



Centre for Education Development Action and Research (CEDAR)

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022





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COVID 19 SECOND WAVE AND THE CHALLENGES

This year the COVID 19 Second Wave hit us very hard, so we had to close the physical office by 21st of April, and all field operations by 30th of April. We had to work online since then. Field Coordinators and Facilitators were, however, active throughout the period setting up and running the Covid Help Desk for the children, their families and communities and attending to other emergencies.

By August 2021, the second wave receded, and the lockdown norms came to be relaxed by the Government. We switched over from online mode to regular mode of functioning on August 10th.

Regular functioning of CRCs in Kovilpatti commenced on July 7th. However, we had to wait till August 25th for reopening CRCs in Madurai.

By October, CEDAR regained its full rhythm of work. Q-3 became an eventful quarter. However, the onset of Omicron Pandemic happened by the second fortnight of December, forcing us to close the office before Christmas. We resumed regular work by mid-January 2022 after Pongal.

COVID FIRST WAVE: SCHOOL CLOSURE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As reported earlier, a major impact assessment was planned in February 2021 to know how children and their families fared during the school closure in view of the First Wave of Covid, particularly responding to the relief organised by CEDAR- PAPER BOAT initiatives, the art manual and other emergency interventions. A total of 435 children were interviewed using an interview-schedule. A sample of 210 parents were interviewed separately using another instrument. Data processing was over by March and a preliminary report was sent to Paper Boat. In continuation of this, 7 FGDs were conducted till 17th of April. Both the quantitative survey and the FGDs have arrayed before us very useful information.

HELP DESK INITIATIVE

The Second Wave of COVID 19 unlike the first not only did enter the rural hinterland but also played out in the tangible distance of the children. There were no instances where children directly getting affected or getting traumatised by the disease. The right to health or protection against disease being one of the fundamental rights of children. We thought it was necessary to organise some safeguarding measures at the face of the threat from the Second Wave of the pandemic. The inspiration also came from Paper Boat, especially Kemal expressing great anguish about the vulnerability of children as the Second Wave advanced. We quickly organised a Help Desk under the leadership of Dr. Navamani, our Trustee. The idea was to monitor, inform, advise treatment and quarantine/isolation in the event of mild disease, and help hospitalisation whenever necessary. In about a fortnight, 752 individuals in 192 families



were screened. What came in handy were the digital thermometers and oximeters made available to us by Paper Boat. 49 individuals including 12 children were detected with symptoms and treated for the same at home. The screening and monitoring went in cycles till the end of June. One person who went critical in Kovilpatti was treated in quarantine by Dr. Navamani herself and got cured. Two other parents who were admitted to hospital. One fully recovered and the second, a parent of one of our children from Madurai unfortunately could not be saved. The facilitators trained online and supported by Dr. Navamani daringly played the role of barefoot doctors. Facilitators as leaders and catalysts in the community could activate and step-up the 'agency' of the community at the face of the crisis. This is another capacity building for the facilitators. The communities are now quite poised to face the Third Wave.



DIRECT RELIEF TO FAMILIES SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHILD LABOUR

It was reported in Q1 that we were planning to provide direct relief to very vulnerable households in which children were prone to go for wage work. 55 such families in total, were given 25 kilograms of rice each benefiting 218 individual family members. This could take care of basic food supply for 15 to 30 days, depending upon the size of the family. This could effectively break the vicious cycle of children entering wage employment under economic pressure. This was further reinforced by keeping the CRCs open during daytime particularly in Kovilpatti, so that facilitators could take care of the children in the absence of their parents. Our intervention almost completely stopped children going for wage employment, defined as child labour, during this quarter. FGDs conducted subsequently have registered surprisingly positive opinions expressed by children of their work experience.

