

Zero to Five Challenge Refinement Q&A

Responses to Questions from the Amplify Team (December 29th)

Question: What are some tangible next steps to take this forward, for example who would you need to speak to?

Answer:

In early to mid-January, Reach India will organize focus group discussions with self-help groups (SHGs) of mothers and mothers-in-law in Bihar. This feedback will be used to both gauge interest in specific early childhood development (ECD) content areas, further adapt specific education sessions, confirm their delivery sequence, and inform the content of a basic technical resource guide for master trainers and facilitators. This guide addresses common questions and concerns and typically enhances trainers' confidence, particularly in the early period delivery a new topic. Then in late February, Thrive Networks will conduct field tests to refine the newly adapted curriculum with a select group of self-help groups in Reach India's partner network.

In terms of its content and the audience it is designed for, HHI's ECD curriculum is ideally suited for delivery across Reach India's training network. However, as a matter of practice, any new education topic is vetted through qualitative research, adapted to the Reach methodology, based on explicit adult learning principles and replicability by a wide array of trainers, and refined to ensure its diagrams and language are completely appropriate to the setting. For Bihar, this will include translating all materials to Hindi. As the curriculum is rolled out to other geographies of East and Northeast India (and potentially Bangladesh), it will be translated to Assamese, Oriya and Bengali.

Question: what materials would need to be prepared?

Answer:

While HHI's curriculum has been successfully delivered in rural India since 2006, primarily in small group settings, it has not been delivered through the massive existing platform of self-help groups. Thus, over the past several months, HHI has been working closely with Thrive Networks' Training Director, Sue Glassford, to adapt HHI's curriculum to the audience, time constraints of SHG meetings, and the learning and delivery needs of modestly educated facilitators. Sue has 20+ years of experience designing lifeskills education and training for Reach India and is intimately familiar with its setting, mission and need for all education to demonstrate impact, scalability and sustainability in a rural setting.

In addition to adapting and field-testing HHI's curriculum for the Reach India delivery model and SHG platform, the partners need to develop a basic technical resource guide

that addresses the most common questions and concerns in response to the ECD curriculum, and those mothers have about child-rearing more generally. In addition to equipping master trainers and trainers with correct answers to technical questions to which there are right and wrong answers, the guide enhances trainers confidence, especially in the initial period of their facilitation of the education. **Program materials will include a facilitators guide, trainers guide and technical resource guide.**

Question: what would the timeframes look like?

Answer:

Focus group discussions organized in early January
Field Testing and adaptation of curriculum in February
Refinement of M&E tools in late February
Program launched March 2015

Question: It would be great to have more information on the ECD model and approach that you are using so far and how you are planning to test through this idea?

Answer:

HHI has provided ECD trainings to women—mothers, government day care and health care workers, grandmothers, and other caregivers—in rural India since 2006. Reach India has trained self-help groups of women and girls since 2007. The proposed program integrates and leverages HHI’s proven curriculum and Reach India’s successful delivery model.

Ensuring all education delivered through the Reach India training network is designed and delivered to a minimum quality standard is critical to ensuring its ultimate impact. For this reason, Thrive Networks focuses a great deal on quality control, measured in good outcomes, and quality assurance, measured in good processes associated with good outcomes. The partnership will, thus, adapt existing M&E tools to ensure that education design, training delivery and trainer certification all lead to positive outcomes for mothers and the organizations that serve them. Refinement of these existing tools will follow adaptation and field-testing of the curriculum.

Question: How you are going to equip individuals with a completely new skill, a bit away from what they are used to?

Answer:

Parenting is incredibly challenging. When parents have a new baby, they are constantly learning new things and learning them quickly. They don't always know they have the capacity or ability support their child's cognitive, social-emotional, physical and language development. It may not seem this way to sleep deprived new parents, but they already have everything they need to love and support their children.

The ECD education is designed specifically to empower mothers and other caregivers to support their child's development, understand what to expect when, and illustrate the ways their children can be supported with simple, daily interactions. Education sessions support and reinforce the healthy, supportive home-based childcare practices caregivers usually are already using. Examples of simple interaction include: when cooking, a parent can talk to the baby, narrating what they are doing; or letting a child put their hand in a cup of rice and noticing how it is different from a cup of dahl.

A new skill that many new parents are not familiar with is recognizing baby cues, the non-verbal ways in which a child communicates, from the time they are born. These cues include rooting, eye-rubbing, scrunched up legs, among others. Once parents learn to recognize these cues, parent-child interactions become less frustrating to both child and parent.

The main skills are practiced during the session, reviewed at the end, and then reviewed and reinforced in the following week's session. Each session builds on, and adds to the previous session.

Question: Learning new skills takes time. How feasible is this?

Answer:

The knowledge and practices promoted by the education are absolutely feasible for new mothers and other caregivers. Once a parent recognizes their own influence, or a new technique that stops their baby from crying, the child's response acts to validate it. The baby creates a natural feedback loop, and therefore, new/enhanced positive behaviors, lead to positive responses from the baby, circling back to the parent wanting to do that again. Parents will do their own testing to see what works, and when they have a win, they will repeat the actions, especially those that cost nothing and can be a part of their existing routine. They will absolutely internalize that.

