SPOTLIGHT REPORT

2020

Acknowledgement

NCE would like to thank all the organisations and academicians who have contributed to the consolidation of this report. NCE would like to convey its gratitude to the writers of the chapters; Ms. Annie Namala, Mr.Satyendra Kumar, Ms.Poornima Ghosh, Ms. Archana Dwivedi, Dr. Sukanya Bose, Mr. Priyanta Ghosh, Ms. Amrita, Dr Prachi Patil, Ms. Arkja Kutiyala, Mr. Yash Johri, Ms. Nisha Caire and Mr.Ramakant Rai.

We would also like to thank all our partner and teachers' organisations who shared their suggestions and views on the report.

NCE is also thankful to its regional partner, ASPBAE, for all their support.

Rampal Singh

General Secretary, NCE India

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights the status of Sustainable development Goals:4 Quality Education for All (SDG4) in India, various themes. The report has been prepared through a collaborative process in which several Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) and Teachers union members have participated. Several national, sub national and grassroots level organisations have been a part of the consultative process. The findings have been fined tuned and further endorsed through several consultative processes both at national and state level. The report analyses the status of education in India, challenges in achieving targets of SDG:4 and based on it, makes recommendations for future policy designs.

Country and Education Context

Population: 1,350,438,098

Child Population: 39 percent of the total population

The urban literacy rates in the adult age which is categorized as 15 years and above persons is at 82.8% (M= 88.3%, F= 76.9%) while in rural areas in the same age group is quite low at 62.6%

India is the country with the highest number of out of school children in the world.

Education for 6-14 years of age is free and compulsory.

The share of Union government spending on education in total budget has decreased from 4.6 per cent to 3.5per cent in last three years.

More than 150,000 government schools have been closed/merged in the last three years.

Governments roll out of SDGs: policy mandate, coordination mechanism, indicator, funding commitment

After the SDGs were adopted, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, was assigned the responsibility of overseeing their implementation. A three-year action plan for 2017-18 to 2019-20 had been published by NITI Aayog to recommend policy changes and programmes for action. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) was entrusted with the task of developing National Monitoring Framework for SDGs. A final indicator framework, with a total of 306 indicators, has been developed by MoSPI. Recently, the Cabinet of Ministers of Government of India also gave its go-ahead to establish a National Monitoring Framework on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A high-level steering committee will periodically review and refine the National Indicator Framework (NIF) to monitor SDGs with associated targets. Out of 306 indicators, there are 20 indicators in SDG4 Out of these 20 indicators, only 2 indicators explicitly talks about gender (in terms of male and female). In addition only one

indicator specifically talks about children with disabilities. Surprisingly, none of the indicators talks specifically about the socially deprived groups like SC/STs/Religious minorities

Government has also undertaken the process of mapping it schemes and have aligned it to corresponding SDGs. Against the 62 indicators in 2018 SDG mapping by NITI Aayog, in 2019 NITI Aayog has increased the number of indicators to be measured to 100, out of which only 9 are dedicated to Goal 4: Quality Education. According to the VNR presented by government of Indian in HLPF, technology driven education is a pillar of Atma Nirbhar Bharat, under which government has mentioned three programs PM e-vidya for multimode access to digital education, Manodarpan- a initiative for psycho social development of kids and New National Curriculum and pedagogical framework for school, early childhood and teachers

While measuring the country's performance on the SDG India Index and Dashboard, for SDG 4 and its disaggregated nine national indicators, the overall Index Score for the country is 58, and ranges between 19 and 81 for the States, and between 43 and 80 for the UTs, on a scale of 0-100. This indicates that the distance to target covered so far by India in quality education remains 58, with a significant variation among the subnational units.

State Level Initiatives

States and UTs have created discrete institutional structures for implementation of SDGs in their own specific contexts. All States and UTs have identified and tasked nodal departments for implementation of SDGs. Departments dealing with planning and finance have been given this nodal responsibility. Several States have also created nodal mechanisms within every department and also at the district levels to make coordination, convergence and data management more precise and predictable.

All States have also created professional units on SDGs in the shape of an SDG cell in the nodal department with personnel having technical expertise and experience. Key activities of the SDG cells/teams include: preparing knowledge products and progress reports, organising capacity building programmes, providing inputs as required from time to time and playing a support-oriented role in interventions on SDGs. As many as six States/UTs (Assam, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Haryana) have matured renditions of such unit with full-fledged centres of excellence in collaboration with support organisations like UNDP

Challenges in achieving SDGs

Indian government has taken positive efforts in developing mechanisms for monitoring and implementation of SDGs in the country. However, the mechanism needs more thinking and evolvement to achieve the full potential. This model does not factor in the interconnectedness

and interdependence of SDGs, by prioritising only a few of them will only work as a quick fix, instead of long-term sustainable change.

The SDG Index created by NITI Ayog miss out a number of targets under different goals. The SDG Index is being used as a 'performance index'. It is becoming more evident day by day that the SDG Index would result, either formally or informally, in 'performance linked financing' among states and among districts within states which might lead to worsening of condition of backward districts. The financing of SDGs monitoring initiatives remain a big challenge. Though positive steps have been taken by the government like undertaking a mapping exercise of the government run schemes and aligning it to various SDGs; there is a further need to have well-defined and clear plans on financing for SDGs.

The policies adopted by governments both union and states are more focussed towards 'outcomes' (which can be clearly seen in the action plan developed by NITI aayog) leading to weakening of already existing progressive policies. For example, in the context of education, the action plan talks about doing away with the norms on inputs like teachers' qualification and infrastructural norms and focuses more on the outcome. While outcome is important, the means of achieving outcome is through inputs.

Interestingly, few states have taken the initiative at the state level and such steps at national level will be a welcome step. The limited engagement of CSOs in strengthening the monitoring and implementation of SDGs leads to narratives remaining lopsided. It would be pragmatic to engage more stakeholders at all levels and define their roles in policy making processes and implementation of SDGs.

Discussion on the most critical issues

India is the home for the highest number of out of school children. Though there have been efforts to make education accessible to all by the government, there are still more than 30 million out of school children. India also accounts for the highest number of stunted children in the world and Early Childhood Care and Education is still not a legal entitlement.

Lack of qualified teachers remains critical at all levels of education. There is a gap of more than 900,000 teachers in the elementary and secondary education itself. Even in the context of higher education, this remains a challenge as almost 45 percent of the teaching jobs are lying vacant. Further, since more than 90 percent of the Teachers' Training Institutes are privatised, the poor accountability of these institutes severely affects the quality of teachers.

