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Bridging gaps in learning: The role of NGO's in strengthening education in Assam

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Abstract
This study focuses on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the identification and alleviation of current learning deficits in primary education in a socioculturally complex environment such as the Hojai district in Assam. Even districts such as Hojai, where tribal and other linguistic minorities are numerous, still experience the extreme shortage of the basic reading and numeracy skills despite the government effort. The current study relies on a qualitative-dominant mixed-method study design to examine the strategies, perceived outcomes, and challenges of NGO interventions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with community individuals, government school teachers and the workers of the non-governmental organizations. Addtionally, information was also obtained from learning centres and focus groups on parents and kids, which were made using non-participant observations. Based on the thematic analysis, NGOs succeed in bridging the gap in learning through three primary and interconnected solutions: (1) establishing a pedagogy of care that facilitates the safe learning environments and establishes the sense of relational trust; (2) fulfilling the role of a linguistic and cultural mediator by relying upon the home languages in making formal education available; and (3) paving the way to a great sense of community ownership by rethinking the role of a parent as an active educational stakeholder. What also emerges as the crux of the paradox integral to the study is a critical issue of resource scarcity, fatigue of volunteers occasioned by temporary funding and challenges of achieving scaling are all problems that undermine the very benefits of these hyper-localized, relationship-based models. In the findings of the study, it was revealed that the non-governmental organizations serve as an important component, additional players who would address the more general ecological and cognitive learning shortcomings in the school system. The findings justify the creation of more sustainable sources of funds to ensure the sustainability and expansion of their successful work, and premeditated policy actions to address popularizing these proven and context-specific strategies into the regular system.

Keywords: Education, NGOs, learning gaps, thematic analysis, Hojai Assam, community participation, pedagogy of care, linguistic bridge

1. Introduction
The fact that elementary education is now universal in India with the passing of The Right to Education Act (2009), is an important move in creating educational equity. Nevertheless, the original intentions of the policy and the real life situation still differ greatly particularly in regions that contain complex sociocultural and economic disparities. The best illustration to this problem would be the northeastern state of Assam, where learning poverty (the inability to read and understand a simple text at age ten) is a source of internet concern despite significant enrolment increases. The proportion of Grade 5 learners in rural India (59.4 percent) being able to read a Grade 2 school text is much higher than the percentage of Assam (51.5 percent), based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 (ASER Centre, 2023) [1]. Although this is not equally distributed, the children of historically underprivileged places are the ones who are disproportionately undermined by this fundamental academic loss.

This paper is about Hojai district that is a microcosm of bigger educational problems in Assam. Hojai, that was split out of Nagaon district, has an eclectic population. It had a literacy rate as indicated in the 2011 Census at 74.3 which is less than the state average of 72.2%. More to the point, the district contains a large population of tribals (Adivasi), and the level of their literacy often difficult to compare to that of the state since they are structurally

poor. There is a large Muslim community, who speak Bengali, is also another factor of linguistic diversity, which often leads to the failure of matching the native language and the language of instruction in the school. This mix of circumstances causes a lethal storm of educational disadvantage. According to data supplied by Unified District Information System of Education (UDISE+), the issues that afflict districts similar to Hojai such as the large percentage of student to teacher and the high number of single-teacher schools have direct impact on the quality of classroom teaching, as evidenced by the 2021-2022 statistics.

The important niche in these areas of discontinuity in the formal structure is formed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Whereas the work objectives of a group such as the Ahom Sarba Siksha Abhiyan Mission (SSA) in Assam are systemic, the local and national NGOs often undertake the complex and time-intensive remedial education, community, and the bridging of specific learning deficiencies. The effectiveness of targeted NGO interventions in promoting learning outcomes is illustrated by such programs as the Pratham program of the Literacy Camps, and the literacy programs of Room to Read, which have already been implemented in the whole of Assam (Pratham, 2019) [15].

