Programmatic approaches to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education: Lessons from 2020

Case study: Slam Out Loud - Arts for All

By Seep Agrawal, Partnerships and Strategic Alliances Manager, Slam Out Loud,

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Leveraging art and low-tech mediums to foster socio-emotional learning
About the programme

Slam Out Loud (SOL) uses the transformative power of performance and visual arts to help build creative confidence and skills like communication, critical thinking and empathy in children from disadvantaged communities. SOL works with professional artists and e-learning resources to help children build the skills to dream bigger, and create mediums through which to raise awareness of issues like gender, climate action and social justice - in the hope of creating more positive futures.

Through the Arts for All programme, Slam Out Loud enables free access to quality arts-based learning resources, as a contextual solution to prioritize and deliver mental wellbeing and socio-emotional learning support to the most vulnerable children. The resources are free of cost, interactive, need-sensitive and accessible in English, Hindi, and Punjabi (and translated in more regional languages). They are made available through low-tech distribution channels like WhatsApp, Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), radio and TV, for use by organisations, teachers, parents and children. Aimed at fostering socio-emotional wellbeing in children aged 7-17, the programme builds artistic confidence, self-esteem, leadership skills, creative communication and critical thinking in learners.

1 India : Arts for All, Slam Out Loud (2020) World Bank
COVID-19 Context

In India, COVID-19 related school closures have affected 320 million children, further increasing educational inequity and adding to the anxiety and stress levels of learners. Nationally, only 24% of households in India have access to the Internet. 66% of India’s population lives in villages, and only a little over 15% of rural households have access to Internet services. For urban households, the proportion is 42%. This made it challenging to reach a vast majority of children in India with remote learning. At the same time, India has more than 400 million active WhatsApp users. 53% of phone users in India use non-internet enabled phones (National Statistical Office, 2019). Given the diverse levels of access to technology, Slam Out Loud’s intervention is designed to be flexible and can be hosted across different platforms to reach children in the most under-resourced spaces, whilst also ensuring that the solution is gender- and age-responsive.

Programme response to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education

SOL leveraged their existing network and contacted multiple additional stakeholders including non-governmental organisations, schools, educators, and parents to ensure a swift response and support equitable remote art learning for students across the country. We launched a WhatsApp Channel delivering arts-based socio-emotional learning activities and through a cascaded model, each NGO, school partner and educator further distributed activities received from Slam Out Loud in their own contexts and geographies, thereby taking the reach to more than 70,000 children daily (as identified by an internal survey) across 23 Indian states and 19 countries.

Through a pilot project with the Government of Patiala, India, we were able to disseminate art activities to over 140,000 children every day, via a systemic network of Block Mentors and Teachers in the region. Additionally, SOL also partnered with Gram Vaani’s community media platform Mobile Vaani to disseminate art activities to children in an audio-visual format, thus enhancing art access for children with extremely low internet bandwidth. Partners such as the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) made Slam Out Loud’s high quality social and emotional learning (SEL)-focused content available to over 4 million children in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan while our collaboration with Leadership for Equity led to SOL’s art-based learning resources being uploaded on Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) and National Council for Teacher Education’s (NCTE) teacher training portal DIKSHA, and rolled out to 1,800,000 students in Maharashtra.

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2 How COVID-19 deepens the digital education divide in India (2020) World Economic Forum
3 Digital 2020: India
4 Get Art Activities delivered to your WhatsApp inbox free-of-cost (2020) Slam Out Loud Survey
5 Gram Vaani | Community-powered-technology
6 https://diksha.gov.in/explore/1?key=slam%20out%20loud (2020) Link is only accessible in India due to gov.in domain
“I had a chance to work with the SOL Team during the ‘Arts For All’ project held with District Administration, Patiala. The program brought a multitude of arts and experiences to the children of Patiala, thus enhancing creativity and also providing a positive learning environment during COVID-19. The program structure, having progressive lessons helped children grow while enjoying the engaging activities. The focus of the SOL team on enhancing the socio-emotional learning of children through a variety of avenues is praiseworthy. The end of project report was very comprehensive and captured the learnings really well. I wish the SOL team the best for helping unlock the potential of all children of India.”

Jagnoor Singh, Extra Assistant Commissioner (Under Training), Patiala

For children with internet access, Slam Out Loud’s at-home ‘Do-It-Yourself’ styled theatre course is also available as video content accessible on-demand and hosted on our YouTube channel. For users without internet access, Slam Out Loud provides remote learning content through Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), Radio, and Television platforms, and distributes printed materials in collaboration with other NGOs and state governments.

Leveraging the reach of WhatsApp

With 50% of India’s internet-enabled audience (over 400 million users) having access to WhatsApp, and a previous internal review finding that 75% of children in SOL’s programs have access to their parent’s WhatsApp accounts for at least one hour in a day, WhatsApp presented itself as the most immediate medium to reach children. Additionally, deploying WhatsApp content in various formats such as text, image, video, and voice recordings made for more equitable learning opportunities for children with diverse learning skills and needs.