Budgetary allocations made to the education are far below the global as well as nationally accepted benchmark. **Public expenditure on education in India was 2.7 percent of the GDP in 2017-18**. According to 2021-2022 Budget presented by Indian government, Funds for schools slashed **Education** and higher **education** sectors have been allotted Rs 93,224 crore, against Rs 99,311 crore last year. Further there is a huge systemic lacuna which leads to immense underutilisation of resources. There is a rampant growth in privatisation of education which are not just exclusionary, but also leads to weakening of the public education system. There is a need to curb this privatisation which creates and strengthens the already existing hierarchies in the society.

It is appreciable that a lot of efforts have been taken by the government for the skilling of youth. However, the policies need to broaden their approach. Currently the focus is more on developing a pool of workers to be able to join the industries. What is required is some focus on enhancing the avenues for youth employment. Non-traditional livelihoods still do not find a place in the government programmes. Even when the literacy rate in India is very low, there are no specific programmes run by the government.

The definition of 'adults' is also very ambiguous which further dilutes the focus. The literacy rate among transgender population is at 56.07 % which is not only lower than the average literacy rate among general population but is even lower than the literacy rates among females in the country. The government's step of technically acknowledging the Third Gender is appreciable, however there need for more concrete strategies or programmes to include them in education at par with all other children. The education system, including teachers, lack understanding and skills of addressing the challenges and aspirations of children who do not fall in the binary of male and female. Equity still is not in the centre stage while framing any policy. In India, it is the most marginalised sections (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, transgender, disabled, girls etc.) which are left behind and these sections need immediate attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a negative impact on school going children. According to various estimated by international and national agencies, the drop out numbers can be in a range of 20-25 million students, of which a big chunk would be girls and students from economically and socially backward communities. Not only this the sudden change from moving to physical classes to digital one created a shock with long terms impacts on both children learning and teacher's abilities to teach.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Introduction

According to the Census of India 2011, India has 165.4 million children in the age group 0-6 years, out of which 121 million live in rural areas and 44 million in urban areas. This age group constitutes 13.59 percent of the population, which is almost one seventh of the total population. The *Constitution of India, 1949* under Article 45, direct the State for children from 0 to 6 years of age to be provide free childcare and education for all children. In the wider context, Article 39 (f) directed the State to ensure 'that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that

childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment'.

The Supreme Court of India, in its historic '*Unni Krishnan, J.P. & Ors. v. State of Andhra Pradesh & Ors. 1993*' judgement, declared that the provisions in Article 45, covering all children until they complete the age of 14 years, is a fundamental right. This landmark judgement lay the foundation of 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002, which inserted article 21(a) in the Indian Constitution, which made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children in 6 to 14 age group. India has also pledged its support to Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG 4 that aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" has a specific target dedicated to ECCE. Target 4.2 states that by 2030, all signatories must "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."

Apart from being a constitutional and international duty, it is also a well-established fact in Neuroscience that 85% of the brain is developed by the time the child turns 6, hence this is a critical and sensitive period in human growth. A study conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) titled, "The impact of pre-school education on retention in primary grades" on 30,000 children illustrated the strong correlation among exposure to pre-school education with retention rates, attendance rates, and most significantly learning outcomes in primary school and beyond.

This chapter will examine the current status of ECCE in India by assessing the international commitments and constitutional provisions along with the impact of various policies, budget allocation, implementation and other factors that have had an impact on the same.

International Conventions and National Commitments

India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 that recognised all persons below the age of 18 years as children and provides for the basic rights of children which are fundamental to their development and education for all. Declaration 1992 (Article V of the EFA declaration acknowledges that learning begins at birth and calls for early childhood care and initial education for all children) besides the SDGs.

The Constitution of India too contains several provisions for ensuring growth and development of children including Article 15 (3) that provides for affirmative action for women and children and Article 21 within which the right to food, nutrition and health have been judicially crafted. In the Directive principles of State Policy, Article 39 (e) stipulates the states to "ensure that the health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused"; Article 39 (f) directs states to ensure that "the children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that the childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material

abandonment; “Article 45 states that “the State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years;” Article 42 directs states to ensure - “Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief ” This assumes importance from the perspective of a child as it ensures healthy birth and nurturing; Article 47 states that the ‘States shall work towards raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties’.

RTE and ECCE

The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 that provides for free and compulsory education for children within the age group of six to fourteen, does not make ECCE an integral component and leaves it to the discretion of the states. Section 11 of the Act addresses ECCE in the following manner:“*with a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years. The appropriate government may make necessary arrangements for providing free preschool education for such children*.” Hence there is no mandate in the RTE for ECCE which leaves it to the discretion of states.

ECCE: Policies and Programs and Current Status

According to NFHS 4 (2015-2016) there are 159 million children in the age group of 0-6 , out of these 21% are undernourished , 36% are under-weight and 38% do not receive full immunization. In past several decades government has implemented several programs to achieve the universal childcare and education. Will discuss few of them now.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

The ICDS was established by the Government of India in 1975 following the National Policy for children (1974).It provides supplementary nutrition,pre-school non-formal education, nutrition and health education, immunization, health check-up and referral services through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) run by an Anganwadi worker (AWW) and a helper. ICDS has been the primary vehicle to implement ECCE services in the country ever since.

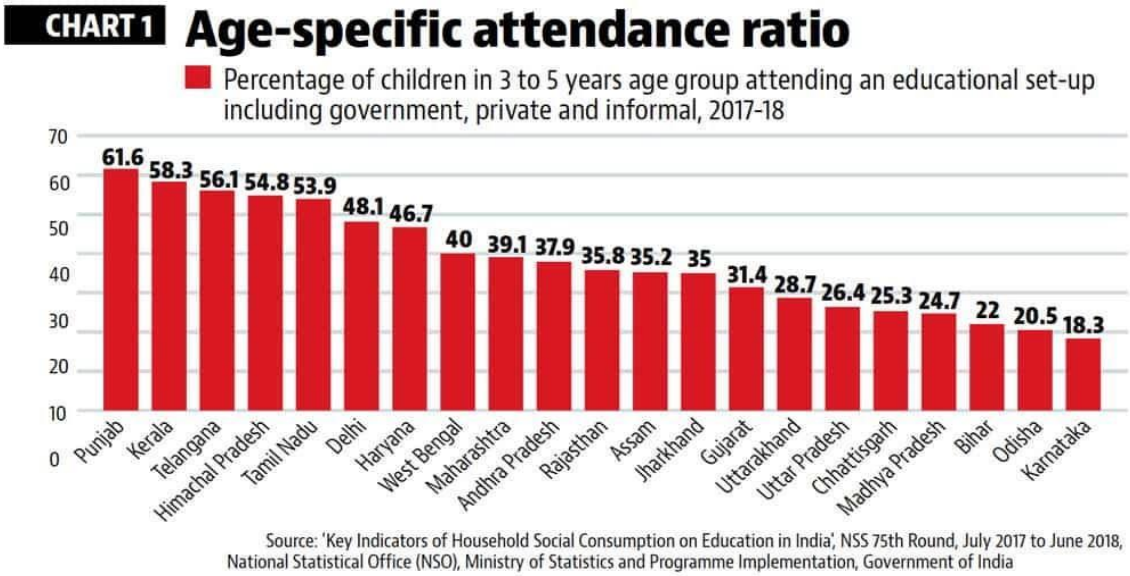
As per the latest available official statistics total of 13.77 lakh anganwadi centres are operational in the country with a strength of 13.02 lakh AWWs and 11.84 lakh helpers, while 6.9% posts for anganwadi workers and 7.63% for helper are vacant in the country. [1]3,62,940 anganwadi centres do not have toilets facilities and 1,59,568 anganwadi centres do not have drinking water facilities.[2] Further, the government data indicates that 12% of AWCs continue to operate from kuccha (dilapidated/non-permanent) buildings. [3]Under the “saksham

