

**Review Report of Dantewada Initiative
of the National Commission for
Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)**

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Introduction

Dantewada is the epicentre of an undeclared civil war between Naxal insurgents and the Salwa Judum - a force of locals stitched together to fight the rebels – that has displaced close to one lakh people, according to government figures.

In December 2007, a three member team representing the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) visited Chattisgarh's Dantewada district to assess the challenges facing children's health, education and fundamental rights in the region. The team comprised of Prof. Shantha Sinha (Chairperson, NCPCR), Mr. J.M.Lyngdoh (Former Chief Election Commissioner of India) and Mr. Venkat Reddy (MV Foundation, Hyderabad).

Based on its findings, the team recommended a slew of measures for the district and state administrations to follow, to try and mitigate adverse effects of the conflict on the lives of the region's children.

Some of the key recommendations of the team were:

1. Child Rights Training & Development:
 - i. A Child Rights Cell should be established in the office of District Collector, Dantewada.
 - ii. Systematic training of functionaries of all institutions dealing with children (schools, hostels, Ashram schools, anganwadis etc.) to sensitize them on child rights issues. Training a group of volunteers from among the Special Police Officers for child rights protection.
 - iii. Social auditing of children's rights at blocks and district level by trained functionaries.
2. Monitoring and support of inter-state displaced children and families:
 - i. Conduct survey and maintain registers on families who have shifted from Chattisgarh to Andhra Pradesh as a consequence of the violence over the past few years. Share this data between state governments to ensure access to basic facilities for families that have moved.
3. Schools as zones of peace:
 - i. Declare schools as zones of peace, out of bounds for all purposes other than educational activities, separation of schools from camps, and introduction of programmes to address the psycho-social needs of the children.
4. Rebuilding disrupted education and health services/infrastructure in camps and villages:
 - i. Assessment of food security and child malnutrition levels in camps and villages, together with immediate action to target gaps including meal provision through schools and anganwadis.

- ii. Collect data on access to schools and on school participation of adolescent children, largely invisible to the team during its visit. Greater transparency in all institutions working with children through review of functioning by an appointed committee.
- iii. Immediate action to provide adequate toilet and sanitation facilities in the camps.

Eight months after the NCPCR team's visit, a review was commissioned to study the implementation of the recommendations and evaluate a pilot project for promoting child rights in Sukuma block of the district started after the Commission's visit. The review was conducted between August 11 and August 15, 2008, after a visit to Sukuma and Kanta blocks of Dantewada. The visit involved meeting villagers, relief camp inmates, government officials and members of UNICEF and the MV Foundation – an NGO – that are working with children in the region.

Report

This review aims to analyze the effects of the pilot project on child rights that started in Sukuma earlier this year and report on the level of implementation, if any, of the recommendations made by the NCPCR team.

Dantewada has historically suffered poor education standards. The last national census in 2001 – four years before the current conflict began in 2005 - revealed that Dantewada has the lowest literacy rate (30.01 percent) among all districts across India. Since 2005, with the advent of the Salwa Judum initiative, the conflict in the region has pushed at least 30,000 people from Dantewada in to Andhra Pradesh, government officials claimed. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) are living Khammam, Warangal and East Godavari districts of AP, the officials said.

1. Background of the Sukuma project:

In May 2008, the MV Foundation and UNICEF began a pilot project on child rights in Sukuma block of Chattisgarh. Sukuma block borders Orissa on its east, and has to its south Konta block, one of the blocks worst affected by the recent violence. Under the pilot project, batches of teachers, headmasters, anganwadi officials, block and district level officers traveled to the MV Foundation headquarters in Hyderabad for extensive training in child rights.

The visiting teams were taken to villages in north Andhra Pradesh affected by similar violence where the MV Foundation has worked on child rights in the past. The teams interacted with members of the gram panchayats, local officials, and members of Child Rights Protection Forums set up in villages for the protection of child rights. In detailed interaction with the reviewer following their return to Sukuma, these functionaries spoke of the “inspiration” they had gained from the programme.

At the request of the Chattisgarh Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the MV Foundation has dedicated two resource persons for the block. These two resource persons are tasked with regularly interacting with teachers, headmasters, anganwadi workers, parents and children to drill in to them the necessity of education and motivate them. They also bring to the notice of the block, district and state governments any perceived shortcomings in the administration’s approach.

