A Case Study: Choti Si Aasha

Dr. Pravin Vitthal Yadav  
**Designation:** Assistant Professor,  
**Affiliation:** Anekant Education Society,  
Anekant Institute of Management Studies, Baramati (AIMS)  
Specialization: Human Resource Management  
praveen26dec@gmail.com

Dr. Dattatray P. More  
**Designation:** Associate Professor,  
**Affiliation:** Anekant Education Society,  
Anekant Institute of Management Studies, Baramati (AIMS)  
Specialization: Marketing Management  
dr.dpmore@yahoo.com

Dr Ganesh Chavan  
**Designation:** Assistant professor  
**Affiliation:** SOCMS, Sandip University Nashik, Nashik  
ganesh.chavan@sandipuniversity.edu.in

Background  
There are 200 sugar factories in Maharashtra. Out of these, around 150 to 170 factories are operational every year. Sugar factories compete with each other to get more quantities of sugarcane to increase their production. Local people don’t prefer to work as sugarcane cutters they feel it is low-grade work which is very hectic and which requires more effort. People from drought-prone districts migrate to earn their livelihood. Children attending school also migrate with their parents.  
Children of these sugarcane cutters migrate from April to May every year. They reside near a sugar factory in a small hut called ‘Khopi’. These children attended school in their hometown but could not continue their schooling because of migration. Earlier sugar factories used to have schools known as ‘Sakharshala’ at the premises of the sugar factory. But due to Education Guarantee Act introduced by the State Government in 2009, these schools have stopped functioning. There are many obstacles in admitting these students in Government or Aided Schools, hence these students remain School dropouts.

Project ASHAA by TATA Trust-Implementation partner Janseva Gramin Shikshan va Samajik Pratishtan  
To include these children in the mainstream of education, TATA Trust and Department of Education Government of Maharashtra initiated project ASHAA (Digital Education Guarantee Card). Janseva Gramin Shikshan va Samajik Pratishtan (JGSSP) is an NGO which is the implementation partner for of project ASHAA. Implementing this project at ground level was a challenge for the team of JGSSP. This project was carried out in the workspace of Someshwar Sugar Factory. The sugar cane cutters spread across the geographical area in small groups and the residential area of these groups is called as ‘Tal’. There were 100-120 Tal’s in the said premises hence to reach out to every family JGSSP nominated a task force of 40 people known as Gav Karyakarte (Tal Coordinators). The basic work of these task forces was to communicate with these families, assisting their children’s admission, marking their attendance, and act as a trouble-shooter for any kind of difficulties. These 40 members were directed and supervised by 4 Directors and one Project In-charge. The project in charge reports to the program manager of TATA Trust.  
For the year 2017-18 around 2069 families have migrated in the region of the Someshwar sugar factory. In these families around 1711 children (936 girls and 772 boys) have migrated for sugarcane cutting.

Survey to Know Reasons of Dropout  
It was important to explore the reasons of school dropouts hence survey was conducted by Tal Coordinators using digital devices. The following reasons of school dropout were reported through the survey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for not attending the school</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3021
Difficulties Faced
The sugar cane cutters are a deprived and downtrodden community. They had developed negative perceptions regarding schools and education. Convincing these families to send their wards to the school itself was a big challenge. Wards of these families had less social exposure hence they had social fear and phobia about their social inclusion in school. The local school authorities were reluctant in admitting these kids in their schools due to their shabby appearance.

Activities Undertaken to Overcome the challenges
There were several reasons for school dropout which were needed to be addressed. Following activities were undertaken by JSSP to enrol maximum migrated students in nearby schools.

1. Survey of Schools
Survey of schools was essential to enrol migrated children in nearby schools. The shabby look of these children is one of the obstacles in admitting them to schools. Counselling of school authorities & teachers was important to make them available for admission of these students. Around 56 private and public schools were identified in September and interaction was made with school authorities and teachers regarding the admission of these migrated students at these schools.