MAKE CHILDREN CORONA WARRIORS: CHILDREN'S CORONA MANUAL

The idea of Children's Covid Manual was a sequel to the Help Desk work. There were three considerations: i. Instead of treating children as objects of protection against Covid we must strengthen their agency so that they actively follow covid appropriate behaviour ii. Children creatively campaign promoting awareness iii. Children acquire critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities in the context of COVID lockdown. The 89-page "Let us Face Corona- Children's art Manual for Action' was first released at Madurai on August 31st at the Gandhi Memorial Museum. Mr. Aneesh Sekhar, IAS,

Madurai District Collector released the Manual. Apart from the Collector, the Government was represented by the CWC, the DCPU and the officers of the Department of education. The children were at the centre of this public function. They staged a very powerful theatre performance highlighting the need for Covid appropriate Behaviour. Parents of the children, a few NGO representatives and public attended. The manual received very positive attention from the Government functionaries. The uniqueness was well appreciated.

The Second Launch of Corona Art manual had to wait till October 6th for several reasons including that of certain lockdown related restrictions. The Assistant Collector of Thoothukudi Mr. S.J. Narayanan I.A.S., launched the manual. More than 100 children and about 50 parents participated in the function. During this occasion an exhibition of children's paintings, drawings and photographs was organized.



MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL CLOSURE: HYBRID LEARNING EXPERIMENT

Necessity is the mother of invention. When CRCs were limping back to some kind of sub-normal routine, the challenging part was Creative Leads periodically visiting the centre. Then we thought of a 'blended curriculum' which can to some extent keep the centres alive. By blended curriculum we mean

- i. Presenting both 'art teaching' and 'subject teaching' using pre-recorded video lessons.
- ii. The video lessons will be presented to children under the supervision of the Facilitator and their first level guidance.
- iii. All the video lessons carry 'do it yourself' tests whether they involve art classes or regular subjects.
- iv. Wrapping up sessions by Creative Leads follows when 'a sequence' is over, which might involve 4 or 5 virtual sessions. The Creative Leads evaluate the learnings that have happened and try to complement polish the rough edges and further deepen the insights.



All the Creative Leads who ran the pilot project and did the post factum evaluation opined that hybrid learning works much better than mere virtual classroom teaching. More than in art, in Mathematics like subjects we need reliable outcomes. Hybrid teaching would be of great help in organising the 'Recovery Curriculum'. It is cost effective especially when centres proliferate. It can ensure wider reach. In pandemic like situations, it is a better alternative as well.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL CLOSURE: FOUNDATIONAL SKILL ASSESSMENT

School closure for more than a calendar year has resulted in serious loss of foundational skills (in Tamil, English, Mathematics). The magnitude of loss was a function of access to online education, appropriateness of online pedagogy, personal motivation and self-discipline of the individual child, parental support, and family environment. There is a serious hiatus between the level of foundational skill and the class or standard at which a child is studying. A realistic assessment of the foundational skills of each child is essential before we proceed to organise or advise any remedial programme. We in CEDAR, decided to assess the individual skills of each child (in Tamil, English and Mathematics) attending the CRCs using standard parameters based on SSA and NCERT paradigms. 304 children were administered the tests and the foundational skills of these children assessed. A comprehensive report on 'foundational skill losses' was prepared by Mr. Rajadurai. Subsequently, initiatives were taken to prepare 'CEDAR's own foundational skill manuals in Tamil, Mathematics and English. These manuals would be used by facilitators.'

CHILD RIGHTS, PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING ACTIVITIES

Updating of Policy: The child protection policy of CEDAR was revised in the year 2019. The revised version was shared with Paper Boat and Child Safeguarding Auditor Jim Dyson as well. Further, it was also posted on CEDAR's website in 2020. Initially, CEDAR had appointed Mr. Pandiyan, Advocacy Manager as the Chairperson of CEDAR's Child rights Protection Committee (CPC), and CEDAR gained a lot through his input. After Pandiyan was relieved from CEDAR in March 2021, the CEO of CEDAR has become the Chair of CPC.

