with their children receive counseling from the women members who referred them to the ANM.

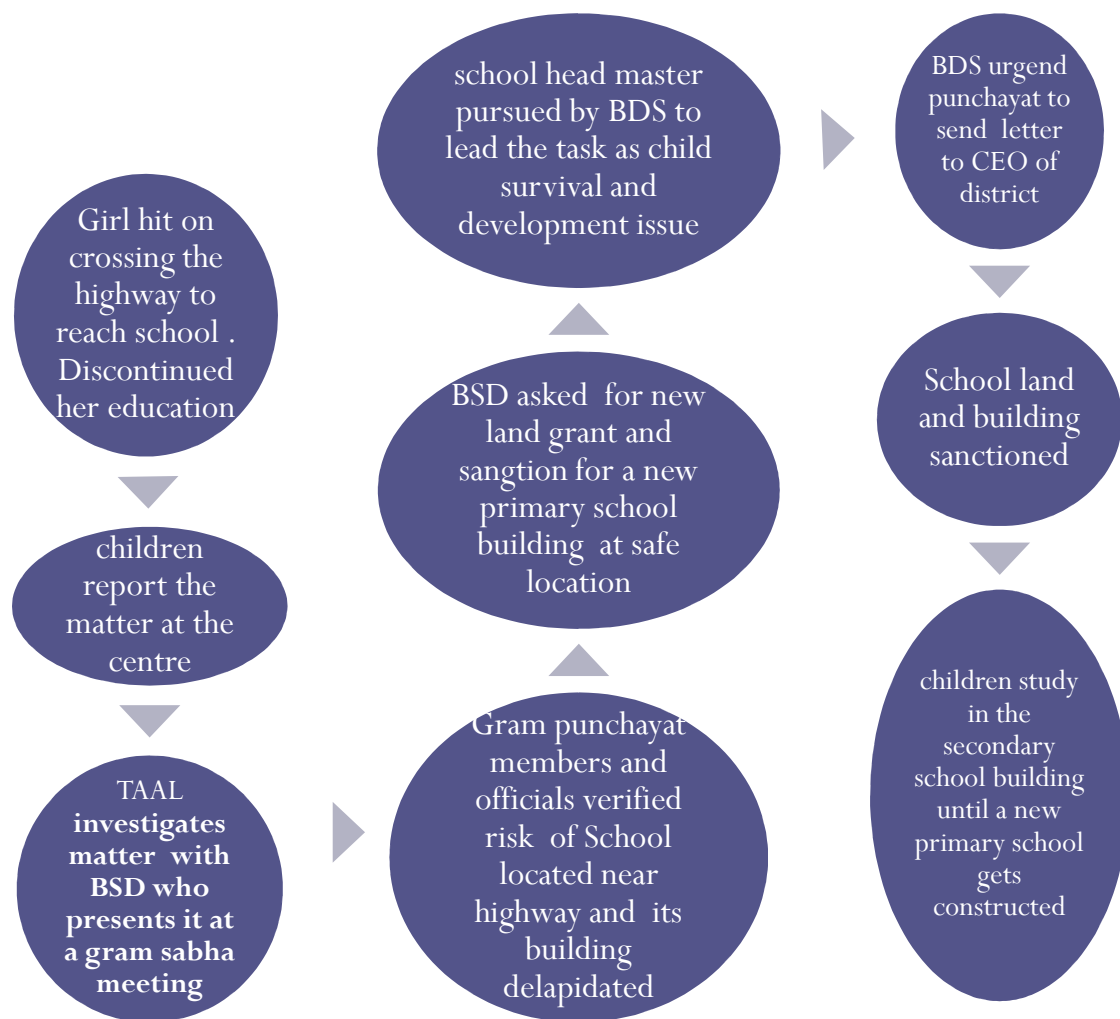
Neelam who runs this Bal Kendra maintains registers of the queries raised by both children and the adults. Most queries were to understand the qualifying criteria to avail the pension, Janani Suraksha Yojna, Nutrition rehabilitation centre or the inoculations, there were three queries on Indira awas yojna and four queries on birth control mechanism.. The block coordinator has had training as an ANM and she has further trained staff like Neelam.

Anita was asked what kind of skills and background a bal centre coordinator should have. She replied “ we look for a local woman in the village who is educated and can agree to working in the budget that we have. Needs to have behavioral skills to have patient with children are important . We need to have woman to coordinate the centre as this will encourage women to visit the centre. Adolescent girls come to the centre to sort their issues on a one on one basis, they do not share private issues with men coordinators”.

The model has worked well to get adults active on issues concerning children and them selves as duty bearers of the children. The examples below are evidence that the Bal Kendra is enabling parents to perform as duty bearers to children.