2. Account of reviewer’s visit - Aug 11 – 14, 2008

2.1. Day 1: August 11, 2008

2.1.1 Interaction with UNICEF education officials in Raipur

UNICEF education officer in Chattisgarh, Venkatesh Malur, briefed the reviewer about the aid agency’s work in Dantewada district. This work can broadly be categorized under two heads:

- a) At Dhornapal camp, the largest IDP camp in Chattisgarh.

Most residents here have been shepherded to the camp by the Salwa Judum, Venkatesh Malur said. Many of them narrate horror stories of Naxals burning their homes and villages. But stories of Salwa Judum (SJ) atrocities also abound at

Dhornapal camp, he said. At the peak of the displacement – soon after the SJ was started in mid 2005 - the camp had over 60,000 inmates, he said. This figure was independently confirmed by the district collector.

Prior to UNICEF's intervention, school classes were largely disorganized, Malur claimed. UNICEF, he said, helped organise the schooling at the camp. The camp has about 130 teachers and 2000 students, he said. UNICEF trained government teachers at the camps. The UN agency called Pratham, an NGO working in education, to hold remedial courses for teachers. "The teachers loved it, and seeing the success, the state government has now asked Pratham to extend the same courses to the other camps," Malur said. UNICEF then started working with local NGOs. The assistance of the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram (VCA), possibly the only NGO in the region, was sought to intervene in improve the sanitation at Dhornapal. The VCA built toilets and taught children taught cleanliness habits – such as washing hands – at Dhornapal.

b) In villages:

UNICEF is working with the VCA to identify a village volunteer for every 20-25 households in villages that are still largely occupied, or where people are returning from camps. The volunteer talks to people about education, sanitation, nutrition. This programme has now been extended to 30 villages, Malur said.

2.1.2 Meeting with Director, SSA, Chattisgarh, at the Mission Office, Raipur:

A major cause of concern expressed by both UNICEF and the MV Foundation members relates to delays in supporting a growing demand for education in Dantewada with supply of necessary infrastructure. Volunteers of the MV Foundation and UNICEF who accompanied the reviewer to this meeting apprised the Chattisgarh SSA Mission Director Dr. Maninder Singh Dwivedi of these concerns. Dwivedi promptly quizzed her officials about the delays, and promised to personally follow up to ensure delivery of promised infrastructure.

2.2. Day 2: August 12, 2008:

2.2.1. Visit to Dhornapal relief camp, Konta block, Dantewada:

Dhornapal is referred to, to state and district government officials, as the largest relief camp in Dantewada. At the peak of the current conflict – soon after the launch of the Salwa Judum initiative in 2005, the camp had an inmate population of around 60,000 according to SK Khan, Circle Officer, Sukuma, who accompanied the reviewer on the visit.

The camp is built primarily on two largely barren fields on either side of a state highway. One field houses the residential sector of the camp - thatched huts with tin roofs (the tin was provided by the government but the houses were built by people

themselves). Many of the huts were locked from outside – other inmates claimed as many as three in every four families had left the camp and returned to their villages.

The other field is host to Dhornapal’s education system. Students here are largely from five 'ashram' schools – residential schools that typically exist in several panchayats and cater to children from surrounding areas, teachers said. Many of the ashram schools had to be deserted along with the villages where they were based either because of Naxal threat, or under force from the Salwa Judum with perceived a Naxal threat, they said. The remainder - a small number of students - at Dhornapal schools are from neighbouring villages who come here for classes, and go back at the end of school, camp officials said.

Till this July, the schools were run from UNICEF tents erected on raised cement platforms. Now, 32 thatched hut classrooms have been built where classes for standards one to five are held.

**Table 1:
Details of students at Dhornapal camp:**

Class	No.of classrooms	Students enrolled
1	9	396
2	10	467
3	5	208
4	4	157
5	4	129

Total		1357

Source: Class registers at Dhornapal.

Out of the 1357, 112 are from the nearby villages – not from ashram schools. Of the 112, 108 were present the day of the visit – a 97 percent attendance rate. The attendance of teachers at the Dhornapal camp schools however was abysmal. Of 41 teachers on the rolls, only ten were present. Most others – para-teachers – were on strike, seeking higher wages, camp officials said. One of the teachers – Vijay Jaiswal – had been appointed at Dhornapal, but was asked to teach in Jagargonda relief camp. Another teacher, KR Kashyap, had gone on election duty – despite a Supreme Court order against appointing teachers for election work.

Some of the students from the ashram schools stay in dormitories built next to the classrooms. Students complained that there are no toilets close to the dormitories/classrooms. At night, students living in the dormitories fear walking the distance to the nearest toilet – the camp are guarded from Naxal attacks by gun toting security personnel. Under cover of dark, the children instead relieve themselves next to classrooms.

During the visit, students in classrooms could be seen cringing at the stench of the feces just outside the door. Around noon, the feces were cleaned up – **by girl students lugging massive pails of water, after they were randomly picked by camp authorities.**

2.2.2. Meeting with school functionaries, panchayat officials and the Block Officer, Sukuma:

Over fifty panchayat leaders, teachers and headmasters trained at the MV Foundation, were present at the meeting. They had been called by Block Officer, Rajendra Singh Rathore. All those present lauded the training programme, individually relating how the workshop had helped them understand students better.

“I had the reputation of being a strict, no nonsense teacher, and students were wary of me. The training helped me come down to the "level" of the children. As a consequence, children started approaching me with their problems,” said Ms. TT Das, a teacher in Sukuma. The headmaster of a school said the training had helped “motivate me to think about child rights in completely new light.” But the teachers, headmasters, panchayat leaders and the Block Officer expressed concerns about a slew of problems.

Till 2007, 52 Residential Bridge Course centres were operational across the block. All the RBC courses were closed in 2007 because of mismanagement that showed up in an internal government enquiry. Though mismanagement cannot be accepted, the region with its massive segment of population that at some point over the past three years has been displaced, desperately needs RBCs, they argued. Now, the government has, in principle, agreed to restart the RBCs on a smaller scale - but none have been cleared yet, said Rathore.

Students who were in RBCs last year, and are yet to clear finishing exams, have been left in the lurch because of the decision to close down the RBCs, they argued. In Kerlapal village alone, 52 boys and 51 girls never completed their RBC. “*Ab bhatak rahe hai, laawaris ki tarah* (now they are roaming around like lumps),” a teacher from Kerlapal said.

Special skills training /vocational skills programmes are required for those students who after school, want to enter workforce, said Bhima Ram Markam, Neelavarum village sarpanch. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas in Andhra Pradesh hold classes from standard six to 12, whereas in Chattisgarh, classes stop at standard 8, Rathore claimed. “After standard eight, children are forced to go to regular schools, and many drop out in the transition,” said Rathore. RBC students in Ramapuram village have not even received their report card from last year, the village sarpanch said. “So they cannot even apply for regular schools, and are dropping out, demotivated,” he said.

The Central Reserve Police Force has occupied residential facilities meant for school children in 11 villages, they complained. A recent phenomenon here, the occupation of schools as paramilitary barracks puts schools in the direct line of fire in the ongoing conflict, they said. It has also led to a severe crunch in space to live in for the students. Teachers and Panchayats are trying to accommodate the children in schools/hostels that are not yet occupied, but are struggling.

2.2.3. Visit to Gonderas village:

On the night of June 3, a massive mob - over 500 villagers, according to eyewitnesses - came and drilled huge holes in the school building, destroying the roofs, and making the school impossible to use. The destroyed buildings are: a 130 seater girls residential school, a 20 seater boys hostel, and buildings meant to be the kitchen and housing for teachers. Villagers indicate the building was destroyed under pressure from Naxals, who feared the building would be taken up as accommodation by the CRPF/security forces battling them. Unanimously, all pointed to the fact that the attack on the building followed hours after the CRPF took over the boys hostel in Badi Setty, separated from Gonderas by a hill.



Picture 1: The demolished walls of classrooms at the Gonderas School

"Rumours were flying thick that evening that after Badi Setty, the Gonderas school would be the next to be occupied," said Prabhakar Das, a teacher in Gonderas. Rathore and other block level officials concurred.



Picture 2: The roof of the Gonderas school left without support to stand



Picture 3: Children at the Gadiras school carrying brick and mortar to build podium for the Independence Day Celebrations

The children who were earlier housed here, have been shifted to nearby Gadiras, but children are stuffed and at least two new hostels – one for boys and the other for girls are required immediately. At the Gadiras school, children were lifting bricks on their heads, carrying water, red sand around to clean up the school façade ahead of August 15 celebrations.