[1] https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/government-plans-to-upgrade-2-5-lakh-anganwadi-centres-in-next-5-years-women-and-child-dev

[2] Union Women and Child Development Minister in her response to the Lok Sabha on December 13.

[3] https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/staff-shortage-hits-anganwadi-services-wcd-report/story-vqmui2RkZLhgCuqFGxDTnI.html

anganwadi" scheme the WCD plans to upgrade 2.5 Lakh anganwadis in the next 5 years, however currently the project remains in the planning stage . The AWCs lack the resources human and physical to provide for the holistic development of children. Due to the inability of the state to provide a quality environment for ECCE many parents are moving away from AWCs to a more formal pre-school education system. Between 2017-18, 28 % of children (within the age group of 3-5 years) in rural areas and 48% in urban areas attended some kind of educational institutes other than the anganwadis. This share is more than 50% for Punjab, Kerala, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh as seen in the figure below



In 2016-17 only 12% of government school children in class 1 have been to a preschool.[4] This highlights the gap between the rich and poor and raises questions on equity. There are 60 million children under 6 years, living in poverty in India - at construction sites, on the streets, in the slums. Their parents are part of the informal labor force, working for a daily wage, without any benefits from employers or social security from the state. The families have no access to quality healthcare, childcare and education. The children, in their most foundational years, suffer neglect, abuse and deprivation from the essentials of developmental care

National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2013

This was the last policy of the government specifically focussed on ECCE. The framework of the policy included the National Curriculum Framework and Quality Standards for ECCE. Although the policy emphasized on conversion of AWCs into AWCs-cum-crèches with a planned early stimulation component and interactive environment for children below 3 years age, no significant progress has been made in this regard over the subsequent years. Therefore,

[4] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/just-2-of-first-graders-in-ktaka-govt-schools-attended-preschool-mhrd-data/articleshow/70267674.cms

despite having several progressive components, the challenges to implementation still remain as a substantial number of children are not enrolled in pre-schools.

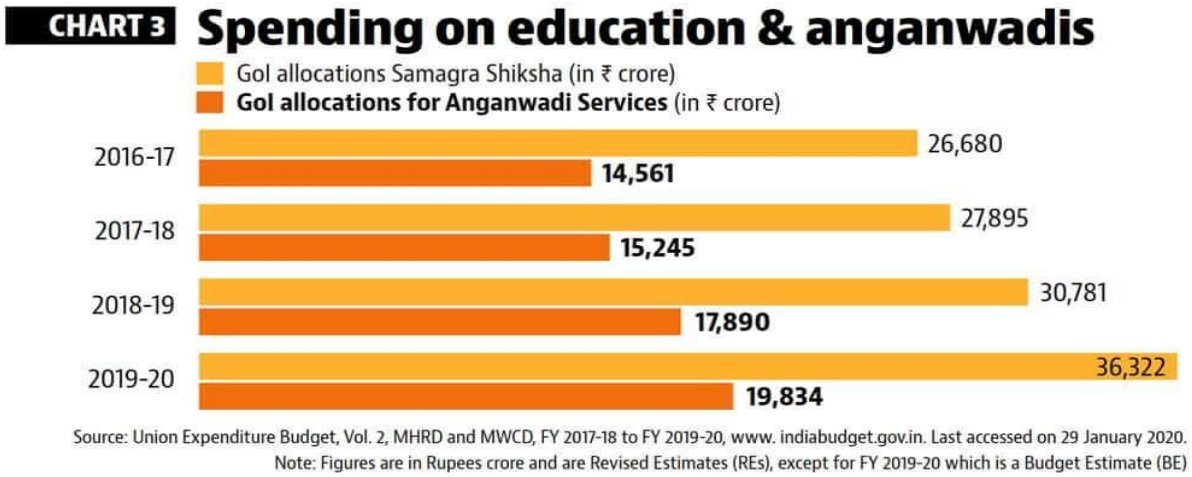
National Education Policy 2019

NEP 2019 recommended extension of RTE from 3 to 18 years, leaving children between births to 3 outside the ambit of RTE. Another recommendation of the policy was the co-location of pre-schools and AWCs with primary schools. The Samagra Shiksha, an integrated scheme for school education introduced in 2018 by MHRD also called for the continuum from pre-school to senior secondary level and prescribed states to co-locate the existing ICDS centres within primary schools. By June 2019, 18% of AWCs across the country were brought within school campuses with proportions varying from as high as 60% in Uttar Pradesh to less than 1% in some of the north- eastern states[5]. There are concerns that such collocations may lead to flouting of the 500-metre norm laid down by the National ECCE policy 2013. The NEP 2019 recommended not making hard separation of age in the ECCE category, making 3-8 years a single pedagogical unit. This may be detrimental to the demographic as a multi-level, multi-age, developmentally appropriate curriculum of different ages is required for conducive learning at this stage. The policy recommendations may lead to a formalization of ECCE. Further, the Policy fails to recognize the pre-school teachers under the teacher training program and does not recommend provisions to build the capacities of the frontline staff beyond 6 months training or a one year diploma if the staff has not completed 10+2.These trainings too shall be conducted through DTH or smart phones that raises serious questions of quality and accessibility. The document also remained silent on after school hour protection and daycare. The recent policies of the government regarding ECCE reflect a shift towards a more formal schooling system.