Child protection and building work for the gram punchayat

The Ramnagar primary school building got sanctioned with the intervention of the project. This school was running in a dilapidated building. An 8 year old girl was hit by motor cycle while crossing the highway to reach the school. This child consequently had to discontinue her education. With this incidence the other parents too got dissuaded to send their children to school. The Balsamooch talked to the children of the school to find out that the children were afraid to cross the highway and on a visit to the building the TAAL coordinator saw that the building of the school was falling apart and that itself was a hazard for children. It was after a discussion in the Balsamooch the matter was taken up by the BSD. The community took the initiative of pursuing the matter in a parent teaching meeting with the headmaster of the school who should have taken action on his own for child protection. The head master had no choice but to get proactive and follow up the case as every level of administration was energized to get the school to be shifted to an alternate site. A meeting of the parents was organized to be followed by a community dialogue with in the punchayat to take the issue to the highest authority. The BSD raised the issue at the gram sabha which referred the matter to the concerned officer in the administration that allotted land for primary school next to the existing secondary school. The school building got a sanction but it is taking long to construct, the primary school then was shifted to the same building as the secondary school.



When we visited the school we found it full of children. Two head masters sat in the covered verandah side by side flanked by children of eighth standard sitting all around the table focusing on their books. One room had four rows of children, mostly girls who are studying for the 6 and 7th grade. On asking what the children wanted to do after studying one 14 year old Sunita said “Whatever my parents think best for me” after further encouragement 15 year Roshni said that she wanted to become a doctor.

The head master of secondary school said that each person has accommodated to the situation to protect and promote the interest of the primary school children but the secondary school interest also need as much attention. The noise level of the school has increased as the methods of teaching at primary level and secondary level need different kinds of physical and mental space. The mixing of elder and younger children in a small space is also not healthy and this has additional supervision responsibility of the teachers of the school. The next task is follow up on the request that the school

be run in two different shifts and the building work of the school supervised to get completed sooner.

Sanction of an Angan wadi for Gadi Baroot

TAAL worker Sanjay took us to the Garhi baroot punchayat where through his motivation an Angan wadi was opened and school boundary constructed. Sarnam Singh member of BSD narrated that the BSD was set up when it was explained to them that the village will prosper when its children have opportunities to develop their skills. The Balsamooch of this village had 4 members with the neighboring village that has a secondary school has 6 others. These four boys from the village have participated in Balsamooch activities and asked their elders why their village did not have an Angan wadi and why mid day meal was not given regularly to them at the school. Through the discussions with Sanjay and their children the BSD agreed that they first must cater to the needs of the younger children and applied to have an anagan wadi for their hamlet. The Anagnwadi has now been operational in the village since the past month. Sarnam Singh said "With the sanction of the Anganwadi we got three applicants for the post of the Anagnwadi worker and this became a challenge for us as village girls were equal for us. We then looked at the qualification criteria and took the highest qualified girl". With this sorted out now the BDS will ask the administration for an anagan wadi building and later for a school building so that their girls can continue their education after primary school.

At the school the mid day meal is not regular. The Balsamooch members informed the BSD that they get food just once in 10 days. The BSD felt that they could not monitor the midday meal service as the school is in another village and the SHG members who cook the meal and distribute it are not from their own caste. Sarnam Singh added "We will like the shg of our own village cook meals for the children. We can put in a proposal in the village to make the change we only hitch is that the women SHG that can get the cooking contract needs to be from a BPL category. Our village does have BPL families but they do have certificates to be classified as BPL. These people are land less but had got left out". Mr Hari Singh of TAAL was quick to inform that the BPL survey is being revised now and it will be opportune to identify the vulnerable people to include the poor. He cautioned that "We should focus on including the excluded rather than creating fights to pull out the others".

The Bal Samooch and Bal Sahayat Dal in Gaddi Baroot have also worked on getting the boundary wall of the school sanctioned. The secondary school is near the road and had an open compound. The hand pump of the school was used regularly by people from the near by habitation for bathing. They would also regularly leave night soil near the school campus. The boundary wall is now being constructed and nearing completion. (add photo of the boundary wall)

Another success reported by the BDS was community initiative to stop the block postman keeping Rs 10 as his disbursement fee for giving pension to beneficiaries

Conclusion: The project has made a success of child participation in spite of the existing challenges. These success stories provide a learning towards what action is required. The project thus provides a framework and way of working to develop the climate of concerns for children as future citizens of the local area and thus a district.

The work of TAAL is only in its initial stage, yet the work shows a path of sustainability as it is not replicating the work of the state but creating a system of demands and accountability of public money to be utilized as an obligation of the state.

The project has had a one year roll out and preliminary outcomes are confirming that planners have to cater for livelihood of parents through sectoral planning under area development to get child protection as a role for the families and the government. Infrastructure that children and women may use and manage to fulfill their rights is also a need that could form a part of spatial planning of each village as a unit in the district. This planning should provide adequate participation of communities that care for children and adults who engage in nurturing the human resource in the area when able bodied adult engage in earning productive resources.

TAAL ideally would like to develop the Bal Sahayata Dal (BSD) as body of village elders who easily access information and get the grievances from the Children's group (Bal Samaooh) solved and is bothered about children. There should be concern for child and ability to solve problems perceived by children. When children experience this care from the elders they too will develop as caring citizens of the future.

