



WEBINAR REPORT

National Webinar on Right to Education and Child Rights:
"Tackling the Digital Divide and Ensuring Inclusive Education"

Date: 24th January 2021 (Sunday)
Time: 11:00 am onwards

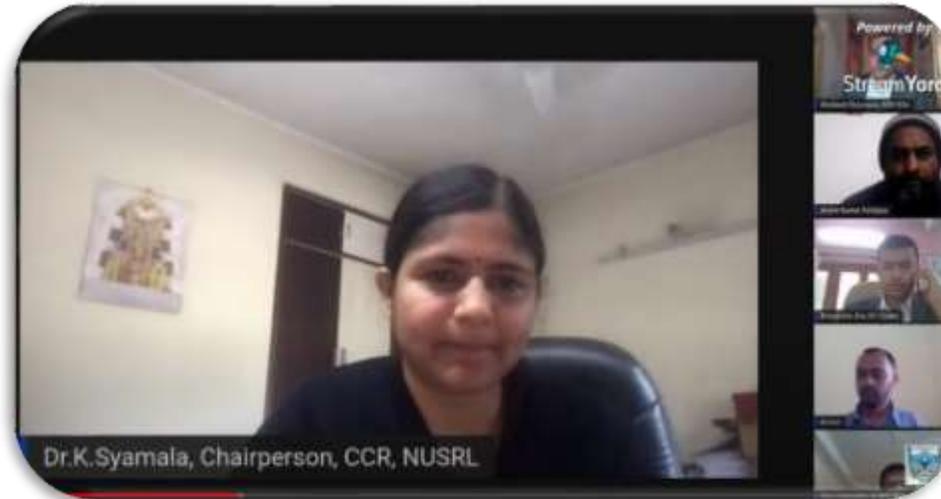
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Patron	Guest of Honor	Guest Speakers	Moderator		
 Prof. Dr. J. K. Prasad Vice-Chancellor, NUSRL	 Shri. Shishu Kumar Choudhary, IAS Secretary, JPR State Project Director, EPC	 Shri. Dipankar Das, IAS Deputy Commissioner District, Chirang, Assam	 Shri. Anand Kumar Chair Rights Advisor Lampin, IIR Delhi, Delhi High Court	 Shri. Anand Kumar JIT (General) & Ex-Gratia Officer Lampin, IIR Delhi, Delhi High Court	 Dr. N. Sanyal Associate Professor Director, Research, NUSRL

NATIONAL WEBINAR ON RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND CHILD RIGHTS TACKLING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND ENSURING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Date: 24th January, 2021

The online webinar “**National Webinar on Right to Education and Child Rights: Tackling the digital divide and ensuring inclusive education**” was organized by Centre for Child Rights (CCR) -National University of Study and Research in Law (NUSRL) ,Ranchi on 24th Jan 2021 at 11:00 onwards on streamyard which lasted for 2 Hours 25 Mins. There are total 277 views received so far on YouTube. The webinar started with the introduction of the webinar’s concept note by the Director-Research (NUSRL) and Chairperson of Center for Child Rights Dr.K Syamala.



Dr.K Syamala introducing the concept note of the webinar

Post introduction of the concept note of the webinar by it was the time to welcome the speakers of the webinar. Honorable Prof(Dr.) Kesava Rao Vurakula welcomed the speakers. Dr.Rao began his speech by presenting his insights on the digital divide amid COVID-19 pandemic and the loss to children's education. He in his speech said that the fact can't be denied that there is a divide among the have's and have-not's. The fact can't be overruled we all are divided in respect of our education, profession, demographics etc but the digital divide as an impact of COVID-19 has furthered deepened down the gaps among the children on academic front. With regard to the work of the state government, he talked about the fact that though the government is doing its level best to seize the opportunity, but unfortunately COVID-19 was brought forward.

Centering on the digital divide, he addressed that by nature we all are alive, but by education we become different and the major causality due to the pandemic is undoubtedly the education being offered to the children because education is not intended to make lawyers or doctors or soldiers or farmer or artisans but it meant for making humans. He suggested that we have to ensure that digital divide doesn't bring much disparity between the education of those who have access to the internet and other facilities and those who do not have the excess.



