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Transforming lives through education

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Learning levels and access to Schools New research launched

A report of new research by ASER on children's access to secondary education, funded by the Kusuma Trust, was launched on 25 January 2018 in New Delhi, India, at a national event that brought together over 50 leading policy-makers, academics and education professionals.

Purnima Ramanujan and Dr Suman Bhattacharjea (ASER Centre) presented key findings and recommendations from the two-year study on factors that influence children's transition from elementary to secondary school.¹

The findings show that:

- the policy goal of universal secondary education under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan by 2017 requires a rapid increase in the provision of government schools offering secondary grades;
- low learning levels at Standard 8 are a good predictor of children's transition from primary to secondary education; and
- children are poorly equipped to handle the secondary curriculum and targeted remedial education is urgently required.

Sunisha Ahuja (former chief consultant, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*), engaged in a lively debate about key areas and questions raised by the findings.

The panel discussion generated active engagement of the audience on key issues, including:

- the need for effective teaching in foundational numeracy and literacy, remedial methods and mixed ability teaching;
- the importance of quality primary and secondary education for all children;
- the negative impact on student attainment of automatic progression through primary grades;
- the potential for residential schools to improve attainment of children in remote rural districts; and
- the emergence of 'bright sparks' of good practice in primary and secondary schools that offer hope for the future of education in India.

Education is gathering momentum as a critical public policy issue and positive change requires the active engagement of all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, policy makers, NGOs, State and central government.

In his closing remarks, Dr Balwant Singh (CEO, Kusuma Trust UK), said:

"Whilst much is being done to improve the quality of teaching and to hold teachers accountable, it is imperative that we hold government to account. This includes delivering on agreed education standards, ensuring subject teachers are available, teacher vacancies are filled and classroom pupil-teacher ratios are met."

"We cannot afford to lose a generation of children whilst government figures out what to do. Remedial education is an important interim measure to meet these children's needs with a view to integrating this into mainstream schooling. Research findings such as these reinforce, and add analytical rigour to, the anecdotes about the education challenges so many face."

1. The study involved a block-level census of all Standard 8 children in two rural blocks each of Hardoi district (Uttar Pradesh) and Sambalpur district (Odisha), a mapping of all educational centres in these blocks, and an assessment of children's learning levels at the end of primary school (Standard 8) and one year later (Standard 9).



A panel of academics and policy makers discuss the research findings
Photo: Kusuma Foundation

Following the presentation, a panel of eminent academics and policy makers, including Dr Wilima Wadhwa (Director, ASER Centre), Dr Maninder Kaur Dwivedi from the Indian Administrative Services (former advisor, NITI Aayog), and

**Our mission is to facilitate and increase access to education and other life opportunities
for children and young people**

Kusuma Supports Excellence

Kusuma Excellence Fellowships - India

Ragini Devi Rathore is a student at Shri Beni Madhav Vidhya Peeth Inter College in Hardoi. Despite scoring 84% in her Class 10 Board Examination, Ragini was worried that she would not be able to continue her studies due to the cost. Ragini is one of three children, her father repairs florescent lamps and his wage barely supports the family.



Ragini Devi Rathore
Photo : Kusuma Foundation

Ragini successfully applied for a Kusuma Excellence Fellowship. She is one of 200 new Fellows selected in 2017. Fellowships are awarded to high-achieving students from low-income families in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh and Sambalpur, Odisha. Fellows receive financial support to continue their education and also participate in English and Computer training and career guidance sessions. Ragini said:

“The Kusuma Excellence Fellowship is really helpful to me. Without the support I was unsure if I could continue my education. Not having to depend on my father to pay my fees means that he can continue to support my younger siblings with their schooling. I am really excited about attending English and computer training as I know they will help me secure a good job. Thanks to Kusuma I now feel confident I can achieve my dreams.”

Since 2009 Kusuma has supported 1,287 Fellows in Sambalpur and Hardoi. The Trust is evaluating the long term impact of the Fellowships in partnership with The London School of Economics.

Kusuma Sutton Scholars - UK

In the UK, the Trust supports talented students age 11-16 to boost their aspirations and academic performance. The scholars programme, in partnership with the Sutton Trust, supports students through a series of school visits, project days, university visits and academic and career guidance.

The scholars programme works with 600 students from schools mainly in coalfield communities. The programme aims to create a pipeline of young people who are at the required level to participate in sixth form university programmes, including summer schools and pathways to university initiatives.

Kusuma Excellence Awards - Gibraltar

In December, three students from Gibraltar were presented with an Excellence Prize. The cash prize recognises high achieving students from Gibraltar who demonstrate excellence and a commitment to their area of study. Students submit an application and shortlisted candidates are invited for a panel interview.

The three successful students were:

- Ryan Robba, studying MSc in Global Environment, Politics and Society at Edinburgh University
- Rachael Perera, studying MSc in Clinical Mental Health Sciences at the University College London
- James Linares, studying MA Conference Interpreting (Quadrilingual) at the Universite Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris



James, Ryan and Rachael receiving their awards from Joey Garcia, Trustee of Kusuma Trust Gibraltar. Photo: Kusuma Trust Gibraltar

Upon receiving the award Rachel Perera said:

“The Kusuma Trust has given me an opportunity that not many people are lucky enough to have. Not having to think about financial problems has allowed me to channel my time towards my education, especially as living in London can be extremely expensive! I've been able to do things, such as a voluntary placement in the NHS and starting sign language lessons, which would not have been possible without Kusuma.”



Students participating in a project day at Warwick University
Photo: Sutton Trust