2.2.4. Visit to Neelavarum village:

Neelavarum village Sarpanch Bhima Ram Markam is father to two children, but local guardian to over 200 'conflict' children. He is responsible for their education, health, and above all, their security, in a region where every human – even a child – is viewed with suspicion by gun toting militia - Naxals, the Salwa Judum, or both. Markam doesn't know the whereabouts of parents of most of the 'conflict' children – an uncertainty that he says tears at him every day.

He does not enjoy a paisa of state government support for taking charge of children left behind by parents fleeing the bullets and explosives of an undeclared civil war. And many in his own village disapprove of his decision. But the village chief, in his mid-thirties, says he has a secret weapon that involves neither bullets nor explosives but disarms critics and puts the children at ease. Markam smiles, and sings a few sentences of a Gondi song. "Everything here is so tense in general, because of the conflict, that a smile and a song really help to relax the atmosphere. It also helps me convey that I am in control," he said, as he settled down on a chair to explain the origin of the term 'conflict' children, used to describe the over 200 children here from neighboring Konta block who are now in his care. "These are children who have already experienced two lives. Their first life was like other children, spent with their parents at home. Now, they are effectively starting a new life – nothing like their old world – born out of this conflict," he said.

Konta is the southern most block of Dantewada and Chattisgarh – it neighbours Bhadrachalam district of Andhra Pradesh. It is also the block where security forces have faced most violent opposition from Naxals. Allegedly hounded by the Salwa Judum for suspected support to Naxals, villagers from this block have been moving to AP refugee camps in a steady stream for over two years now. This July, however, the parents of these 200 'conflict' children traveled north to Sukuma block's Neelavarum – their mission to plead with Markam to take charge of their wards. "Markam had built a reputation for himself in the village. That reputation obviously traveled all the way to Konta's villages," Block Officer Rajendra Rathore said.

Earlier this year, when the state government announced it was closing down all Residential Bridge Course (RBC) schools in the district, a pall of gloom initially descended in Neelavarum too, said Rathore. Then, as the enthusiasm from the pilot child rights project caught on, Markam approached Rathore with a unique plan – to continue the RBC with Markam's own money and Panchayat funds. Touched by Markam's gesture, Rathore said he could not stop himself from approving the proposal.

"By then, it was clear that RBCs would be started, even though on a lower scale, once again. The key thing was to prevent a break in schooling for students already at RBCs, while the government comes up with a fresh action plan. We decided that Markam could be compensated later for the money he has spent from his own pocket," Rathore said. Markam continued with the RBC in his village – 70 children studied there – even as bridge courses across the district wound up. "That initiative he showed, translated into goodwill for him which traveled to Konta, and resulted in fleeing families bringing their children here to be educated," said Rathore.

But the Konta families brought over 200 children - far in excess of the number that could possibly be accommodated in the Neelavarum RBC over and above the 70 children from the village itself. "I couldn't however, possibly, refuse to take care of these children. I decided that I would take some in the RBC, and admit the rest in the regular school," Markam said. Today, the RBC in Neelavarum hosts 140 children – 70 from the village and an equal number from Konta.

Another 135 students from Konta are at the regular school – they study and live there (in hostels) with 33 students from Neelavarum, and 102 from the rest of Sukuma block. "There is a severe space crunch, in classrooms and hostel rooms. I have requested Raipur to expedite the construction of new buildings. But nothing can happen till the fresh action plan to restart RBCs is accepted and implemented," Rathore said.

In Neelavarum, Markam faces criticism from villagers who accuse the Sarpanch of prioritizing needs of the 'conflict' children over those of the children from the village. "There are many children in Neelavarum itself who are not in school, because of inadequate facilities. When I took charge of the Konta children and accommodated them with our own children on a temporary, emergency basis, villagers started criticising me," Markam said.



Picture 4: Bhima Ram Markam with children at the RBC he is continuing to run without government support. Most of the children in the picture are from Konta, left behind by parents fleeing to refugee camps.