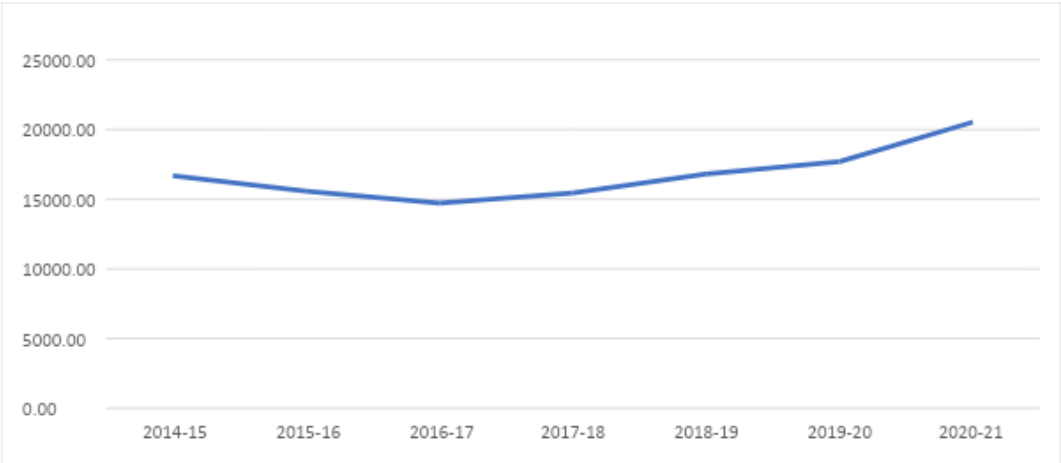
Budget

The fiscal architecture is an important area of concern in ECCE. The budget allocation for ECCE is currently made under ICDS. The figure below compares the allocation of funds by the government to the allocation for anganwadis. The proportion of funds allocated for the anganwadis in 2018-19 were the highest in comparison to the Samagra Shiksha.

[5] https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/will-children-get-attention-in-budget/story-CT1MmqYAwDMIYJYxvnqTXO.html

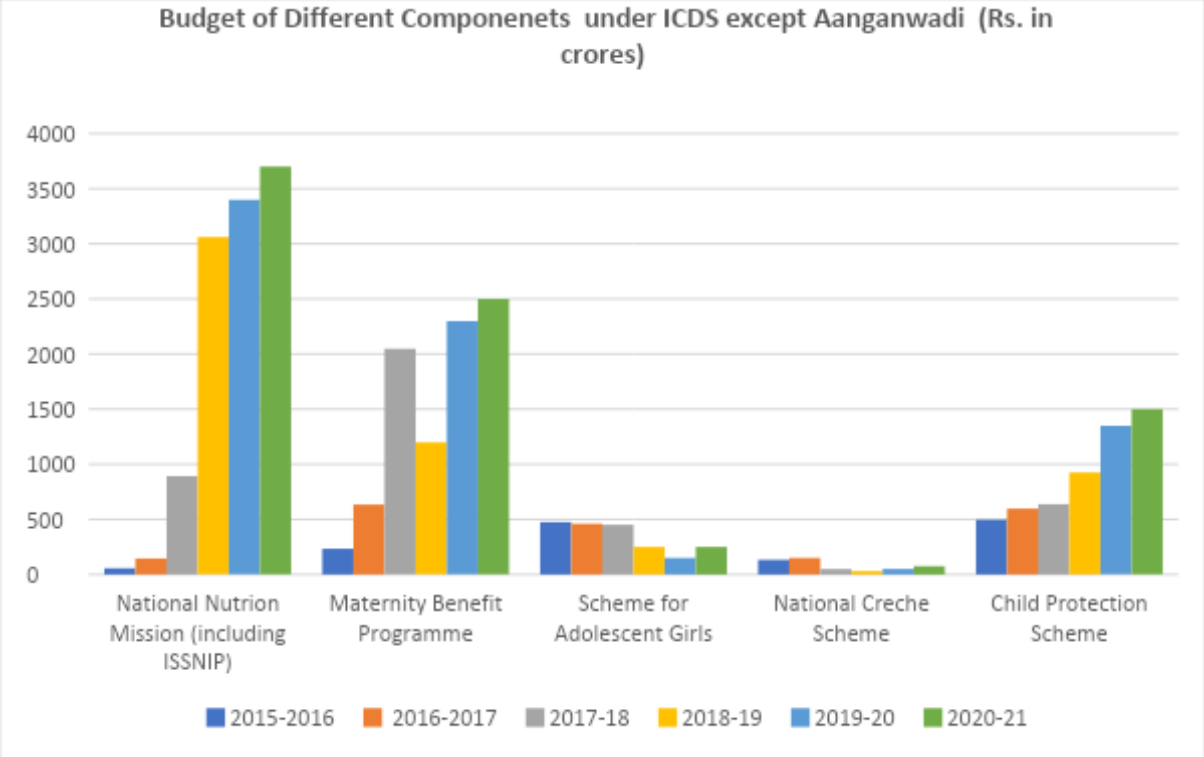


As reflected in the figure below, the GoI expenditure (nominal) on ICDS went down steadily over the course of four years from 2014-15 to 2016-17. Even though there was an increase in nominal expenditure in the year 2017-18, it was barely enough as it was even less than 2015-16. There has been a rise in budget for Anganwadis in ICDS from 2018-19 by 2019-2020 the revised budget reached 17704.5 crores while the estimated budget for 2020-21 is Rs. 20532.38 crores. Total ICDS allocations have remained much lower than the estimated demand by the MWCD for several years.



*2014-15 to 2019-20 is revised estimate and 2020-21 is budget estimate.

Assessing the budget allocation for ICDS except the Anganwadis in the figure below, it is clear that only the budget allocated for the National Nutrition Mission and Child Protection Scheme have shown a steady increase over time. The government's negligence towards the National Creche and that for adolescent girls is visible by the low budget allocation. With 47% of the total ICDS budget dedicated to the supplementary nutritional program, the fiscal resources available for early learning and other important aspects of child growth remain low.



Non-Governmental and Private providers for ECCE

According to government estimates, approximately 3 to 20 million children participate in ECCE programs provided by NGOs and 10 million children participate in ECCE programs provided by private organizations. In the absence of state intervention such institutions rely on user fees for its functioning. While some of these institutions specifically target children from middle-class and elite backgrounds, the others focus on the children of the poor. Unlike elementary and secondary education, ECCE programs are not regulated or standardized by the government. Therefore, there is a large discrepancy in the ways in which ECCE providers deal with curricula, education quality, and teachers' qualifications. The majority of ECCE programs provided by private educational institutions are unofficial education programs without the government's supervision and instruction, and these are gradually expanding due to an increasing interest among parents in ECCE. Many non-state interventions fail to provide for nutrition and other auxiliary services despite charging user fees.