All education topics Reach India delivers are identified based on the results of market research using the following criteria:

- Does the topic address issues that have a serious affect on the health, personal finances and livelihoods of very poor women and/or adolescent girls?
- How effectively can women and girls address the topic through self-managed practices?
- Which of the self-managed practices can be acquired and applied, confidently, at home given 3-7 cumulative hours of education over a series of group meetings?
- What resources do very poor women and girls need or have to implement these practices (e.g., money, health services, health or financial products, decision-making authority, mobility, peer support, etc.), and are they available?

In terms of methodology, the proposed program approach is rooted in the proven principles and practices of adult learning; illiteracy is not a barrier to full participation; typically, sessions do not require any materials to deliver, freeing the facilitator from carrying materials from village to village; the methodology is diverse and engaging; and it is simple enough for an animator with limited formal education and no previous training experience to develop the requisite skills and confidence to deliver it effectively following a three-day training by Reach India.

Moreover, it has been demonstrated that adults learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process and when there is real-world application. Topics of discussion must fill an immediate need, to ensure high motivation for learning and taking action. Learners must be able to experiment with new ideas and relate those ideas to their own experience. And, importantly, learners need time to reflect and absorb how new concepts fit into their perception of the world. Thus, in the Reach learning process, a field staff person of a local organization—referred to as an animator—simply becomes a facilitator in mothers’ learning and decision-making processes. She helps create and nurture an environment in which SHG members can acquire and apply new knowledge, and reflect on their experiences.

However, more than addressing any one specific issue, this Reach education approach presents the group a problem-solving process that allows them to explore any issue they choose to address. The process of identifying a problem or issue of concern, reflecting on its causes and consequences, considering possible solutions and motivating to action can be applied to whatever question is brought to or raised by the group. Members own the process and, thus, employ it to address evolving needs and concerns specific to their local context and experience.

Additionally, Reach India’s experience suggests that this group-based approach to learning strengthens social capital when groups face issues together and create and reinforce bonds of trust. Under a three-year randomized control trial evaluation of Reach education, women exposed to its methodology indicated they felt increased

confidence because they could learn from others' experiences and discuss issues and make more appropriate decisions about their lives.

Question: Can you think of other people that can be the TOTs?

Answer:

The program is built on three critical resources: (1) a vast and growing network of local organizations that serve self-help groups of women every day across rural India; (2) proven EDC curriculum adapted to a proven adult learning education methodology; and (3) a proven Reach India network of master trainers that train and enhance the capacity of thousands of local organizations to promote proven lifeskills education at significant scale.

Reach India's trainers work in teams, and are certified and branded as Reach India, based on significant practice, evaluation, coaching and support. Once certified as master trainers, training teams receive modest fees for training local organizations to facilitate education among the self-help groups they work with daily. Modeling training teams as independent "social" businesses—as opposed to charitable organizations or employees—is important for three related reasons. First, each is intended to become self-sustaining. Thus, each team must deliver benefits that are perceived by their local organization to be valuable enough to pay for. Secondly, it provides an entrepreneurial opportunity for capable rural people. This represents a powerful attraction, both in recruiting and retaining trainers, as well as in evoking inspired, dedicated, ongoing performance. Third, it provides status and the prospect of a career path for a large number of rural development professionals. To-date under this model, Reach India has equipped 1.4 millions women and girls with new knowledge and skills in the safe, supportive setting of a group.

Question: How is what you are proposing unique?

Answer:

Early Childhood Development is a relatively recent trend in international development funding. HHI has been at the forefront of a movement to recognize the foundational nature of ECD to a wide array of developmental outcomes later in life. This program is unique because it brings together HHI's technical competence and years of India-specific experience with the proven delivery capability and scale of Reach India's training network.

The proposed partnership is uniquely positioned to support very poor mothers and the many diverse organizations that serve them, based on unique organizational competencies and proven experience providing self-help solutions.

Self-Help Solutions for the Very Poor

Hundreds of millions of very poor women and girls come together regularly in self-help groups to save and find solidarity and solutions to their daily problems. This large and profoundly important non-literate segment of the “bottom billion” has demonstrated a critical need for savings, knowledge, skills, and resources to improve home-based health practices, livelihood strategies and basic money management. Yet there is a nearly complete absence of experienced specialist developers of evidence-based lifeskills education designed to support them. The Thrive partnership offers that lifeskills education resource to poor mothers.

Self-Help Solutions for Local Organizations

A growing number of diverse organizations across India recognize the opportunity of integrating financial services—especially savings—and lifeskills education for very poor women through community-based groups. To succeed, these organizations need training and support not only to promote savings groups and facilitate lifeskills education, but also to do this consistently and cost-efficiently, and achieve scale. Having demonstrated the ability to equip a wide variety of organizations to do precisely this, Reach India is ideally placed to support poor mothers.

Focus on Scale and Cost-Efficiency

While small innovative projects can play a critical role in advancing our collective understanding of what works for poor people, we need means to deliver life changing innovations to millions of the world’s poorest people, particularly women and girls. Scaling innovations—even those like non-formal education and savings-led microfinance that are now decades old—is a wise investment of finite development assistance dollars.

A Unique Combination focused on Impact and Scale

After field-testing, adapting and pilot testing HHI’s curriculum within Reach India’s life skills education delivery model, which is currently reaching close to 100,000 women and adolescent girls every year across 14 of the poorest states of India, we believe the program has tremendous potential to achieve positive impacts at scale. The program partnership has identified no other model like what is proposed, and no other partnership with the unique competence, demonstrated experience, and established position in East India.