Subsequently the following actions were taken:

1. Operationalized the Child Protection Policy of CEDAR by constituting the Child Rights Protection Committee (CPC) under section 6 of the Policy.
2. Following amendments were made to the policy:
 - a. An autonomous CPC was formed and operationalized. The CEO of CEDAR was removed from the position of Chairperson of the committee. And Manager of CEDAR has been appointed as ex officio chairperson of the committee.
 - b. Rajadurai, Manager of CEDAR became the Chairperson of the committee.
 - c. Apart from the Chair, 3 staff members – Michael Raj representing Kovilpatti field operations, Ponkundram representing Madurai field operations, and Muthupriya as the women's representative were included as members in the child rights protection committee.
 - d. There was a gap in the involvement of persons holding mandatory positions as per the JJ act. This was addressed by appointing two external members from Govt. statutory agencies as members of the committee after getting their consent:
 - i. Mr James Athisayaraja, the Protection Officer, District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Thoothukudi District.
 - ii. Mr Sharath Sathya, Programme Officer, Tamil Nadu State Child Protection Society (TNSCPS), Chennai.
 - e. Thus, the CPC committee consists of 12 members instead of the 10 members proposed earlier – 5 members within CEDAR and 7 external members including 5 women representatives.
3. It was decided to have five members as the quorum for the child rights protection committee meetings for taking any decisions. Of the five, 3 must be external members excluding the children.
4. All the employees of CEDAR including the CEO have signed the declaration form stating that he/she abides by the child protection policy and the code of conduct stipulated by CEDAR. It is decided to get the declaration from all the Trustees and volunteers associated with CEDAR. Also, it was decided to get a signature on the declaration form whenever someone comes to CEDAR newly either as a staff or as a volunteer abiding by the child protection policy and the code of conduct stipulated by CEDAR.
5. CPC meetings shall be conducted every quarter. Appropriate records of attendance and minutes of each meeting must be maintained. If necessary, special meetings can be arranged with immediate notice.
 - a. In the event the children, staff, facilitators, parents, and trustees of CEDAR bring a complaint either orally or in writing, it shall be immediately registered.

- b.** The complaint shall be acted upon immediately, by informing the management and seeking the help of the two external committee members who work at DCPU and TNSCPS.
- c.** The CPC committee shall organise appropriate training for children, staff, and parents at CEDAR.
- d.** The CPC committee shall advise CEDAR management in such a manner that the organisation remains child-friendly and safer for children.

Other Activities under Safeguarding

The first mandatory quarterly meeting was to be held on 4th September but did not happen. The meeting, however, was held a little later, on 2nd October.

Two training programmes for the parents, one at Koosalipatti attended by 50 parents and another at Keela Earal attended by 60 parents on 'Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse' was well received.

Rajadurai, Trustee Dr. Navamani and Facilitator Poongodi team could successfully present Child Meena who lost her father, before the CWC and Revenue Officials to get the Rs. 3,00,000/- solatium. We are following it up.

Jim Dyson's Child Safeguarding orientation was very well received by the facilitators and staff.

Four children from CEDAR participated in a consultation which was meant for preparing the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for the United Nations Human Rights Council.



CHILDREN COLLECTIVES

Children Collectives are formed on a voluntary basis encouraging members from each CRC to join the Children's Collective of their village. Normally, senior children opt to become members. The rule is that even children who are no more members of the CRC or 'not enrolled' can also become CC members. The very idea of forming Children Collectives (CCs) is to develop voluntarism, leadership in children, civic-political engagement for addressing issues affecting children. It is also a forum for child rights education and activism.

Children's Collectives numbering ten in Kovilpatti, and three in Madurai are functional. There are about 300 members, 20 to 25 children making a collective. CCs hold monthly meetings with an agenda prepared for it in advance. Children deliberate on issues based on the agenda, take decisions, and keep the minutes of the meetings.