Status of Care-givers

The National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) recommends at least 2 hours of the day to be spent on learning, several studies have found that much of the time of Anganwadi workers is spent instead on the provision of the Supplementary Nutrition Programme and the daily maintenance of data.

The AWWs and the Anganwadi helpers (AHs) are not salaried employees of the government and are given an honorarium instead. The honoraria is shared between the state and central government and thus their incomes show regional variance. Several representations to the state

and central government have been made to scrap the monthly honorarium system and introduce a monthly wage system but not enough progress has been made. The honoraria for AWWs and AHs was increased from Rs 3000 to Rs 4500 and Rs 1500 to Rs 2250 respectively after 7 years.This is lower than the minimum wage for unskilled workers. Given the extensive range of community and health services they perform, they cannot be dismissed as unskilled workers.

The training of the AWWs and AHs also needs attention and constant upgradation. With the onset of Corona, many AWWS and AHs have been assigned extra duties and often they are not even equipped to work. No training or counselling for the new job has been conducted and the workers are expected to work without masks, sanitizers and other essential protective gear that is required when working in the frontline in the situation of a pandemic.Reports of Anganwadi workers losing their lives after getting infected have surfaced from Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh.In an arbitrary move the Uttar Pradesh government has forcibly retired Anganwadi workers above the age of 62, across 62 districts.

Status of ECCE after the onset of Corona

ICDS has been at the heart of tackling India's malnutrition problem through the Anganwadi centres. Due to Corona,the anganwadi centres were shut. Although dry rations such as Wheat and Chana Dal were being distributed to the people, it has become harder to ensure that the young children get appropriate nutrition. There is a possibility of the other family members sharing the ration as due to a lockdown many people have lost their source of livelihood. Whatsapp is being used as a medium to dispense information regarding scheduled health check-ups and immunization services.

With the constant rise in cases, many individuals are terrified to go to public clinics for immunization. The massive exodus of migrant workers has further caused problems as it has made it even harder for the anganwadi workers to track vaccination records .This may lead to a delay in immunization and many children and pregnant mothers being left out. The migrant exodus from cities to villages, however, has made it harder for anganwadi workers to track vaccination records and ensure that no child is missed out. Data released by National Health mission points towards an increase in unattended births during the lockdown. The data also revealed a 34% drop in the number of measles vaccines administered across India between February and March, and a 69% drop between March 2019 and March 2020. Since the measles vaccine must be given to a child between nine and twelve months of age, the numbers suggest that a large number of babies may have missed out on timely measles vaccines.

SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA

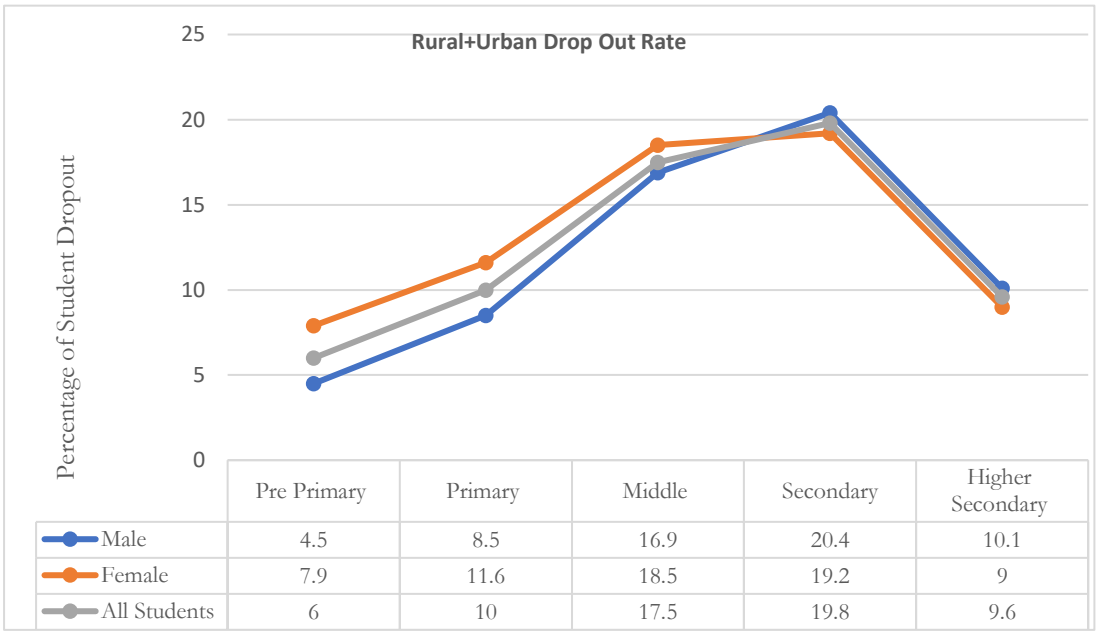
All India Primary Teachers Federation

The most ambitious six EFA goals and targets as laid down in 'Dakar declaration' during 2000 were not fully met by many countries including India. Hence the unfinished agenda of Education for all (EFA) is still a concern for all of us. Again, during May 2015 heads of the states and Ministers from 193 countries assembled in Incheon, South Korea to adopt a new commitment called "Incheon Declaration." (Called "Education 2030") After the Incheon declaration United Nations general assembly adopted and firmed up Sustainable Development Goals during September 2015 with the participation of 193 countries. With Goal 4 of Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (hereafter referred to as "Education 2030") – and its associated targets, to be achieved by 2030.

The Sustainable development Goal 4 talks about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning Target 4.1 talks exclusively about the primary and secondary education.

India faces various challenges in School Education. It has the highest number of out of school's children in the world with girls and socially marginalised groups comprising of high percentage of the out of school children. Some of the major challenges of school education are given below:

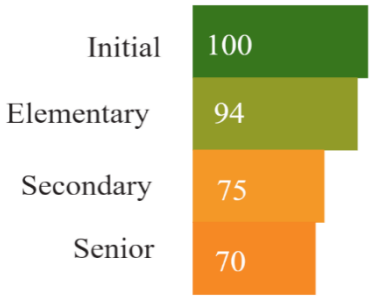
Drop Out Rate



	Pre Primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary
Male	4.5	8.5	16.9	20.4	10.1
Female	7.9	11.6	18.5	19.2	9
All Students	6	10	17.5	19.8	9.6

The drop-out rate shows a steady increase from pre- primary to secondary where it rises from 6 to as high as 19.8. The drop-out rate does fall in the Higher Secondary level to 9.6 from a 19.8 in Secondary level, but even then, it continues to be quite high.[6]

With its high tribal population, Jharkhand has the highest dropout rate for schoolchildren in India (only 30 out of 100 finish school). Dropout rates among Adivasis are the highest among all communities.