2. Survey of Migrated Children
The data of migrated children from age group 6 to 15 years were required to plan further activities. A survey was conducted in September to know the exact count of children who has migrated. Also allied required information like family details, the previous school attended problems in attending schools was conducted through this survey. This information was required to overcome the issues faced by these children in attending the School. Their mentality regarding attending the school was also judged during this survey. The survey was conducted in online mode via tab. All migrated students were enrolled in the database so that their progress could be tracked daily.

3. Discussion with Parents
Many of the parents were reluctant to send their children to schools due to reasons like safety, taking care of younger children in the family, filling the water to drink at home, cooking, etc. These obstacles were tackled through the discussion with parents. Tal Coordinators interacted with parents and counselled them regarding the importance of enrolling children in schools. Precautions regarding their safety and food were taken care of by the school and the Trust jointly. Maximum parents were ready to send their children to schools after this activity.

4. Admission Fest
A common admission fest of these students was conducted to admit these children in identified schools. These children were welcomed at schools by offering books and flowers to make their day memorable and create their interest in attending schools. Students were admitted to nearby schools. The responsibility of trucking their daily attendance was assigned to coordinators of Janseva Gramin Shikshan va Samajik Pratishthan. Teaching Faculty of TAL Coordinators Baramati and students actively volunteered for this fest.
5. **Counselling session for the public and private school’s authorities and teachers:**
   As the socioeconomic status of these sugarcane cutters and the shabby look of their children makes the public and private school authorities and teachers resist their admission. To work on this, we met some of these authorities and teachers and tried to explain to them that more than their look and status what is more important is their education and our acceptance for the same.

6. **Recreational activities**
   Children of sugarcane cutters are socially and emotionally deprived. They fear to express their feelings, emotions, thoughts, and abilities due to many reasons. These children undergo a very hectic and compromised lifestyle. To provide a platform to express their emotions, thoughts & skills and to make them relaxed out of their hectic schedule, recreational activities were conducted. Tal Coordinators have conducted activities like Balgeet, Storytelling, and outdoor fun games. Also, the refreshment was offered by the Institute in the form of Biscuits, Snacks, and Chocolates.

**Outcome:**
The due diligence efforts of the entire team resulted in a changed mind-set of parents and as a result of which, in 2016 out of 743 eligible students, 474 were admitted to various schools. In 2017 out of 861 eligible students, 608 were admitted, and in 2018 out of 993 eligible students, 734 were admitted. In total during a 3-year span 1863 students were admitted to various government schools.

**Teaching Notes**

**Synopsis of Case**
This case is about successful implementation of Project ASHAA by TAT trust and Janseva Gramin Shikshan va Samajik Pratishthan, Someshwar. The schooling of wards of sugar cane cutters was a key issue which was addressed by TATA trust in partnership of education department of Government of Maharashtra through Project ASHAA. This project is implemented by JGSSP Someshwar. The challenges faced and various activities conducted to overcome these challenges are discussed in this case.

**Target Group**
This case is designed for Management Students perusing HR, students perusing program in social work and social sciences. The case focused wards of seasonal migrant labors (Sugar Cane Cutters) and covering them under mainstay of education.

**The learning/teaching objectives and key issues**
This case serves three learning objectives.
   1. To understand the socioeconomic issues of migrant sugar cane cutters.
   2. To explore the reasons of school dropouts and activities conducted to increase their enrollment.
   3. To formulate various alternative options to improve enrollment of wards of sugar cane cutters.

**Teaching Strategy**
The case may first be analyzed at the individual level and then may be discussed at the group level. The recommended group size is 4-6 members. Instructor can initiate the discussion in group by describing case situation.

**Questions:**
1. Comment on the quality work life of sugar cane cutter families and its impact on grooming of their wards
2. Discuss the alternative idea, activities and options for inclusiveness of these wards.

**Background Reading:**
2. oxfamindia. (February, 2020). Human Cost of Sugar. OXFAM INDIA DISCUSSION PAPER.