Children's Collectives have gained significant agency and children not only discuss issues that affect them directly but also diligently try to seek solutions. They regularly engage the local civic body (Panchayat) by participating in Gram Sabha Meetings (Village Assembly Meetings). They are forthright in placing their demands before the civic leaders.

Abdul Kalam Children's Collective in Keela Eral made a breakthrough. The Children's Collective mobilized 75 children and placed their demand for a separate community hall for conducting the CRC. This was positively responded to, by the Panchayat President (local body leader). He promised to build a community hall facility using Panchayat's own financial resources.

Keela Eral Abdul Kalam Children's Collective Celebrated International Women's Day 2022 on March 8th at their Centre by inviting their parents.

When it comes to the functioning of children's collectives, Kovilpatti has a longstanding tradition and a successful track record. As it comes to Madurai children, the idea is relatively new. Several attempts by facilitators and programme staff, did not yield good results. Then it was decided to bring children from Kovilpatti to share their experience putting up and working in collectives with their counterparts in Madurai and facilitate the process of forming children's collectives. In December, three children from Keela Eral came to Madurai Tallakulam CRC, and facilitated the process. Madurai children readily responded. Their children's collectives are back on the rail collecting full steam.



CEDAR has been invited to come back and join the Forum for Promotion of Children Participation (FPCP) which is a network of NGOs promoting a state level networking of children facilitating participation, child rights education and children advocating on child rights-child safeguarding policies.

PARENT COLLECTIVES: OWNERSHIP AND CHILD-CENTRED SPACE IN THE COMMUNITY

By adopting successful strategies during the COVID lockdown, we have made parents realise the importance of parents directly participating/supporting CRC activities. Our relief work as well as handholding support to the communities in critical times was a gamechanger. Many critical decisions like closure, reopening, safety, launching of public functions etc., are now being taken only in consultation with parents. It is our understanding, the coming year on school reopening, is going to be critical as children would need the support of the parents in making the stressful post-covid transition getting back their regular study habits. Holding monthly meetings of the Parent Collectives become imperative.

Quarter-3 particularly saw tangible results in terms of parent collective activities. It will not be an over generalization to say that parent collectives are gaining agency in every community. However, the degree may vary from one community to another. There are four instances that need recording here.

The first instance relates to Keela Eral school where a teacher refused permission to CEDAR children to attend a weekend special art camp. The matter was taken up with the headmaster of the school by the programme staff. The Head Master readily agreed to send the children to the camp. However, when the children returned to school on Monday, the class teacher did not permit the children who attended the art camp to enter the classroom. They were made to wait outside the classroom for

45 minutes. One among them was physically challenged. When the matter was brought to the knowledge of parents, the Parent Collective meeting was immediately convened to discuss the matter. On the next day, the Parent Collective representatives met with the headmaster and registered their protest. They explained to him how much they valued the CRC activities and how it provided handholding support all through the pandemic for their children and them. The teacher was summoned by the headmaster and in his presence, she tendered an apology. The matter was amicably resolved. This was unthinkable even a year ago.

The second incident relates to how the parents surprised the CEDAR staff by coming forward to support the weekend art camp. On 10th of November, the parent collectives of Pungavarnatham were informed of the upcoming art camp on 13th and 14th of November. The 14th of November happened to be the Children's Day. One parent in her excitement announced in the meeting that she would donate 25 kilograms of rice to prepare food. Others joined to say they would bring other ingredients and cook a decent meal for all the children. It ended up in a feast of Biryani being served for 70 children who attended the art camp on the National Children's Day. Hearing this, the Panchayat President on her part, gifted the children with art material worth Rs. 3,000. It was not a mere celebration of Children's Day, but a celebration of their children and the learning space CEDAR has created.

