

MMC Observations

Visited site at Planet Godrej and Raheja construction sites in Mumbai. The first one is a temporary structure with asbestos roofs and sides while second one is a regular structure.

Children ages 0-2, 3-5 and 5-8 are segregated into separate rooms in both sites. In PG, there were about 7-15 children in each room (with smaller numbers corresponding to younger children). There are concrete floors, children sleep on mats. 1 teacher in each room. Children were drawing/coloring – they do academics in morning and arts/crafts in the afternoon. Some of the younger children seem malnourished. The older children did not seem to be particularly good at language or math skills. Some of the 5-8 age group do not go to school because the parents are new and not ready to send them to school, they have not had much prior education and hence cannot enter a grade directly. Parents not able to send children to school or do not have the resources/knowledge to take the necessary steps to admit them to school, take them there, etc. MMC helps them in this process. The Raheja center even had a computer but I am not sure whether it is being used – the answers to my question were not clear. The older children danced for me in the Raheja center and the younger children were drawing, coloring, playing with clay.

One of the teachers (Sunita) at PG had trained only last year. She had taken the initiative to start a crèche/school in the construction site even before MMC came on the scene. She is the wife of a construction worker and had taken the initiative to start a school with a few children. When MMC approached her about training before starting to teach (all teachers have to be trained first), she was reluctant because she wondered how she going to travel to the site for training, what she would do with her small 3 year old, etc. But MMC said they would take care of her child in the crèche. She says this experience really built her confidence – she learned to travel by herself (simple things like buying a train/bus ticket, etc.) and she has also learned something about money, a savings account, etc. She sounded very confident and she said this happened because of the help of MMC and her husband was also supportive. She was initially apprehensive when MMC came on the scene because she was worried that they will take over the school and she will not be able to teach anymore because she is not trained. Instead, she has been pleasantly surprised.

Devika told me that builders are supporting more and more of the expenses although it depends on the builder. PG center is supported 90% by the builder. But most builders not very enthusiastic about supporting it and so less than 10% of the construction sites have such centers, as per Devika. Builders react better to positive rather than negative inputs.

Overall, my impression is that MMC is doing good work given the circumstances and constraints. I am not sure how much learning occurs in the formal sense at these centers for the older children but they provide a safe environment and there is some informal learning. Given the transient nature of some of the population and the fact that children of different ages are in the same class, it is not easy to achieve significant formal learning.