Hon'ble VC Prof (Dr.) Kesava Rao Vurrakula delivering the welcome address

He also pointed out that if the society neglects children, it is certain that children will one day neglect the whole of society. Further stating a statement of a specialist of the Family Law he emphasizes that we should focus on setting up the youth for the part rather preparing path for the youth. He calls that if we want a solid society to be built up we have to make sure that the necessary infrastructure facilities and the necessary qualitative education is provided by playing a key role by all the stakeholders in this arena. He also stated if we want the children and parents to be serious about education than all the stakeholders have to take care of what is happening and we have no option but to ensure how to provide qualitative as well as inclusive education to all. Lastly, he thanked and introduced all the keynote speaker of the webinar.

After the inaugural address of Dr.Rao it was the time to invite the first speaker of the webinar. Mr. Anand Kulakarni, Ex-Gandhi fellow, Lead Partnerships Youth Dreamers Foundation expressed his insights on the theme of the webinar. The speech was initiated by addressing the issue of the digital divide as yet another example of underlined inequalities and inefficiencies, not just in education but in society generally. And it is not just the responsibility of the administration to remove this divide but it is the duty of every citizen to work for securing children's rights. Even when the online learning platforms are on a burst with only Byju's having enrolled more than seven crore students according to a report published in 2019, there is a much larger section of students who are still deprived of it.

He further talked about the exact figures from the annual education report and cited that only around 35% of students are able to receive study materials during this period. He believes that digital solutions cannot be the first thing on which we can rely because of the extremely poor internet penetration in the country. In furtherance of these problems, he talked about two possible solutions to this digital divide. First, he mentioned the report of the 1st Kothari Commission, which submitted that we spend too little on education and even at the least we talk, a 6% of the GDP should be injected into the education sector to tackle the challenges of today and meet the demands of tomorrow. The data clearly shows how the expenditure on students is directly linked to the quality of education they receive.

He explained his point by taking an example of Kendriya Vidyalaya's students, upon whom around 30 thousand rupees is spent yearly while



Anand Kulkari addressing the webinar

for other public schools, the number is close to twenty thousand per child per year. Considering the pandemic and the need to get back onto the track, it is the best time for the said change to happen. The second solution, he suggested, is to shift the way of teaching from input-based education to outcome-based education. Although we are slowly moving toward this way of education through the introduction of CCE, which is a continuous and comprehensive evaluation, since we are at the onset of a new decade, we need to evaluate the curriculum in practice and assess what changes we need to bring. He attempted to compare the learning-teaching methodology of other nations, like Finland,

where textbooks are abolished from the curriculum and activity-based learnings are given priority.

He concluded his speech by emphasizing what VC sir said, if society gives something to children then students will also pay back the society in generosity. Covid was not the first challenge to the education sector, but it definitely introduced some more issues, so we should collectively make an effort to tackle the challenges, not just to establish what we had before but to bring new changes in the system to give the best we can, to our children.

Post speech of Mr.Kulkarni, the second speaker Adv. Anant Kumar Asthana (Child Rights Lawyer-Delhi High Court) started off by congratulating NUSRL for flagging up the issue, especially for a girl child. In continuation to Dr. Kesava Rao and Mr. Anand, he also talked about the general divide, that the divide in general is a reflection of greater divide and the greater divide is the gender divide. He said that merely talking about the issue will not help us. In order to solve the problem, one has to understand the root cause of it. Why girls are left behind in education is because girls are in general left behind. He cited an example for the same.

He led us to a scenario in a household during the pandemic where only the earning male has the mobile phone and when it comes to giving the mobile to the girl child, suddenly the insecurities take over. So, the solution has to be gender just. He emphasized that the narrative has to be built in the context of social inequalities in which girls, in general, suffer. Then he hailed his point saying that when we talk of digital divide, we have to keep the gender dynamics in mind, what is the nature of society's engagement with girls, and the solution must flow from there. Then he cited some data to give us the insight of the reality. Out of the school children in 2018, the ratio of school dropout was 4% and in 2020 it increased up to 5.5% after COVID-19. Then 38.2% children do not have access to smartphones. Though the number of school children having access to smartphones increased by 11.1% during the lockdown, it still is a long way to go. Further he talked about the policy development in this regard and how it has affected the ground situation. He told us about the Child Protection Policy of Madhya Pradesh in which they have made a provision of child budgeting from the point of view of their overall development especially their education. He then talked about the increased share of education in the national budget which is currently at 4.4% and will be increased to 6% in the National Education Policy. Which will be very helpful once every state starts rolling out child education policy of their own.



Advocate Anant Kumar Asthana addressing the webinar

He then talked about the focus of the Honourable Supreme Court towards the child care institutions in Suo motu writ petition 4 of 2020. At district level Supreme Court has given a lot of mandate to District Child Protection Units (DCPU) particularly in the context of children who live-in child-care institutions and these units have helped the government in restoring children from institutions back home during this lockdown. The Supreme Court has asked these DCPU's to take care of the education of these children back home and in the case of any issue, report to the concerned District Legal Service Authority.