The villagers accused him of "finding space for others' children, but not for those from the village," Markam said, his face breaking into a rueful smile. "It was a tough decision. But I thought, our children at least have a home and parents. If I were to turn the Konta children out, I would be knowingly pushing them towards beggary and lumpenism," he said.

2.3. Day 3: August 13, 2008:

1. Visit to Japra village:

In May, a 50-seater residential complex for primary boys (1st to 5th) at the balak ashram was occupied by the CRPF. Nearby trees were chopped, presumably to obtain a clear view of approaching people/vehicles.

As a consequence of the CRPF occupying the hostel, the children are having to sleep on the floor, in pitiable conditions at the nearby school building - where till now only daily classes were held. In all, there are 112 students at the school, including 50 from the occupied ashram. The school headmaster, SR Markam, said he had collected 12 beds, but the rest sleep of the students displaced by the CRPF had to sleep on the floor.



Picture 5: The Japra boys hostel, now barracks for the CRPF.

Teachers were on strike – of the five teachers appointed for 112 students, only two were present, remaining three on strike. Only one is permanent, the remaining four are para-teachers, who were on strike statewide during the reviewer’s visit, seeking better working conditions and pay. (See Table 7 for impact of teachers’ strike).

The students were present though – despite the absence of teachers – indicating enthusiasm that has grown thanks to the pilot project, Markam said.

Another school – not ashram - nearby offered classes from 6th to 10th. The school – supposedly co-educational - had a remarkably skewed sex ratio of students.

Table 2:

Details of students at secondary and senior secondary school in Japra:

Class	Boys	Girls
Sixth	10	3
Seventh	8	0
Eighth	4	0
Nineth	12	1
Tenth	10	1

44 5

Source: Admission registers of the school

At this school too, of the five teachers appointed, only three (permanent) were at work, while the remaining two (para-teachers) were on strike. On the outskirts of the village, some fifty metres off the main road, is a 'school building' that many in Japra refer to as their dream.

The white walls of the 'school' building are stained with dark iron deposits, the bars on its windows orange with rust, brittle with neglect. Its walls look sturdy, the kitchen and toilets spacious and potentially comfortable. In 1998, the state government - then of Madhya Pradesh – built the school as a model for Sukuma block, recall villagers and Panchayat members. The building – complete barring flooring and electrification – has since been lying neglected, officially waiting for an “inauguration” by the state government before it can be used.



Picture 6: The Japra school building constructed in 1998, which has been laying unused, waiting to be inaugurated, ever since.

Over the past decade, Japra’s hope was slowly shrouded by dense undergrowth that eventually stole from the villagers even a view of the school building. “The forest grew all around the building till you could not see it from here,” said Ramesh, a villager who lives 100 metres away. Enthused by their interaction with members of the MV Foundation, villagers last month hacked down the tall bushes that had grown around the building. They even started leveling the floors of the rooms on their own.

But a government building cannot be used without government approval – that’s all the villagers today want.

2. Visit to Mullagoda village:

At the bal ashram here, only four teachers are appointed for 126 students. Of the four, three are parateachers who were on strike during the reviewer’s visit. The fourth, Phagu Ram Mandavi is a permanent teacher and the headmaster of the school.



Picture 7: Girls sit in a queue at their “class” in Mullagonda, oblivious to the strike that means no teacher will turn up to address them.

Table 3:

Details of students at Mullagoda bal ashram:

Class	Boys	Girls
First	31	17
Second	23	10
Third	11	6
Fourth	11	5
Fifth	9	3

Source: Admission registers at the bal ashram.

3. Visit to Badi Setty village:

Like in Japra, here too, the CRPF has occupied a pre-matric school hostel. The occupied hostel used to house 62 students – 45 boys and 17 girls – said RK Patel, headmaster of the pre-matric school.



Picture 8: The Badi Setty hostel now fenced and barracked to host the CRPF.

These 62 students have now been shifted to a primary boys *ashram* barely 100 metres away. The *ashram* which was home to 65 primary boys now has to accommodate 127 students in all. (Hostels and *ashrams* are meant for students from other villages). The Badi Setty *ashram* consists of four rooms each originally meant to house around 16 primary school boys. Now, 17 older girls occupy one room. The boys are squeezed, 30 to a room the size of a squash court, on beds jammed against each other, with no space in between.



Picture 9: An incomplete school building in Badi Setty village, metres away from the overcrowded rooms in which students displaced from the ashram are staying.