Nevertheless, there is a common use of anecdotal evidence to impact the efficacy of these NGOs. Few and far in-between empirical research exists that comprehensively analyzes their instruction methods, the way they are bargaining the challenging sociolinguistic backdrop of Hojai, and the peculiar challenges that they meet. Therefore, the research is more than bare acknowledgment of their role by providing a deep, qualitative examination of how the NGOs operating in the Hojai area have been trying to bridge the primary learning divides of the neediest children, to the best of their abilities. The following questions are going to be the guidelines of the study:

- What are the specific ways through which non-governmental organizations in Hojai find and seal learning gaps at the elementary school level?
- What are the primary challenges and support factors, which influence the NGO work of this specific situation?
- What are the attitudes of different stakeholders who include parents, students, government educators, and NGO employees towards the effectiveness and effects of these interventions?

This paper aims at giving a reasoned, objective explanation of how non-state actors have promoted education in one of the key districts of Assam by offering solutions to these challenges.

2. Theoretical Perspective and Literature

The review is a summary of the current academic research on the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in education, shifting it to the context of Assam.

2.1 The Global and National Discourse on NGOs in Education

The spread of NGOs in the education sector world-wide is a well known phenomenon being associated with the growth of neoliberals where the states are increasingly collaborating with non-state organizations to meet development agendas (Rose, 2009) [16]. The point made by scholars such as Mundy and Murphy (2001) [13] is that NGOs tend to serve as substitute agencies and fill gaps caused by state failure especially in accessing the marginalized population. Their advantages have always been mentioned as flexibility, innovation and being community-oriented (Bano, 2008) [4]. They are lauded because of their skills to fly experimental pedagogies, localize resources, and react quicker to local demands as compared to the gigantic, bureaucratic state structures.

This story is powerful in the Indian context. Dreze and Sen (2013) [11] have notoriously put forward the importance of civil structure actors, such as NGOs, to lobby as well as enact social reforms, such as the Right to Education Act. Jain (2015) [12] and Batra (2005) [5] further within the studies expound the role played by NGOs in delivering remedial education, bridging school-ages children through courses and trainings teachers on child-centred approaches of education. An example of this is the work of agencies such as Pratham and its main initiative of the Read India campaign, which has been widely reported to have played a key role in increasing the number of organizations and individuals in the effort towards assisting with the improvement of foundational literacy and numeracy rates in the country at large (Banerji *et al*., 2013) [3].

2.2 The Specific Context of Education in Assam

Assam educational scene is defined with a complicated combination of geography, poverty and ethnicity. Even after the infrastructure and the enrolment rates improved after the adoption of the SSAP, the state still shows poor results in terms of learning outcomes as shown by the state performance in national tests such as ASER and National Achievement Survey (NAS). According to a study by Bora (2018) [6], these issues can also be explained by a number of factors determined by the state: the remoteness and char (river island) nature, language diversification, and the marginalization of certain groups of people by the state, such as the Tea-Tribe (Adivasi) and former tea-garden workers.

In terms of education, the Tea-Tribe community has been named to be one of the most underprivileged in Assam. Researchers such as Sharma (2017) [17] and Das (2019) [19] identify one of the key obstacles to education among children living in tea garden regions as a cycle of poverty, low levels of parental literacy, and the irrelevance of the school curriculum. As a conclusion of these studies, it is encompassed that an extraordinary, one-size-fits-all issue is not enough to reveal the profound educational faults in such communities.

2.3 NGOs in Assam's Education Sector: Existing Knowledge and Identified Gaps

It has been recognized that NGOs play a critical role in Assam but this has not been fully examined with regard to such a difficult environment. The partnership with NGOs under SSA is generally mentioned in government reports and policy publications when approaching community mobilization or special training of the out-of-school children (Axom Sarba Siksha Abhiyan Mission, 2020) [2]. Nonetheless, there is limited academic literature that offers a critical in-depth examination to the work they have done.

