23 August 2021

Shri Rajesh Sharma

Secretary, Department of School Education

Government of Jharkhand

Dear Mr. Sharma,

We are writing to draw your attention to the enormity of the schooling crisis in Jharkhand, and to the urgency of reopening all schools with careful planning.

As you know, primary and upper-schools in Jharkhand have been closed for 17 months, with few provisions being made to enable children to continue studying except through online education.

Attached are some summary findings of a recent survey conducted in five SC/ST hamlets of Latehar district earlier this month. The situation is truly catastrophic:

* Online education is a fiction: only 1% of the sample children are “studying online regularly”.
* Education is at a standstill: 72% of the children are not studying at all at the moment.
* More than three fourths of the children are unable to read beyond a few words.
* An overwhelming majority (95%) of parents want schools to reopen as soon as possible.

A larger survey by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, also earlier this month, suggests that the schooling situation among disadvantaged communities is similar across rural Jharkhand.

This situation calls for urgent action, including but not restricted to the following:

1. Reopening of primary and upper-primary schools with due safeguards.
2. Active preparations for the same including renovation of school buildings, vaccination of teachers, supply of masks and sanitizers, etc.
3. Door-to-door surveys to ensure that all children return to school when they reopen.
4. Revision of curriculum and pedagogy for an extended “transition period”, to enable children to make up for the staggering loss of learning that took place in the last 17 months.

The last point is absolutely critical. If children are promoted again to the next class (two years ahead of the class they belonged to before the lockdown!) without any change in curriculum and pedagogy, even as they forgot much of what they had learnt earlier, there is no chance of them being able to keep up. They will turn into drop-out children, even if they are nominally enrolled.

Finally, we urge you to convene a broad consultation on this issue – this crisis requires the best possible advice from educationists and others. It would also be useful to invite persons (from Jharkhand or elsewhere) who are familiar with constructive schooling initiatives in other states.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Drèze Kashinath Chatterjee

(Visiting Professor, Ranchi University) (Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti)