

## Field Diary: High Quality Low Cost Private Education in Lucknow



Posted by Grace Chao and Rochana Cooray in [Impact Advisory](#)

To learn about Athena's work to provide high quality low cost private education in peri-urban Uttar Pradesh, click [here](#).

### Purpose of the Field Visit

This field visit sought to determine which development blocks possess the greatest need for high quality low cost private education. The project focuses on rural and peri-urban Lucknow, the capital of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. It also sought to determine the ability and willingness to pay for an alternative education option by [City Montessori School](#), through a Social Impact Bond (SIB). The school identified three rural and peri-urban clusters, according to location and number of private and government schools.

### Issue 1: Quality and Affordability

Private schools are increasingly outpacing government schools in terms of number of locations in many parts of India. Similarly, parents are growing weary of the unreliable quality of education in government schools. While most private schools offer low tuition fees, parents remain unsatisfied with the quality of education. Therefore, such schools do not offer value for money, especially for poor, rural families who rely on inconsistent income from unstable daily wage labor. These families often have no other choice but to send their children to these schools. Those who cannot afford even a low-cost private education resort to government schools. These government schools suffer from high teacher absenteeism, lack of motivation and scarce resources. This results in poor learning outcomes, which are below state and national averages in student performance and achievement.

### Issue 2: Accessibility

In addition to this, government and private schools are often far away from where most households and children live. This adds expensive transportation costs to already expensive monthly private school tuition fees. While the government has passed the Right to Education Act, it does not have the capacity to provide a free and fair education to all. The only option available to students is to pay for low-quality private education or discontinue their schooling altogether. This presents a pressing need to provide access to low-cost high-quality private education in peri-urban Lucknow.

### The Project: City Montessori School (CMS) Satellite Program

City Montessori School (CMS) is widely regarded as one of the best private schools in India. Having successfully operated in Lucknow for over 50 years, CMS wishes to provide low-cost high-quality education to the poorest communities in Uttar Pradesh. As such, CMS, in partnership with Athena Infonomics, plans to design a Social Impact Bond (SIB) to fund three affordable, high-quality private schools in peri-urban Lucknow. The SIB will leverage the CMS's resources to provide high quality educational programs at a highly subsidized rate.



Akshansh (CMS) and Rochana explain the proposed CMS Satellite School concept to a group of families.

The intended outcomes to be sought by the outcome funder include: improved learning outcomes, personality development, and technological proficiency. To gain better insight into the current education environment and the options and quality available to these children, a field visit was planned. This focused on the Mohanlalganj, Bhillwal and Safabad areas, comprising informal surveys of rural and peri-urban households to gain better insight into the current education environment and the options and quality available to these children. Along with Grace Chao and Rochana Cooray from John Hopkins SAIS/Athena, Akshansh Srivastava from City Montessori School joined the field visit.

### Village Exploration: Understanding Ability and Willingness to Pay

To better understand the on the ground reality, the team visited rural and peri-urban households to survey the educational landscape in these areas. This looked at private and government schools and what options are available. It also sought to gauge satisfaction with the current quality of education and resources available, while compare current educational options to CMS's proposed alternative. The team's informal conversations also gauged families' ability and willingness to pay for low cost private education, offering superior quality.



Akshansh (CMS) and Rochana ask two families about the quality and availability of education options available in the area.

To assess the need in the local area, the team gathered a series of information. This included: number of children in each family, number of school age children attending school regularly, the number and type of schooling options available in the community. It also identified each family's proximity to existing institutions parent and child perceptions of quality of presently available schooling options. To accurately assess affordability, it also determined occupation, whether said occupation provides a consistent income, average daily and monthly household income, along with ability and willingness to pay for another affordable high quality private education option from CMS.