The existing literature can be categorized into two broad types:

1. **Macro-Level Reports:** These are often quantitative or evaluative studies that mention NGO involvement as one of many factors. They tell us *that* NGOs are active but provide little insight into *how* they operate, their pedagogical strategies, or their day-to-day challenges on the ground.
2. **Anecdotal or Project-Specific Case Studies:** Some literature exists in the form of NGO annual reports or success stories, which, while valuable, often lack academic rigor and critical distance. They tend to highlight successes without a nuanced analysis of limitations or the complex dynamics of working within communities like those in Hojai.

This leads to a clear and significant gap in the literature

- **Geographical Gap:** There is a conspicuous absence of district-specific studies. The unique socio-cultural fabric of a district like Hojai — Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri, Dimasa, Bihari and Bhojpuri communities, linguistic minorities, and its status as a relatively new administrative district—remains unexamined in the context of NGO intervention.
- **Methodological Gap:** Much of the existing work is either purely quantitative (measuring enrollment or test scores) or purely descriptive. There is a lack of rich, qualitative studies that use methods like thematic analysis to delve into the lived experiences and perceptions of all stakeholders: the NGO workers, the government teachers they may collaborate with or work parallel to, the parents, and most importantly, the children.
- **Thematic Gap:** The literature offers limited understanding of the specific *strategies* NGOs use to navigate linguistic barriers, build trust in marginalized communities, and adapt pedagogical methods to local contexts in Assam.

2.4 Conceptual Positioning of the Present Study

This research is in a better position to bridge these gaps. It considers NGOs position by narrowing the analysis down to the Hojai district and adopting a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach that includes thematic analysis as its main process in order to create a fine-grained, contextual insight into the position of NGOs. It also attempts to go beyond the what (e.g. better test scores) to the how and the why- how trust is established through relation, how the language can be used as a bridge and why some community engagement approaches work or do not. Subsequently, the paper will provide a critical evidence-based case study to the current body of literature on education, development and role of non-state actors in northeastern part of India.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The method in this research was a qualitative-dominant mixed-method study. The major research approach was qualitative and the thematic analysis was applicable to analyze the data. Observable levels of learning (e.g., could read a paragraph, could not solve subtraction), were documented using simple descriptive approaches to put understanding of the qualitative data in perspective without the use of inferential statistics.

3.2 Study Context and Participants

The research was conducted over six months in Hojai district, Assam. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a wide range of perspectives. The final sample included:

- NGO Personnel: 8 (including coordinators and field-level instructors).
- Government School Teachers: 6.
- Parents and Community Leaders: 12.
- Students**:** 25 (from Grades 3-5), participated in focus group discussions.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Conducted with NGO personnel, government teachers, and parents to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in depth.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Held with separate groups of students and parents to understand collective views and shared experiences.
- **Non-participant Observation:** Observed 15 NGO-run learning sessions to understand pedagogical practices and student-teacher interactions in a natural setting.
- **Document Analysis:** Reviewed simple learning assessment sheets used by the NGOs to gauge children's starting points and progress descriptively.

3.4 Data Analysis

All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary. The data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis:

1. **Familiarization:** Repeated reading of transcripts.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Identifying key phrases and ideas.
3. **Searching for Themes:** Collating codes into potential themes.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Refining the essence of each theme.
6. **Producing the Report:** Weaving the thematic analysis into a narrative, supported by direct quotes.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis revealed three overarching themes that capture the core of the NGOs' work in bridging learning gaps in Hojai.

4.1 The Landscape of Learning Gaps: A Multi-Dimensional Deficit

The research results of this paper have shown that the learning gaps of Hojai district are not unidimensional but a multi-dimensional deficit that is highly intertwined between socio-economic, linguistic and pedagogical issues. The qualitative data which is completed by the simple descriptive evaluations will outline a bright scenario of difficulties children experience especially those belonging to the different tribes and linguistic minorities.