- Of an initial enrolment of 100 students, on an average, only 70 finish school in India. While the number of students in the elementary education level is high (94), many drop out during the secondary level (with 75 left). The graphs depict these rates for various levels.

	Initial	Elementary	Secondary	Senior
General	100	96	81	74
SC	100	92	71	65
ST	100	91	67	61
OBC	100	94	75	73

Only 61 of 100 ST students finish senior secondary school, the lowest among all communities.[7]

- In rural areas, about 70% of the individuals aged 15 years and above could not complete their secondary education, i.e., 10th standard and above, and in urban areas, about 40% of individuals were not able to secure the same education level, according to the latest data by the National Statistical Office (NSO). The onus is more on the state government to improve this rate.[8]

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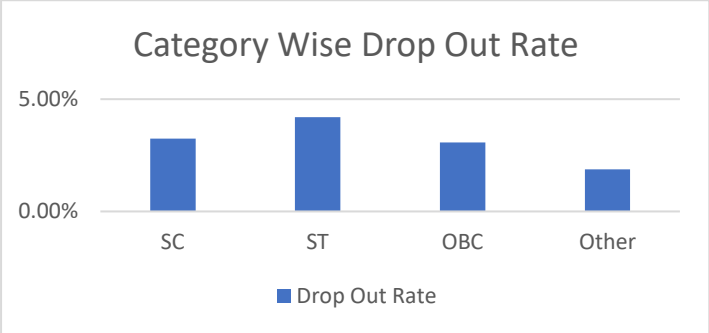
[6] *MHRD, Department of School Education and Literacy. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2020, from http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/.*

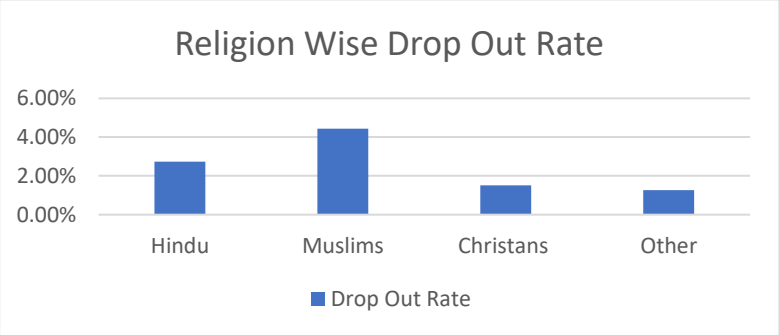
[7] *Radhakrishnan, V. (2019, January 04). What is the dropout rate among schoolchildren in India? Retrieved May 25, 2020, from https://www.thehindu.com/education/percentage-of-school-dropouts/article25909306.ece*

[8] *Online, F. (2019, November 28). Uneducated India: Education goes from bad to worse; dismal situation at elementary and high levels. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/uneducated-india-education-goes-from-bad-to-worse-dismal-situation-at-elementary-and-high-levels/1778120/*



At the national level, the maximum proportion of out of school children in India is within Scheduled Tribes (4.20%), followed by Scheduled Castes (3.24%), OBC (3.07%) and Others (1.87%).

In terms of proportion of the drop out children, at the national level, Muslims have the maximum proportion of out of school children in India (4.43%), followed by Hindus (2.73%), Christians (1.52%) and others (1.26%).[9]



Out of School Children

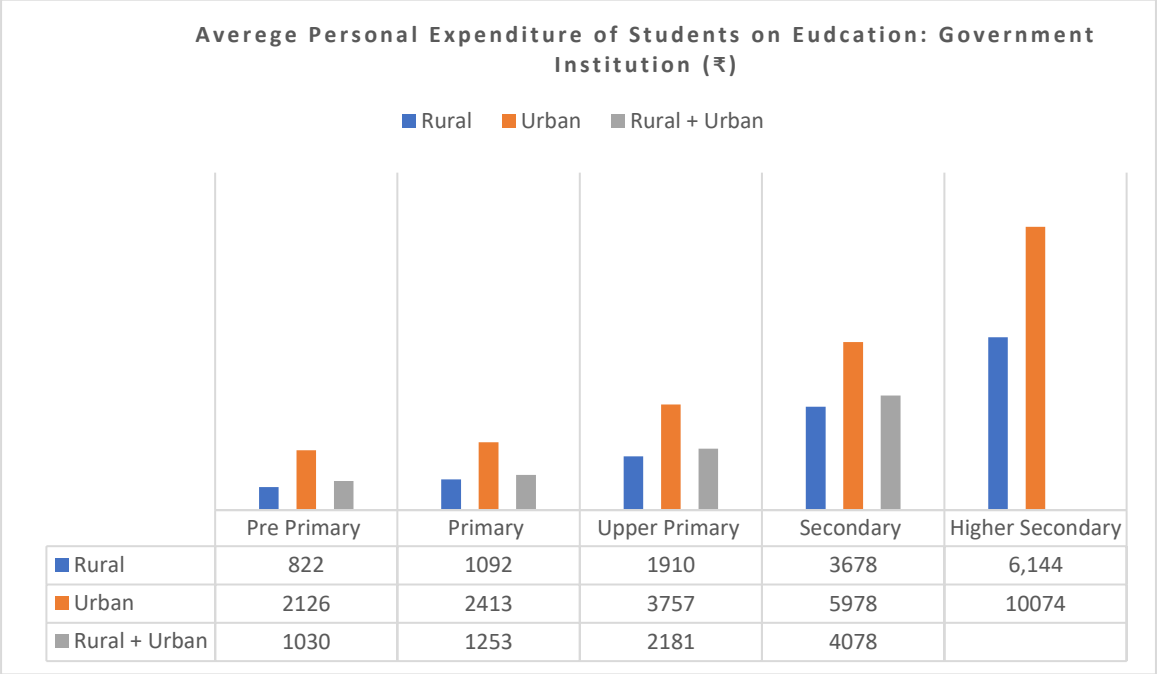
- The proportion of people who never even entered the education system has risen in recent years, according to a government report. "The proportion of students that never stepped in the country's education system has risen in the recent findings of survey (NSS 75th round), which draws our attention to the ineffective/ declining efforts by government to enrol an individual in schooling and to keep him enrolled in the system," CARE Ratings said in a recent note.[10]

[9] *"National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India"*

https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/National-Survey-_Estimation-School-Children-Draft-Report.pdf