Patel expressed the fear that the close proximity in which the students sleep is conducive to the spread of communicable diseases. “The government builds the hostels for our students, not for security forces to stay in. Why then are they (security forces) allowed to continue there,” he wondered.



Picture 10 : A classroom turned into a dormitory at the Badi Setty school where students from the ashram occupied by the CRPF have been shifted.

Next to the ashram stands an incomplete school building, a stark reminder of what can be achieved simply by fulfilling old promises.

3.1. Day 4: August 14, 2008:

1. Meeting with District Collector SR Shori in Dantewada town, the district headquarters.

The literacy rate of the district, at 30.17 percent, is least across India, Shori said. The densely forested terrain acts as a demotivating factor for qualified teachers – especially in Math and Science – to go and teach in Dantewada’s villages, he said. But

the situation has only worsened since the inception of the Salwa Judum, Shori said. "In Kottekalyan (a taluk) for instance, there was peace earlier, but once the forces came, Naxals too stepped up activities. Now, there are entire areas that are out of bounds for us," he said.

In all, 11 schools/hostels in the district have been occupied by the CRPF, the District collector said. "I have, on several occasions, spoken to the Chief Secretary, other officials, and through them communicated to the Centre as well that the occupation of schools is unacceptable," he said. "The Home Ministry tells us the forces will vacate, but as never given any timeline."

4. Schools, the new war zones

Eleven schools and hostels across Dantewada are occupied by central paramilitary forces and the state special task force (STF) – including at least three in Sukuma - said district collector SK Sori. At least a dozen other schools and hostels have been destroyed – usually exploded – by alleged Naxals and their sympathizers, he said. "It is evident that the Naxals are attacking schools and buildings because they fear these buildings will otherwise be occupied by security forces," the collector said.

The girl's residential primary school in Gonderas village bears the gaping wounds of a sledgehammer victim. The holes in its walls are large enough for a car to pass through, and its collapsed roofs could be signatures of an earthquake. Three months back, the school housed 130 girls. But on the night of June 3, according to villagers and district officials, the impressive structure came crumbling down under vicious attack from a mob of alleged Naxal sympathizers.

Across a hill from Gonderas, jawans of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) play cards at the pre-matric boys – class six to eight - hostel in Badi Setty, shielded by barbed wire, gunny bags and watchful guards. The CRPF reached the Badi Setty hostel on the afternoon of June 3, and have since shown no sign of moving, according to locals and the district administration. "Rumours were flying thick that evening that after Badi Setty, the Gonderas school would be the next to be occupied," said Prabhakar Das, a teacher in Gonderas, as he showed the reviewer the remains of the demolished girls school. A 20 seater boys primary school-cum-hostel adjacent to the girls school has not been spared either.

The buildings are now unusable, said Rajendra Rathore, Sukuma block officer. The children who were earlier housed at the Gonderas school, have been shifted to nearby Gadiras village. The Gadiras school has not been attacked - as yet. But only just. A BSNL tower just beyond the Gadiras school compound walls teeters on three legs, maimed by an explosion triggered allegedly by Naxals.

The influx of 150 students – 130 girls and 20 boys – from the Gonderas school has doubled the strength of the Gadiras school, where the space crunch is acute. Block officer Rathore said at least two additional hostels are required.

The Badi Setty hostel now occupied by the CRPF used to house 62 students – 45 boys and 17 girls – said RK Patel, headmaster of the pre-matric school. These 62 students have now been shifted to a primary boys *ashram* barely 100 metres away. The *ashram* which was home to 65 primary boys now has to accommodate 127 students in all (Hostels and *ashrams* are meant for students from other villages). The Badi Setty *ashram* consists of four rooms each originally meant to house around 16 primary school boys. Now, 17 older girls occupy one room. The boys have it worse – 110 stuffed into three rooms, their beds jammed against each other, leaving absolutely no space in between. Clothes and bags are hung on the wall.

Patel expressed the fear that the close proximity in which the students sleep is conducive to the spread of communicable diseases. “The government builds the hostels for our students, not for security forces to stay in. Why then are they (security forces) allowed to continue there,” he wondered.