4.1.1 The Severity of Foundational Deficits

The threatful tendencies observed in the national reports were verified even by the first descriptive evaluations, which were made during the fieldwork. It was noted that a massive majority of Grade 5 children in the sampled regions

had challenges with competencies in Grade 2. An example is that in a basic exercise when the children were tested to read a short story of Grade 2 level in Assamese, it was seen that around every ten children were not able to read and comprehend a short story besides being unable to read it at all. They frequently practiced what we today call barking at text:- reading the words containing the meaning without understanding what is meant. The difference was also very sharp in the numeracy. An uncomplicated word problem which involved a small number of objects (e.g., 12 pencils among 3 buddies) was something that the similar number of children found impossible, as many of them were not able to determine which of the arithmetic operations to apply.

This was not only a statistical report, but a direct experience of teachers. According to a Hojai town government school teacher, he was compelled to teach the Grade 5 syllabus because the curriculum required it, although he was aware that half of his students were still unable to add and subtract in two digits. He shared "They can repeat what I write on the board and when I request them to solve a new problem by themselves, they are at a loss. It is not a year gap, but three or four years."

4.1.2 The Linguistic Chasm

The linguistic barrier was a critical aspect of the gap in the learning process that came out strongly in the interviews. Most of the government schools use the Assamese medium of instruction with many children using the home language of Sadri, Bengali or a tribal dialect. This resulted in an essential disengagement on the first day of school.

An example being given by an NGO teacher in one of the tea garden regions was exemplary: "In Assamese the textbook says sador (cloud). However, the child calls it in Sadri badal. This connection has not been made to them by any book or learning material". Thus, over the years they stare at the word sador and the image of the cloud and it is an abstract strange symbol. The fact that it is the same badal that they observe day in day out never gets to them. And what are you going to do to construct a sentence when you are sealed up inside the words? It demonstrates that the learning gap could be frequently a comprehension gap based on language, many years before it developed into an achievement gap as seen on the test score.

4.1.3 The Cascading Effect on Confidence and Engagement

The data also indicated that these scholastic shortfalls were not only arbitrary; they spread out to the psychological and emotional interaction that children had with school. Failure was also experienced repeatedly and inability to follow-up with the curriculum brought a lot of frustration, diminished self-esteem and eventual disengagement.

This was exposed in a focus group discussion with the students. A Grade 4 boy said, "I do not like attending the big school [government school]. The teacher poses questions and I do not know the answer. The other children laugh. And there I sit and wait up till the bell sounds." This acted as a reflection of an observation by an organizer of NGO who remarked, "On reaching Class 4 or 5, many of them have already given up. Physically they are there but mentally they are absent. They have been pushed out by the silent system. We do not teach them the alphabet in the first place, but we persuade them that they can do it. This brings out the issue of learning gaps producing a -participation gap," as the children pull out of the learning process itself.

4.1.4 The Invisibility of the Gap in Formal Systems

One of the most interesting conclusions was on the invisibility of such subtle gaps in the school framework. The stress to finish the syllabus, the high class sizes, and emphasis on memorizing frustrated the definite, underlying confusion of the specific child that frequently went through without the identification and correction.

One teacher said he was a government school teacher and told there were 50 students in a class and he had to look at the average. He said, "Similar to the previous question, in this case, I need to proceed in case the majority of children can repeat the multiplication table following me. I understand that some of them are just punching their mouths, and they do not even comprehend, yet, I do not have time and money to spend on sitting with each. This caused a systemic restriction, in that learning gaps were not attached but rather multiplied each year", with the curriculum of each new grade being based on more and more of a shaky foundation, which was incomplete.

To sum up, the Hojai landscape of learning gaps may be characterized as one of the tragic underlying literacy and numerical insufficiency, being aggravated by the great linguistic divide and resulting in a crisis of trustworthiness among the learners. These loopholes are too small to the overworked system that a group of children is left without schooling however in school. It is on this complicated terrain where the activities of NGOs, studied in the subsequent sections are placed.

4.2 Bridging the Gaps: Grassroots Strategies and Lived Experiences

The qualitative information shows that NGOs in Hojai do not use a single or common intervention, but a mosaic of interwoven, context-related strategies. Rather than focusing on the cognitive deficit of the child, their method is essentially relational and ecological in nature and addresses the whole learning environment. The discussion condensed into three central and overlapping themes, which describe their modus operandi.