SOL also leveraged their existing repository of resources and content principles to address the remote learning needs of children during COVID-19. These resources were customised during the school closures for delivery over low tech platforms such as WhatsApp and IVRS. Customisations were made to cater to the limitations of the platforms (the amount and nature of content that can be shared), data bandwidth and app access.

Creating content that is context-relevant

Additionally, SOL ensured the activities and tasks it was creating and sending out to students daily were contextual, addressed current challenges, required few resources, and could be accomplished easily at home. Through knowledge partnerships with Girl Rising and World’s Largest Lesson, Slam Out Loud focused on content that is centered around gender, climate action, and social justice, to ensure children learn about and are equipped to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

7 DIY Theatre - YouTube (2020) Slam Out Loud
8 Slam Out Loud YouTube Channel
9 Art for All Booklet (2020) Slam Out Loud
10 WhatsApp reaches 400 million users in India (2019) TechCrunch
Programme outcome

Through sustainable partnerships with over 610 NGOs and educational institutions across the world, Arts For All reached 4.7 million children, across 23 Indian States and 19 countries. During SOL's eight-week pilot project with the Government of Patiala, children created more than 460 artworks and 120 response videos. During the pandemic, SOL has enabled the creation of more than 100,000 artworks, comprising audio-visual responses of children’s poems and stories.

“I love doing these activities and seeing all the art that other children create. I am excited to show what all I learnt when the schools open and see if our teacher can make my class do some of these activities.”

Iqra (Student), Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Learnings and challenges

Art learning through low tech platforms was not being used at scale before this point. Slam Out Loud created a scaled market through institutional as well as government partnerships such as with the Government of Patiala, Punjab, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Government of Gujarat, Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), Gram Vaani, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Leadership for Equity which enabled us to leverage systemic partnerships and disseminate art learning resources to children in respective states where these partners were operating. Child protection regulations vary across different countries. Since Slam Out Loud’s primary beneficiaries were children, it was paramount to ensure that parental permissions and individual data protection was focused upon.

Slam Out Loud faced the challenge of content requirement steadily increasing with the programme process. This was mitigated by consistently introducing new volunteer cohorts who specialised in content creation, along with subsequent capacity building of existing volunteers. Application Programming Interface/Interactive Voice Response (API/IVR) are largely tech-heavy platforms that lead to project costs shooting up. Given the financial constraints in which Slam Out Loud was operating, we relied on institutional partnerships to cover part of their costs. For example, a tech based non-profit (assisting the setting up of a WhatsApp API), subsidised rates from an IVR vendor and implementation partners to pay for printing and distribution of physical copies of learning resources.
Looking beyond the immediate COVID-19 crisis

Individuals and organisations in 19 countries already subscribe to the Arts for All intervention and it is also largely adaptable across any space within the English-speaking population. Countries can also further customise the programme to suit their context and translate content into languages other than English, with support from Slam Out Loud in designing or implementing the programme on a needs basis. The learning content is age-appropriate and applicable to children across contexts.

Slam Out Loud believes that the Arts For All programme will continue to be sustained beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Through government level and institutional partnerships, SOL aims to advocate for socio-emotional learning being adopted as a key component in educational systems, and provide a replicable example of how low tech resources can be used to implement arts-based remote learning. To address the post-pandemic challenges of learner loneliness and/or anxiety, as well as to educate learners about the issues that face them (diversity, intercultural challenges, climate action, social justice and more), SOL believes that arts-based learning will play a pivotal role in children’s wellbeing, and a safe space for expression to young learners, adolescents, and out-of-school children, thus aiding the development of 21st century skills.
More resources to explore:


The Possibilities of Art in Socio-Emotional Learning: Curating Young Learners’ Well Being (2020) UNESCO MGIEP

What Happens when Children Engage with Art? (2020) WISE, Qatar Foundation

Art in your inbox (2020) Mid Day India


DIY Poetry - YouTube (2020) Slam Out Loud

DIY Storytelling - YouTube (2020) Slam Out Loud

Contact the authors:

Seep Agrawal, seep.a@slamoutloud.com
Partnerships and Strategic Alliances Manager, Slam Out Loud

Jigyasa Labroo, jigyasa@slamoutloud.com
Co-Founder/CEO, Slam Out Loud

Gaurav Singh, gaurav@slamoutloud.com
Co-Founder/COO, Slam Out Loud
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Page 6 - © Slam Out Loud. Visual representation of the Arts for All programme in action.

Page 7 (left) - © Slam Out Loud. Representative poster of the first WhatsApp channel launched by Slam Out Loud during the pandemic, that garnered over 610 subscribers, cumulatively reaching 70,000 children in just a few weeks.

Page 7 (top right) - © Ritu/Slam Out Loud. Powerful artwork created by a learner as part of the Arts For All project.

Page 7 (bottom right) - © Ayush/Slam Out Loud. Powerful artworks created by a learner as part of the Arts For All project.