In Japra village – also in Sukuma – the CRPF has occupied a 50-seater residential complex for primary boys (1st to 5th). As with Badi Setty and Gonderas, in Japra too, the school buildings transformed into war theatres while students celebrated their summer vacations. The Japra hostel was occupied in May, said SR Markam, headmaster of the primary boys school in the village.

Trees near the occupied hostel in Japra have been chopped, presumably to obtain a clear view of approaching people and vehicles.

A kilometre away from the occupied hostel is a school, where local village children come to study during the day, and then return to their homes. This school now accommodates the 50 primary boys displaced by the CRPF. It has 62 students of its own, who come for classes. Headmaster Markam pointed out that the facilities were barely adequate to start with – two small classrooms for 62 students to study in.

Now, 112 students sit in the two rooms, some spilling out on to the corridor, where a black board has been installed. At night, once the 62 local students go home, these two rooms transform into sleeping quarters for the 50 displaced boys. Markam said he has arranged for 12 cots, but the remaining 38 students have to sleep on the ground.

“This district has poor educational standards to start with. If we are trying to bring about a change, that too in the midst of conflict, we simply cannot afford to deny our children facilities that already exist. One epidemic that starts from their cramped sleeping quarters, and we will lose, overnight, all that we have gained,” a teacher from Badi Setty said. District collector Sori concurred, but expressed helplessness. Sori said he had complained – through the state government – to the Union Home Ministry about the occupation of schools and hostels. “I have specifically asked them to vacate these buildings.”

The response from New Delhi, he said, has been vague at best. “They have said they will vacate the buildings, but are not giving any time frame. It suits the central forces

to occupy existing structures that they take a fancy to, than to build their own structures,” he said. Central paramilitary forces on deployment are allocated funds for setting up temporary structures for their housing.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1. The **occupation** of schools, *ashrams* and hostels as barracks by security forces like the CRPF, and the destruction of other such buildings by Naxals, makes a mockery of the NCPDR team’s recommendation to transform schools into zones of peace. The occupation of these buildings must be stopped immediately, and the occupied buildings vacated at the earliest. Most locals see the Naxal attacks on school buildings as a measure aimed at preventing occupation by the security forces. If this perception is correct, the attacks by Naxals on school buildings should stop once the occupation ends. If this perception is wrong, the rebels stand exposed. The government must take the first step. It may be pointed out to the Home Ministry that the occupation of the school buildings is only alienating locals further from the administration – district, state and centre.

5.2. **Delivery mechanisms** for key services such as education increasingly appear to be out of synchrony with the reality. While people are returning from relief camps to villages once under siege, the services continue to be provided at the camps alone, and not at the villages where people are returning. Tables 4,5 and 6 indicate to this problem. A fresh survey must be conducted to ascertain exactly what percentage of relief camp inhabitants have returned to their villages. The administration must keep this data updated, on a monthly basis. Villages that were once empty, but where substantial numbers of people are now returning, must be provided with adequate schooling and *anganwadi* facilities. Destroyed buildings must be rebuilt. The presence of adequate teachers at these schools must be ensured.

5.3. **Residential Bridge Courses**, stopped by the Chattisgarh government in Dantewada district last year, must be restarted urgently. In a region where large sections of the population either have been, or risk becoming victims of internal displacement, RBCs as a mechanism for schooling, are crucial. Misuse of public funds cannot be excused, but the closing down RBCs has created a vacuum in the district’s schooling system that educators and district officials said they are struggling to fill.

State government officials said a plan to reintroduce RBCs in the district is on the anvil, but confusion over the future of bridge courses here prevails. This confusion – rampant even among district officials – has bred its own problems for RBC students over the past year.

Students studying at these schools, who have not yet cleared finishing exams, cannot approach regular schools for admissions. Students, who have cleared their exams but have not yet received certificates stating the same, must be given their reports at the earliest, so that they can apply for admission to regular schools.

- 5.4. Laxity in **ensuring delivery** of basic facilities and amenities demanded by schools and children is exaggerating other problems already listed and may prove counterproductive to the aim of bringing children to school and keeping them there. Despite extremely encouraging initiative and enthusiasm shown at the level of the SSA Mission Director, delays, perhaps at lower levels, need to be addressed. These problems – of delays – are common across most parts of the country, and there was no evidence available that Dantewada is worse hit than any other area. But in a region where the State is supposedly trying to battle cries of neglect that spur Naxalism, described by the Prime Minister as India's biggest internal security challenge, special efforts are needed.