4.2.1 The Pedagogy of Care and Relational Trust

The most powerful theme which materialized was the intentional development of a favourable and close-knit learning environment, which the stakeholders always compared to the perceived formal inflexibility of government schools. This cancer cuts across normal pedagogy, to be more of a sort of pedagogy of care (Noddings, 1984) [14], in which emotive stability is seen as a precondition to cognitive interactions.

The NGO teachers were nearly always addressed not as teacher (sir or madam) but as didi (sister), or bhaiya (brother). Such semantic twist is deep and it indicates a family relationship that is tinged with demands of love, caring, and individual responsibility. One of the instructors of a tea garden region said, "we are not teacher only, we are at first their well-wishers. We are familiar with their families, their economic problems. In case a child is not present, we do not think of the child skipping school, but we think of whether the kid is sick or not. Is there a problem at home?' I shall walk their line (the row of houses in the tea garden), and see what. Our lesson is that you should trust."

The NGO learning centres were observed to have an atmosphere in which the mistakes were not penalised but used as learning opportunities. A child who had difficulties reading a word was mildly cajoled by his/her didi, and other children stood by looking at the child with encouragement. This was a stark difference of what was experienced in government schools where the children were mentioned to fear chastisement due to providing wrong answers. In one FGD, one of the students said, "Here, when I do not know, didi will repeat herself many times. In large school, the teacher rebukes and transfers to another student. This secure environment will promote participation and taking risks which are critical to learning.

This theme highlights that in the case of children with stressed and sidelined backgrounds, the affective domain cannot be separated with the cognitive. The NGOs have achieved success when they consider the hierarchy of needs as suggested by Maslow that includes a sense of belonging and safety before seeking to fulfill the need of achievement. This is the trust in relation that bonds their pedagogical interventions.

4.2.2 Acting as a Linguistic and Cultural Bridge

The NGOs in Hojai deliberately and tactically use children's home languages and cultural grounds as strength and not weakness. They act not only as talented decoders, but also as ones who interpret whole sets of schemas, which are cultural, to render formal education enjoyable and relevant.

The bilingual teaching aids were common. Vocabulary would be presented in both the mother tongue (Sadri/Bengali) and the school language (Assamese) with the use of flashcards, charts, and stories. An NGO coordinator expounded on their approach: indicated that they used a bridge language approach. He said, "We begin to explain at Sadri, where we introduce the Assamese word and we apply them jointly till the child is at home. E.g. we say, Ei ta phul... aru Assomot phul ke koi ful... (this is a phul... Assemali phul nomi ful...). We are making a linguistic bridge over which they are bound to pass, without requiring them to forego their own beach."

In addition to words, NGOs localized contents to match realities on the ground. Mathematical problems with words could include finding out the weight of the tea leaves or the proportion of wage of the labourers, and thus make abstract ideas concrete. The presence of this cultural relevance further fostered a key relationship between what the child knows in schools and their lived experience, which lead to better understanding and retention.

This is a practice that is a direct implementation of Vygotskian socio-constructivism, where learning is supported through the process of aligning the new knowledge (the Assamese curriculum) with the previously existing tools of the culture of the learner (their mother tongue and their daily experiences). It goes directly to one of the sources of the learning gap- the sense of alienation experienced by the linguistic minorities in the monolingual education system.

4.2.3 Fostering Community Ownership and Reconceptualizing Parental Role

The NGOs worked by the underlying principle that communication of sustainable approach to education is not possible without the participation of the community. They took a lot of effort in redefining of the role of the community as not being a passive consumer but an active stakeholder in the educational process and an active owner.

This interaction provided the credibility to NGOs in trying to overcome marginal yet critical obstacles. As an example, a single NGO arranged a used-uniform and book drive in the community since it overlooked the economic aspect of dropping out of school due to the expensiveness of these products. This approach helped to make them more coherent and entrenched in the social life of the community.