In conclusion Mr. Asthana enlightened us with the reality of helpline numbers related to children. In the data given out by Org.C3 where 36% of children know about the helpline number only 18% of them know how to use it for their purpose. There is a considerable increase in child marriages during lockdown and DCPU's must come for the rescue. He also suggested that DCPU's should reach out to rural areas. Starting off with the campaign of child awareness they will eventually roll out services and schemes. Lastly, when we reopen our schools, the reopening has to be gender responsive if we want girl children to ever reach out to schools.

Further building upon the topic and sharing the district level bottlenecks in narrowing down the digital divide gap Mr.Divyanshu Jha,IAS Deputy Commissioner of Chatra shared his opinion regarding the infrastructure comparing the offline and online mode. Further he talked about the investments that are being made by foreign companies. According to him good investment should be made in the education sector so as to help the children study well. He then stated that government is working towards making online sources more available and innovations are being done. He read a book by Esther Duflo of which he shared a quote 'Poverty is the greatest Cognitive Impediment'. This can be related to the fact that poor people don't have enough money because of which it is difficult for them to access the online gadgets and platforms which can help them grow. He further kind of put his opinion that online mode is not as good as offline mode because physical presence makes things easy to learn. He then discussed about the problems faced by teachers while accessing the online platforms.

As the government used to give bicycles to students as prize for their success or just for helping them to reach school easily. Sir mentioned



Deputy Commissioner, Chatra Mr.Divyanshu Jha addressing the webinar

that in these times smartphones are the bicycles of today that can help students to study well. According to Sir, research needs to be done and innovating ideas should be welcomed for improving the situation and making online gadgets accessible to the students whether they are poor or rich. Girl or boy. Sir even asked National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi to come up with some innovative ideas that can help the government to make online gadgets and the platforms available for every child.

After the thought sharing of Mr.Jha it was the time to provide ground reality, bottlenecks, initiatives of the government of Jharkhand in bridging the digital gap. The webinar chief guest Shri Shailesh Kumar Chaurasia (IAS), Director JCERT and State Project Director, JEPC in his speech mainly focused on three broad topics i.e., the digital divide, the approach of Jharkhand government to tackle the problems before and after covid-19, and challenges faced during the implementation of digital learning. According to him, digital divide was in existence long before COVID-19 arrived, and only after this dreadful situation we are able to understand the realities. He felt that an aggressive digital



campaign to make digital learning popular will only give rise to a larger digital divide. The structure and process to minimize the divide, by taking into consideration the income constraint of the parents, should be formulated rather than urging the government to invest more money.

The next thing which he explained is how much the government has tried to improve the education and physical infrastructure of the schools in Jharkhand. From connecting students of various classes and cultures with the school to providing them with books, uniforms, table chairs, and electricity to facilitate their learning. The mid-day meal and 5000 schools with smart classrooms was the incentive for the children who attended the schools. Before covid-19 the total focus of the government was to improve the infrastructure of the schools.

The limitations before COVID-19 were regarding lack of teachers in the schools. But after covid-19 the focus shifted from education to

access to education. Many children, especially girls were deprived of a mobile phone which became the main concern for the government and increased the digital divide. The government started many initiatives from teaching children through television and mobile apps but limitations were visibly wide. Many didn't have television and the financial condition to afford internet packages. Due to migration and reverse migration during the lockdown, many children were forced to leave school and start working to manage their families.

He highlighted the fact that parents who enrolled their children in private schools now might transfer them to public schools. He said that digital education was also taking a toll on the teachers who were not familiar with the technology. He supports classroom learning over digital learning and feels that to universalize education it should be available to all and not just to the people who can afford it. Classroom learning gives children socialization which digital learning doesn't. He said that digital learning has major implications where the development of a student can't be fully understood hence it is essential to strengthen the structure and system of education to provide a value-added education for all in the future.

Vote of Thanks

The vote of thanks was extended by Dr K Syamala, Director-Research and Chairperson, Centre for Child Rights, National University of Study and Research in Law Ranchi. The speakers for the day were thanked for taking out their time to aid in the deliberation over the pressing issue of inclusive education. Further, the audience of the programme was thanked for lending out their viewership. The student members Mr Pratikesh Shankar and Raj Shekhar were also thanked for their aid in helping the discussion progress smoothly with minimal issue.