The CRC at Jawaharlalpuram, Madurai, has been functioning from the Community Hall owned and controlled by the civic body. On October 29th, some local official came to the centre, asked the children and the facilitator to step out, locked the community hall and went away. The matter was taken up immediately with the Parent Collectives. The Parent Collective representatives went to the local body office demanding an answer from the officials. Nothing worked out. After three four attempts, the desperate parents, and the facilitator, contacted CEDAR office asking for help. Mr. Rajadurai and Balakarhikeyan after discussing the matter with the parents, decided to petition the Collector, the Executive Magistrate of the District. The Collector promised to intervene. It is hoped that the matter will be resolved after local body elections.

A similar incident took place in Madurai Ambedkar Colony. The community hall wherefrom the CRC was functioning was locked by some miscreants in November. Here also, this issue was directly taken up by the Parent Collectives of Ambedkar Colony. The women went as a group and confronted those responsible for the act. The miscreants being members of the same community, did not want the issue to be pushed to a flash point. The parents further deliberated the issue and resolved to make an alternative arrangement. On their own initiative, they rented an open terrace of a house wherefrom the CRC could function. Eighteen mothers joined to make a written representation requesting CEDAR to continue with the CRC activities from the new premises. CEDAR on its part, welcomed the idea. But at the same time, insisted that more than the programme staff, now the parents must be responsible for the safety of the children if the centre functioned from the premises rented by the parents. CEDAR is hopeful that the matter can be resolved when the civic elections are over. Despite difficulties and hardship faced, this incident stands as evidence for the growing sense of ownership emerging in parents in terms of their children's education.



Another noteworthy incident is, the exposure visit for children organised by parents in Keela Eral bearing the entire cost amounting to Rs. 16,000/-.

In Koosalipatti village, parents came forward to provide partial financial support in organising Children's Art Exhibition. Keela Eral's parents have decided to provide children with nutritional supplements when they meet at CRCs in the evenings.

ALTERNATIVE ALTERNATIVE ART PEDAGOGY: AGOGY: PAINTING AND DRAWING



A serious discussion has been initiated to revise the drawing and painting experience imparted to children. The new framework proposes to include exposure to wall painting, Warli painting, clay modeling, realism and big picture painting. The idea is to encourage children to use their talents for child-rights advocacy. Children will be encouraged to use approved public spaces to paint on child rights and child protection themes.

ALTERNATIVE ART PEDAGOGY: CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY



In the past two years field-photography workshop suffered a setback because of the pandemic restrictions. A new curriculum framework has been developed during this quarter. The specific focus is to train children to write photo essays on issues directly affecting them.

ALTERNATIVE ART PEDAGOGY: THEATRE

Novel experiments have been initiated to develop children-parent mixed teams, which will bring parents closer and facilitate better understanding between them.

ALTERNATIVE ART PEDAGOGY: CHILDREN MAKING CHILDREN'S FILMS

CEDAR found out early that there can't be a better medium of art than filmmaking that would teach children creative problem-solving through collaboration and teamwork. It is obvious that filmmaking demands wide ranging skills from storytelling to script writing, acting etc. on one hand, and techno-aesthetic skills ranging from cinematography to editing, scoring, dubbing, etc. on the other hand. Wider the distribution of skills, more it demands collaboration.

It took 10 days of dedicated work on the part of both the creative leads, facilitators, and children to make the film 'Little Dreams'. Children told stories, selected the best one, wrote the script, decided on the cast, and acted. On the techno-aesthetic side, children received good exposure in cinematography and editing. The short film became an instant success.

More than the film, the short documentary on the making of the film wherein the children shared their experiences in making of the film has become very inspiring and instructive to other children. It was a good piece of evidence of how children effortlessly participate in collaborative-creative activities which are complex.



"Children Making Children's Musical" is yet another novel idea. This would encourage children to write their own storyline and lyric, sing, and play music to make a filmic narrative. This is an experiment in the anvil.

CURATING CHILDREN'S ARTWORK

Over a period, a good number of children's drawings, paintings and photographs have accumulated. The value of this collection, in our opinion, is immeasurable.