The NGOs operate in compliance with the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner by enhancing the mesosystemic relationship between the learning center (exosystem) and the home (microsystem). It is this sense of community that gives these communities a facilitating ecosystem making learning stronger and resistant to those socio-economic forces that usually cause children to drop out. The intervention thus becomes community owned as opposed to being imposed by NGOs.

To conclude, this potent formula of strategies, i.e., establishing relational trust through the pedagogy of care, establishing cognitive access through linguistic and cultural bridging, sustaining it by embedding in deep community ownership, made the NGOs effective in Hojai. They are effective as they do not treat the child as an isolated learner, but as a member of a complicated network of social interactions.

4.3 Navigating the Precarity of Grassroots Intervention

As far as the above themes shed light on the advantages of NGO interventions, another theme that occurred with the similar gaze was the ambiance of precariousness in which those organizations had to work. The structural and systemic vulnerabilities that negatively affect their work always jeopardize the sustainability of their powerful, but weak, models.

The insecurity of funding was mentioned most of the time as the main problem. The NGOs mainly depend on donor grants or corporate sponsored social responsibility (CSR) funds which are mostly specific and quantifiable with tight deadlines. This causes the cycle of operational uncertainty. One project manager who has more than ten years of experience clarified that they are in project mode all the time informed, "A learning enhancement project is one and two year grant. We employ young people locally under contract and train them and when they are effective in the job the project is terminated. Then we take three months it takes us to write fresh proposals and our finest teachers, who must put food on the table, must seek alternative employment."

This is the root cause of high levels of burnout of the volunteer and field staff. One of the young teachers, who had earlier used the program, told us, "I love this job. I would like to see children of my society learning. But my honorarium is less than what I in a world would get as a daily wage labourer in the garden. My family wonders why I have done so. When a permanent job proposal presents, then I will be required to accept it." This feeling underscores the cruel irony of how this passion and local knowledge that render these instructors useful actually finds its exploitation by a very unsustainable economic model.

The second precarity layer is the so-called precarity paradox of scale. The most powerful tool of the NGOs is a hyper-localized, intensive and relationship-driven approach, which also happens to be the reason why their model is challenging

to prepare to the scale of the issue. One government education officer said that despite the good work they did they had this drawback when crediting his or her work: These NGOs are doing fine work in their 20 or 30 learning centres. But Hojai district contains more than 800 primary schools. They have the model of 1 instructor to 15 children and it is resource-intensive. We have one teacher for 50. The fact that they do is an indication of what is not impossible, but a reminder of how vastly we must bridge the resource disparity between us and them to offer that quality to everyone.

This is acutely aware of the NGOs. One of the founders of a non-governmental organization said, "We are not the solution; we are an illustration of what the solution might be. We are able to establish a pocket of blue oases but in order to reform the system, we need the state to pick up on what we accomplished and invest in replicating these principles which could include; lower pupil-teacher ratio, community participation, bilingual education, etc. within the mainstream."

In addition to materials, NGOs also work within the intricate system of social and bureaucratic networks. They have to work through the existing power structures of communities with meticulous care because at times they may meet opposition of local leaders who may attribute their activities to threat to their tradition or authority. Moreover, they usually have an ambivalent relationship with the school system in the government. Whereas the additional support was a welcome change by some of the government teachers, others saw NGOs as something suspicious or a criticism of their own performance. One government teacher has commented that the resources and glory of work are allocated to them because they work with a few students. She added, "We are daily handling a large class with no one to assist and are verbally abused with the outcome by blaming our achievement. This at times gives rise to some competition instead of cooperating, which negatively affects the possibility of synergy."