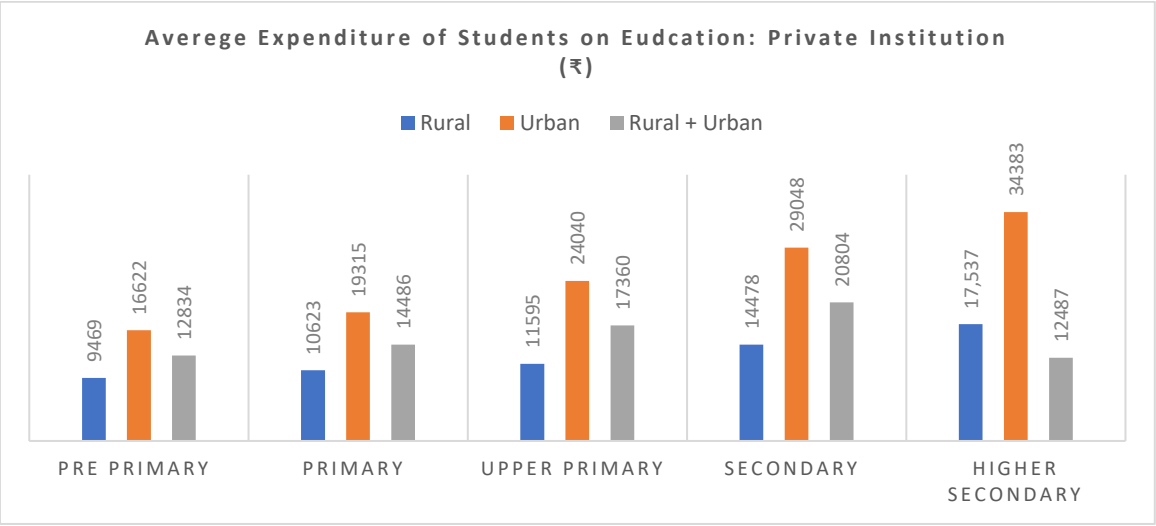
[10] *Online, F. (2019, November 28). Uneducated India: Education goes from bad to worse; dismal situation at elementary and high levels. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/uneducated-india-education-goes-from-bad-to-worse-dismal-situation-at-elementary-and-high-levels/1778120/*

Personal Expenditure of Students on Education



	Pre Primary	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
Rural	822	1092	1910	3678	6,144
Urban	2126	2413	3757	5978	10074
Rural + Urban	1030	1253	2181	4078	

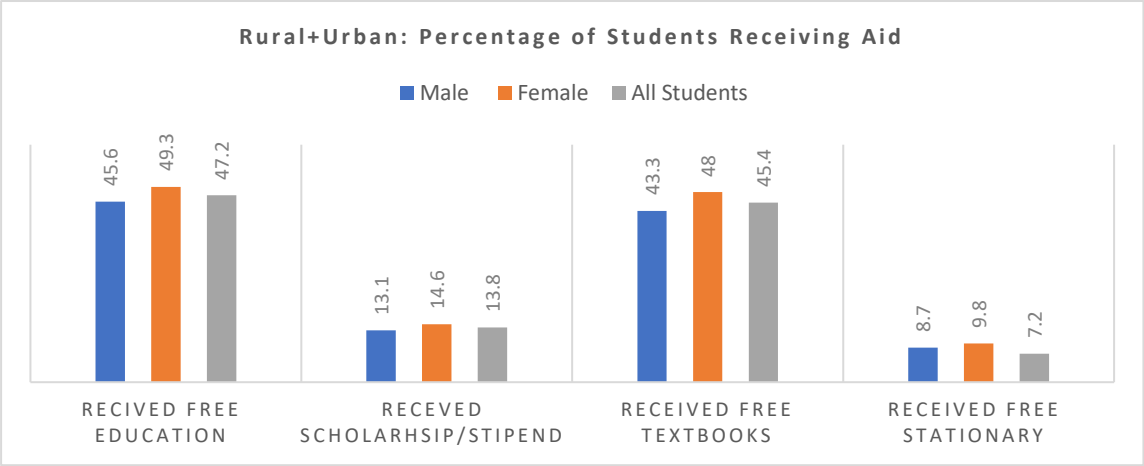
- Average expenditure of students in education from government institutions is especially high in the urban areas. It is more than what a huge chunk of the households in this country can hope to afford. The average expenditure of attaining secondary education is as high as Rs. 5978. in a country where education is supposed to be free.[11] While being signatory to SDG, India has yet not made education free up to secondary level a legal right. There has been a long-lasting demand to extend Right to Free and Compulsory Education up to the age of 18, however, it is yet to be realised.



[11] *Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India. (2020). Retrieved 26 May 2020, from* *http://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/KI_Education_75th_Final.pdf*

When it comes to expenditure of states on education per child, the report by Right to Education Forum and Centre for Budget Policy Studies with support of the World Bank and UNICEF, cited that education and empowerment index are related to per-child expenditure. Kerala tops the index with a pending of Rs 11,574 per child per year with Bihar at the bottom with a spending of just Rs 2,869. Himachal Pradesh, with a spending of Rs 17,921 per child per year, features second among 17 large states.[12]

Students receiving aids.



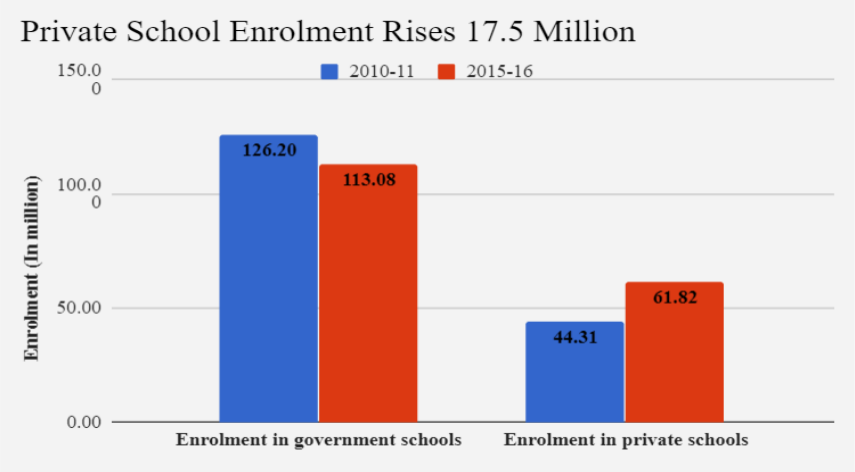
- The coverage of students receiving aid is rather scanty. All of them are less than 50% and some are even lesser than 10%. Especially when education remains quite expensive, the reach of these aids should have been much more to reap sufficient benefits. [13]

Privatization of School Education

Between 2010-11 and 2015-16, student enrolment in government schools across 20 Indian states fell by 13 million, while private schools acquired 17.5 million new students.