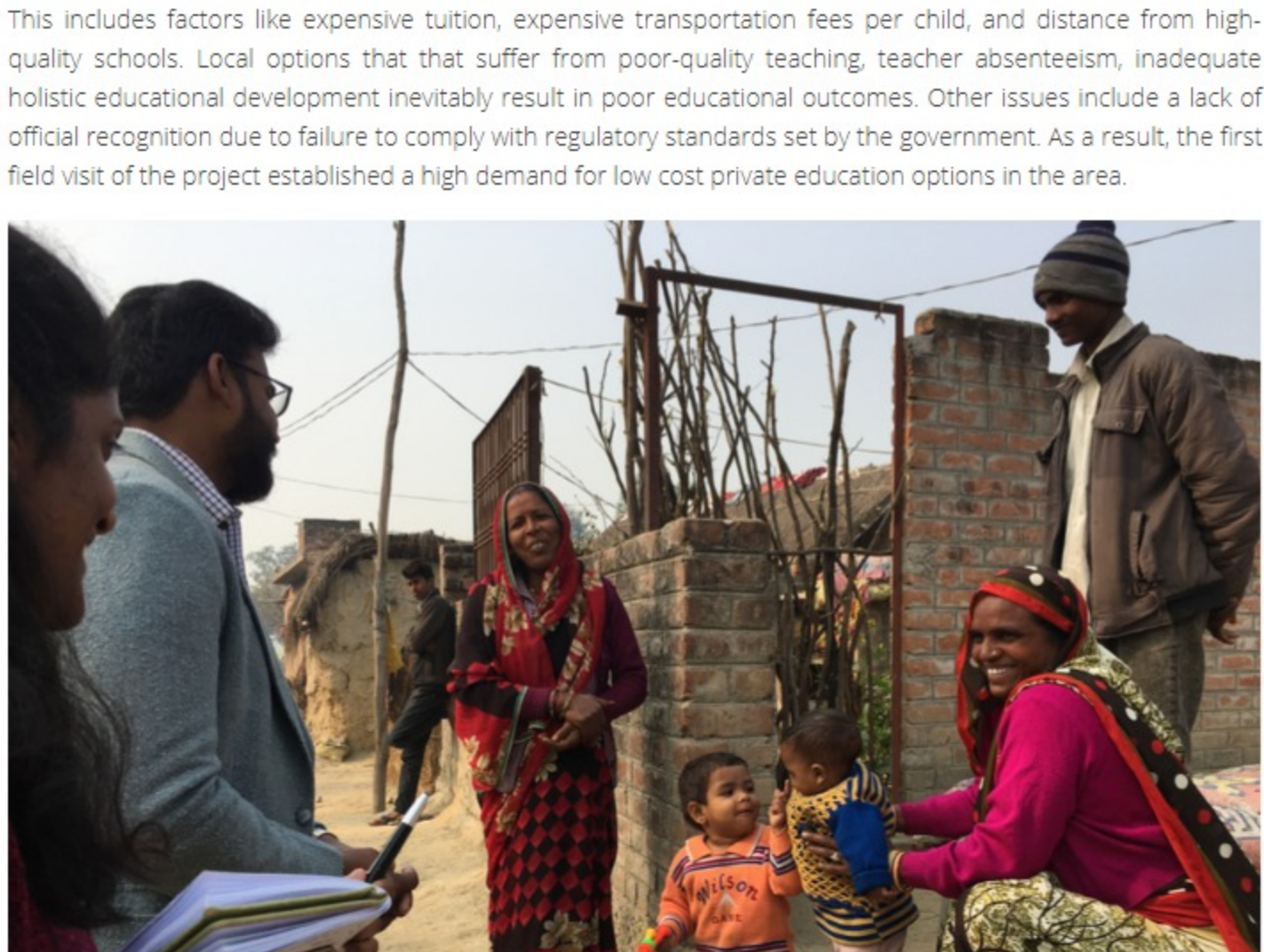
### Takeaways

The field visits revealed that these localities desperately lack high-quality school options (government/private). They also revealed that good quality schools are inaccessible. Most families are so far away, resulting in exorbitant transportation costs in addition to school fees. A majority of parents expressed immense dissatisfaction with the low-quality, high-cost education options available to their children. They were excited by the prospect of an alternative investment of their limited income – especially given that an overwhelming number of families rely on inconsistent daily wage labor that brings in. This averages 150-300 INR (\$3.30-\$4.70 USD) daily.



Akshansh (CMS) and Rochana ask a mother if about her satisfaction with the quality of education her child receives.

For many of these large families, there are several factors that compel them to settle for poor quality education. This includes factors like expensive tuition, expensive transportation fees per child, and distance from high-quality schools. Local options that suffer from poor-quality teaching, teacher absenteeism, inadequate holistic educational development inevitably result in poor educational outcomes. Other issues include a lack of official recognition due to failure to comply with regulatory standards set by the government. As a result, the first field visit of the project established a high demand for low cost private education options in the area.

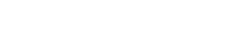


A mother and a grandmother express excitement at the prospect of an affordable high-quality private education option. They asked if they could also attend the new school.

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### About Grace Chao and Rochana Cooray



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