This precariousness theme is important to have a balanced perspective. It shows that NGOs work hard and always face danger in order to prove their efficiency. Their interventions are in a state of vulnerability, being torn between the grand demand of the community and the constraints of the short term, project based funding. There is a paradox of scale, to which every educational policy is a challenge, in the sense that it is hard to take the proven, situation-specific, happenstance successes of small scale Non Governmental Organizations and scale them globally without losing the same factors that made them successful. Sustainability of closing the learning gaps will be fostered not by the grassroots efforts alone by the NGOs but rather by designing more stable, conducive, and cooperative ecosystem this will also involve sustained state funding and formalizing their role.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the delicate and sensitive aspect of Non-Governmental Organizations as contributors towards redressing the long held or entrenched learning gaps in the elementary education system of the district of Hojai, Assam. The qualitative-dominant, mixed-methods approach allows the study to leave the metrics of success simple and discover the complex processes and relationships that form the basis of NGO interventions. The results offer the two-sided truth of the matter: the great efficiency of grassroots could be always darkened by the structural weaknesses.

This paper is based on the idea that, owing to the fact that they are ecosystem engineers, NGOs in Hojai are flourishing. They do not only offer remedial academic teachings; they directly reorganise the learning environment of the child. They reinforce microsystem with a pedagogy of care creating learning relational trust and safe places. They can heal the mesosystem as they serve as a language and cultural translator, ensuring that the curriculum can be made available to children with different languages. Lastly, they revitalize the ecosystem by creating strong ownership of the community, as parents will no longer be spectators but part of the stakeholders of the community in education of their children. It was shown by their work that the gaps in learning are essentially ecological gaps, failures in relationships that existed between the child, the school, the home, and the curriculum.

But it is a crucial work which is carried on a hazardous basis. The motifs of resource-dearth, volunteer burnout, and the paradox of scaling demonstrate a structural failure of the long-term character of educational change by the project-based funding regimes, which are perpetually short-term, and keep most NGOs operational. Their greatest advantage, their localized, intensive, and context-sensitive strategy is also their main weakness in the face of a system-wide problem.

5.1 These findings have implications that are relevant and indicate the required policy and practice changes:

5.1.1 For Policy (State Government of Assam and SSA)

- **From Parallel to Integrated Systems:** The state should move beyond viewing NGOs as temporary contractors and instead create formal frameworks for collaboration. This could include establishing a "Partnership Cell" within the SSA to identify, vet, and support credible NGOs.
- **Sustainable Funding Models:** Instead of one-off project grants, the government could explore creating a "Challenge Fund" or providing long-term, core-support grants to NGOs with a proven track record, focusing on capacity building and stability rather than just deliverables.
- **Mainstreaming Effective Practices:** The successful strategies identified—such as bilingual education, mother's committees, and child-centered pedagogies—should be systematically incorporated into state-level teacher training programs (DIETs) and curriculum frameworks.

5.1.2 For Practice (NGOs and Civil Society)

- **Advocacy through Evidence:** NGOs must enhance their documentation and move beyond anecdotal reporting to build robust, qualitative evidence of their impact and their unique methodologies. This evidence is crucial for advocating for policy change and more sustainable funding.
- **Building Consortiums:** To address the scalability paradox, NGOs working in similar regions or on similar issues could form consortiums. This would allow for shared resources, stronger advocacy, and the ability to bid for larger, more impactful projects.
- **Focus on Capacity and Exit Strategies:** While striving for sustainability, NGOs should also

consciously build the capacity of community institutions (like the Maa Committees) and develop clear exit strategies that ensure community-led initiatives can continue with minimal external support.

To sum up, the NGOs of Hojai district do not serve as a panacea of systematic malfunctions of the school environment. They are, nevertheless, irreplaceable change agents and strong demonstration locations of what is possible. They demonstrate that even in the face of the most daunting learning disjunctions, the most sensitive approach of cultural sensitivity and community collaboration can help bridge the gaps. The final task of ensuring that education in Assam is indeed strengthened is not to establish additional NGOs, but to learn on the experience of their grassroots, and to be bold enough to make these tested, humanitarian principles the very core of the Assam education project. The future of fair education in such areas as Hojai lies in cultivating an interface between creative agility of the non-profit sector and the facade ability in the state.

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