Proper curation and presentation of these artifacts in the public domain would make their value manifest. With this idea, Ponkundram has taken the initiative to draw the attention of connoisseurs and patrons to artworks of children. This could lead to the creation of considerable market value to the artworks.

About 40 paintings and 40 photographs by children have been selected and curated and are ready for sale. A separate webpage has also been designed to create a virtual gallery.

CHILDREN'S ART EXHIBITIONS



It was decided during the previous quarter that the artwork of children must be exhibited for public view. At the first level, we wanted the parents and community members to see and give their feedback on the artworks of their children. This in our view would create 'defining moments' for children, parents, and the community members. This is really needed for the articulation and strengthening of the 'agency' in children, and the much-required child-cent red space in the family, community, and the school. This year, during Q-4 four such art exhibitions were experimentally conducted. There was an overwhelming response from all quarters. It is important to note here that all these art exhibitions were enthusiastically attended by the panchayat members and other community leaders. We see a big promise in this direction.

REACHING OUT TO SCHOOLS



One of the strategic aims of Total Quality Education is to reach out to schools and make the schools realize the need for a holistic vision of education which emphasizes the need for alternative art curriculum that helps reaching the children through their heart rather than their brain and enrich their emotional and creative wellbeing.

Some schools have not failed to notice the difference the CRC children make, in their formal school studies. The Government Aided Baptist Group of Schools are the first to acknowledge this. The school management went one step further by expressing interest in getting their teachers trained by CEDAR in the basics of Alternative Art Pedagogy. Responding to the invitation extended by the school management, Dr. Chinnaraj led a team from CEDAR to discuss the matter. On the school side, the meeting was attended by the Correspondent of the school, eight headmasters, and a select group of teachers. A plan for training has been chalked out.

ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS

CEDAR's collaboration with Equal and Opposite (E&O) UK, has opened avenues for internship opportunities for international students. Ms. Ishita Seth, a post graduate student in Digital Media Practice from Sussex University successfully completed her internship in the month of October.

The Postgraduate department of Social Work of the Lady Doak College, a leading women's college in Madurai, has expressed willingness to sign an MoU with CEDAR for academic collaboration. This would range from internship for students to conducting academic workshops and assisting in research and documentation. To begin with, a five-day paid workshop on Documentary Filmmaking was conducted for post-graduate students of Social Work.

NETWORKING, COLLABORATING AND PARTNERING

CEDAR has become member of Tamil Nadu Child Rights Watch (TNCRW), primarily an advocacy network. Rajadurai on behalf of CEDAR attended their second general body meeting in October. He also attended a State Level Consultation workshop in Chennai on December 15th and 16th for developing the advocacy paper "Tamil Nadu State Policy for Children 2021: Policy to Action."

FPCP: Forum for Promotion of Child Participation (FPCP) is a child centric network committed to promoting child safeguarding, civic participation, and leadership. A virtual training programme for programme staff was organised on October 28th via Google Meet. Michael, Marikannan and Karthick participated in it. FPCP promised they would organise a federation meeting of children. CEDAR children will participate.

RESEARCH

During this year, there was a good amount of data generated through the survey, FGDs and case studies.

MALALA PROPOSAL

Considerable effort was put in developing a grant-proposal for applying to Malala Fund in collaboration with Project Rangeet. It was an experience in several ways including strategies for collaboration. Now, we have a reasonably good template for developing grant proposals.

STATUTORY COMPLIANCES

We are pleased to report that following statutory compliances have been met with:

- i.** Renewal of 12 AA and 80 G exemptions with the Income Tax department
- ii.** Renewal of FCRA with the Ministry of Home Affairs for the next FIVE years
- iii.** Starting of FCRA Bank Account with SBI New Delhi (Final approval obtained from Home Ministry)
- iv.** Completion of Intelligence Bureau (IB) review.

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