A mechanism for fortnightly review of promised projects across the district – the worst hit by Naxalism in the state – may be set up. The mechanism may be headed by a top official in Raipur – perhaps the Chief Secretary – and must include the district collector. Dantewada must not be forgotten, and then remembered intermittently after major incidents of violence.

- 5.5. The Sukuma **pilot project** may be expanded cautiously to other blocks of the

district, if possible. In a short span, the project appears to have fostered enthusiasm and excitement for education in the lap of traditional illiteracy. However, the enthusiasm of Sukuma must also be consolidated – meeting demand with supply would play a key role.

Annexure - 1

Statistics tell the story

1.1. Table 4: Camp wise data on students from regular schools and the number who are still present to attend classes (at the camp).

S.No	Block	Camp name	Schools	Enrolled students	Attending students	Teachers
1	Gidam	Kasoli	1	56	12	2
		Bangapal	5	168	72	8
2	Konta	Konta	14	1877	1204	87
		Injaram	3	366	354	30
		Errabore	5	396	125	8
		Muraiguda	1	31	0	4
		Dhornapal	11	679	410	42

		Polampalli	0	0	0	0
Total			40	3571	2177	181

Source: District Collectorate, Dantewada.

Implication: Figures in Table 4 show that overall attendance is around 61 percent. The 'attending students' are not based on those present on the day of the survey, but based on those who come to school at all, however rarely. In other words, the remaining 39 percent have "dropped out" and district officials say it is a safe estimate that these children have gone back to their villages.

1.2. Table 5: Camp wise data on students from ashram schools and the number who are till present to attend classes (at the camp).

S.No.	Block	Camp name	Ashram schools	Enrolled students	Attending Students	Teachers
1	Gidam	Kasoli	0	0	0	0
		Bangapal	0	0	0	0
2	Konta	Konta	7	714	662	31
		Injaram	0	0	0	0
		Errabore	1	147	125	8
		Muraiguda	8	685	590	48
		Dhornapal	17	2274	2210	54
		Polampalli	1	55	55	3
Total			34	3875	3642	144

Source: District Collectorate, Dantewada.

Implication: Nearly 94 percent of students enrolled at camps from ashram schools are still attending classes (at the camps). **A possible explanation for the glaring difference in fraction of drop outs from ashram schools and regular day schools may be that parents who go back to villages don't mind – as much – leaving their children behind in the former.**

1.3. Table 6: Data on total students from both Ashram Schools and regular schools at Dhornapal, provided by camp school authorities.

Class	No. of classrooms	No. of students
1	9	396
2	10	467
3	5	208
4	4	157
5	4	129
Total	32	1357

Source: Class registers at Dhornapal camp.

Implication: Only 1357 of the 2620 students – 2210 from ashram schools and 410 from regular schools - that government figures say study at Dhornapal, actually continue to do so. This translates into a percentage of 51.8 percent. This suggests that the remaining 48.2 percent students who are now unaccounted for, may have returned to their villages since the last government survey here. The reviewer could

only visit Dhornapal among the relief camps, but this comparison – between Table 5 and Table 6 – suggests that a similar scenario may exist in other camps too.

1.4. Table 7: Data on the teaching staff at various schools in Sukuma district and at Dhornapal camp, the student-teacher ratio when all are present, and the same ratio when para-teachers are on strike.

School	No. of students	No. of teaching Staff	No. of teaching staff present	Student:Teacher Ratio if all staff Present	Student:Teacher Ratio at time of Reviewer’s visit (during strike)
Dhornapal camp	1357 (2620)	41(96)	10	33.1	135.7
Japra primary	112	5	2	22.4	56.0
Japra secondary and senior secondary	49	5	3	9.8	16.3
Mullagoda	126	3	0	42.0	Cannot be determined
Badi Setty	127	4	0	31.7	Cannot be determined

Source: Student and teacher attendance registers.

Implications: The student: teacher ratio in some schools is extremely good, especially in Japra. Though worse in other schools, the ratio is comparable to what one sees in schools in major metros. However, once the staff strikes work, the ratio rises unacceptably high. In schools where only para-teachers have been recruited, a strike can mean no teaching staff reporting to work, as in the case of Mullagoda and Badi Setty.