



BUILDING SYSTEM CAPACITY IN MIRZAPUR, UP

October 2019

THE SITUATION

Mirzapur district is located in Uttar Pradesh state in northern India. It is one of the largest districts in the state, with a population of more than 2.5 million, and the majority of people live in rural areas. Mirzapur is especially famous for its carpets and brassware industries. STiR started work in Mirzapur in 2017 in a small number of clusters, and we then scaled up our programme in 2018 as part of our system learning partnership. In this model, we work with state governments to refocus existing resources to deliver our programme in every government primary school in selected districts, with governments taking ownership and accountability of the approach from the start.

| District fact file | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Year STiR started working | 2017 |
| # Blocks | 12 |
| # Clusters | 105 |
| # Primary schools | 2,216 |
| # Primary teachers | 7,978 |
| # Primary pupils | 273,400 |

Our model works through Education Leaders (ELs) – local government officials who lead our teacher network meetings. In our six other districts in Uttar Pradesh, we identified a tier of Naya Panchayat Resource Centre Coordinators (NPRCCs) who are responsible for supporting a small number of schools at cluster level, and agreed with district leadership that these officials could act as ELs. NPRCCs are supported by Assistant Block Resource Centre Coordinators (ABRCCs) at block level, so we agreed that our District Leads should work directly with these officials (Education Leader Managers in our terminology) to train and support the NPRCCs.

However, this was not possible in Mirzapur, as there had not been any ABRCCs in the district since 2017 and no fresh recruitment was expected. We therefore had to find an alternative way to deliver our approach through the NPRCCs alone to reach every primary school in the district.

| Role | STiR terminology | Employed by | Responsibilities | # in Mirzapur |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|
| NPRCC | Education Leader (EL) | UP government | Provide support to a small cluster of schools. | 105 |
| ABRCC | Education Leader Manager (ELM) | UP government | Provide support across a block to several NPRCCs. | 0 |
| District Lead | District Lead | STiR | Provide support across a district to all ABRCCs. | 1 |

OUR APPROACH

BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE DISTRICT

Our team in Mirzapur was clear that the programme would not be successful without support at ELM level, so they needed to find a way to secure capacity from the system without any ABRCCs in post. Their proposal was to identify some high-performing and enthusiastic NPRCCs to offer support to their colleagues alongside their own roles, in an informal capacity. We observed their performance in the first training session at the start of term, and also liaised with the Block Education Officers to collect their feedback on which NPRCCs would be best placed to perform this role.

In blocks with a high proportion of female NPRCCs, we tried to ensure that the selected NPRCC was female. As our monitoring data shows that female teachers are more likely to be present and engage in network meetings

led by a female NPRCC, we wanted to replicate this with officials. (This important role-modelling effect mirrors a recent Brookings article: [‘7 principles for empowering teachers to be architects for girls’ empowerment’](#).)

By the start of July 2018, we had recruited a team of 16 NPRCCs to support the rest of their cohort as ELMs over the first year. Having established this new tier of leadership, we now needed to ensure that they received sufficient support both from STiR and other actors in the system to complete their new roles successfully.

DEVELOPING THE ELMs

The new ELMs had no official recognition from the district, so they still needed to perform in their roles as NPRCCs outside of their work with STiR. This meant that their coachees were still their peers, which often created difficulties for many ELMs, especially for younger ELMs being asked to coach very experienced peers. To make this easier, we introduced group coaching sessions at block level to establish the ELMs in their roles. Each ELM led sessions with all of their NPRCC colleagues to explain the purpose of their new roles and discuss how they would lead the coaching process. This received a positive response from NPRCCs and made them more receptive to coaching. We were pleased to see that even in this hierarchical system, it was possible to introduce a culture of peer collaboration and feedback to help all of the NPRCCs to improve.

We also worked to build connections between ELMs to help them to better support each other. We introduced a monthly coaching session with the District Lead to build their clarity about their roles, and provide a forum for them to share their apprehensions about programme implementation. We also created a buddy system for the ELMs to share the workload in the biggest blocks, solving problems together and ensuring smooth communication about the programme.



“Through the STiR programme and by the means of network meetings, I was given a platform where I could lead my block as well as facilitate conversation around innovative classroom practices. I feel immense pride in my work seeing my teachers benefiting from each other.”

Avdesh Narayan Mishra, Education Leader Manager, Chabey Block, Mirzapur

CHANGING MINDSETS

One of the biggest challenges in embedding the STiR programme in Mirzapur has been developing relationships between the STiR District Lead and senior district officials, to the extent where we are able to challenge deeply-held beliefs about the quality of teachers in the district. To shift these mindsets, it was important that our communication was authentic, consistent and timely with all stakeholders, including ensuring that the progress we were making through network meetings was shared every month.

It was especially important to build rapport with the District Education Officer (DEO), who is the most senior official in the district. We conducted regular meetings to share our progress and request feedback from him, and demonstrated how we were incorporating this into the programme, which helped us to show that we valued his input. We also used programme structures including district alignment meetings (which bring together stakeholders from across the district to discuss successes and challenges on a termly basis) and monthly progress checks (which review the data collected on programme quality and outcomes) as a platform for other officials to share their challenges and remove obstacles together.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

After approximately 20 visits from the District Lead over seven months, the DEO issued a letter to formally establish this new tier of leadership for the STiR programme. This letter designates our ELMs as Nodal NPRCCs, which represented a significant step forward in his recognition of the difference that these leaders were making to teacher motivation in the district, and reinforced the ELMs in their roles at block level.

These new leaders further developed their credibility at a district alignment meeting held in February 2019. Each ELM attended, and the meeting was used as a platform for each of them to share bright spots from the field, as well as their own development through participation in the programme. The DEO was very impressed, which further strengthened our case that intrinsic motivation can be developed at all levels of the system.

In July 2019, following a training session led by STiR for our ELMs, the latest training institute for NPRCCs was led from start to finish by system officials for the first time. This represented great progress, and encourages us that the programme can be successfully embedded in the system even without a tier of ABRCCs to lead it.



Our priorities for the next year are as follows:

- Although the ELMs have been leading the programme effectively across the district, the lack of a formal hierarchy continues to present problems. Our District Lead will provide coaching on influencing without authority, as well as reinforcing it during the next ELM institute.
- It is also clear to see that ELMs are overloaded, as they continue to need to complete their own duties as NPRCCs alongside their support for their colleagues. The District Lead is working to establish a second line of leadership; in most cases it is a motivated teacher who is also inclined to help the ELMs perform in this role, especially during network meetings.

ACADEMIC YEAR DATA

After the first year of the programme, we're pleased to see the following progress in the district:

98% of expected network meetings took place.

98% of expected coaching meetings took place.

88% of teachers were observed trying new practices in their classrooms.

TESTIMONIALS

"Through the network meetings, by engaging in discussions and trying out new practices, I have seen myself improving as a teacher. It is also heartening to see my colleagues come together to discuss classroom practices."

Shweta Agarwal, Assistant Teacher, Muhkuchwa Primary School, Mirzapur

"Lot of efforts are being made by STiR in Mirzapur district. It is imperative that all of us come together to ensure that the teacher intrinsic motivation programme becomes a success."

Praveen Kumar Tiwari, Former District Education Officer, Mirzapur