[12] **Source:** *40% of girls aged 15-18 not attending school: Report: India News - Times of India. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/40-of-girls-aged-15-18-not-attending-school-report/articleshow/73598999.cms.*

[13] *Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India. (2020). Retrieved 26 May 2020, from http://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/KI_Education_75th_Final.pdf*



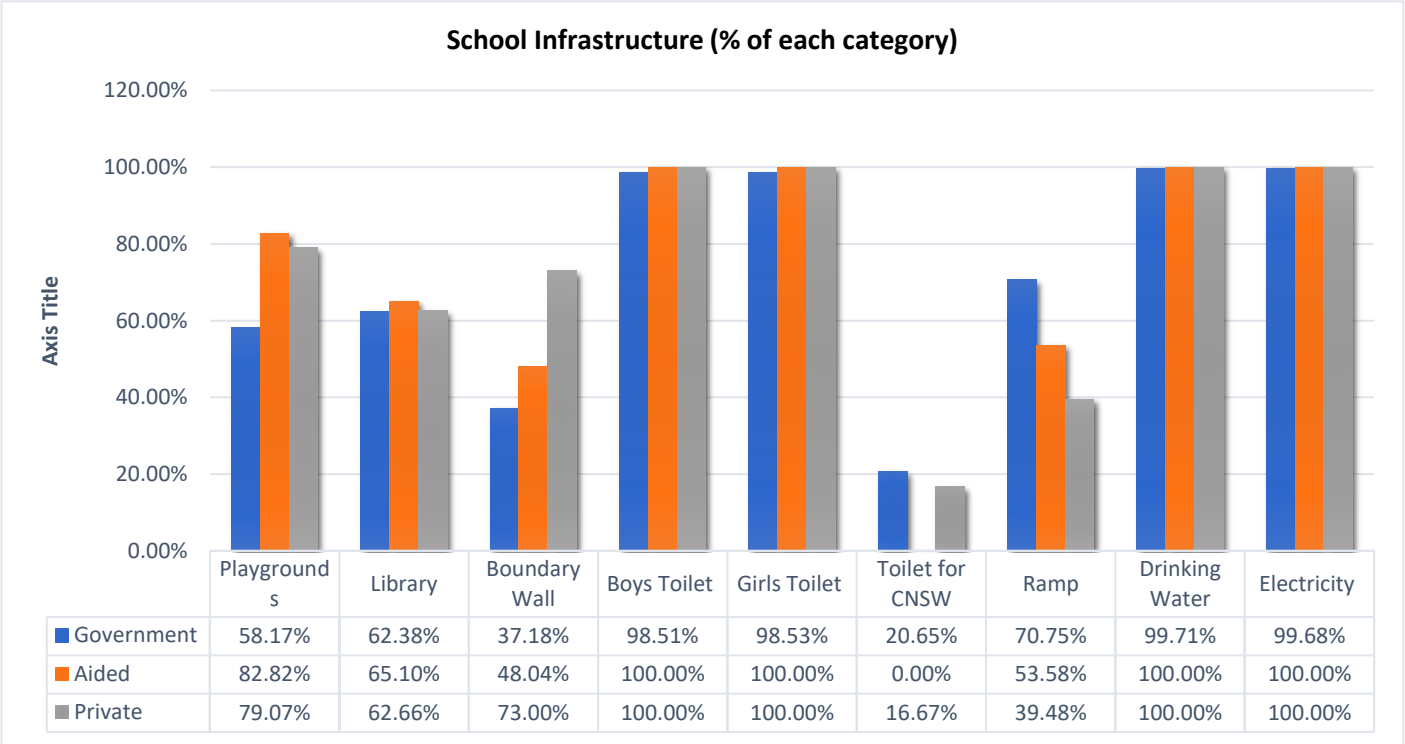
- Enrolment in private school have not gone down post the sudden and steep rise in 2015-16 from 2010-11. It has continued to increase, albeit marginally over the years till 2018-19. [14]
- (2018-19) Currently as less as only 52% of the schools in India, are government schools.

States with their proportion of Private Schools Enrolments[15]		
1	Haryana	59%
2	Andhra Pradesh	47%
3	Rajasthan	47%
4	Uttar Pradesh	46%
5	J&K	44%
6	Karnataka	43%
7	Delhi	41%

[14] *IndiaSpend, D. (2017, April 17). Private schools gain 17 mn students in 5 years, govt schools lose 13 mn. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/private-schools-gain-17-mn-students-in-5-yrs-govt-schools-lose-13-mn-117041700073_1.html.*

[15] **Source:** *UDISE+. (n.d.). Retrieved May 26, 2020, from http://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/*

Infrastructure



	Playgrounds	Library	Boundary Wall	Boys Toilet	Girls Toilet	Toilet for CNSW	Ramp	Drinking Water	Electricity
Government	58.17%	62.38%	37.18%	98.51%	98.53%	20.65%	70.75%	99.71%	99.68%
Aided	82.82%	65.10%	48.04%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	53.58%	100.00%	100.00%
Private	79.07%	62.66%	73.00%	100.00%	100.00%	16.67%	39.48%	100.00%	100.00%

- Only 58% of the government schools have playgrounds while as much as 79% of private schools have playgrounds. This reflects poorly on the quality of the education and infrastructure that the government can provide for the students.
- Libraries appear to be built in much less than adequate numbers across school management types.
- Boundary walls, which are an important decision maker when it comes to if families want to send their girl children to school, seems to be absent in a distressing proportion of government schools. Only 37% of government schools have boundary walls.
- Toilets for CWSN is appallingly less across types of management. Only 21% of government schools have toilets for CWSN, 0% aided schools have toilets for CWSN and only 17% of private schools have toilets for CWSN. [16]

[16] **Source:** *UDISE+. (n.d.). Retrieved May 26, 2020, from* http://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/

Girl Child Education

- Ten years after the Right to Education (RTE) Act came into being, nearly 40% of adolescent girls in the age group of 15-18 years are not attending school while 30% of girls from poorest families have never set foot in a classroom, according to status report.[17]
- Girls out of school: In 2018, the overall proportion of girls in the 11 to 14 age group out of school was still as high as 4.1%. This figure is even more than 5% in 4 states. Further as high as 13.5% of girls in the 15 to 16 age group were not enrolled in school by 2018.[18]
- According to the report by Right to Education Forum and Centre for Budget Policy Studies with support of the World Bank and UNICEF, girls are twice less likely as boys to receive at least four years of schooling, 30% of girls from the economically disadvantaged groups have never set foot inside a classroom. The literacy rate of women in India is only at 65%.[19]

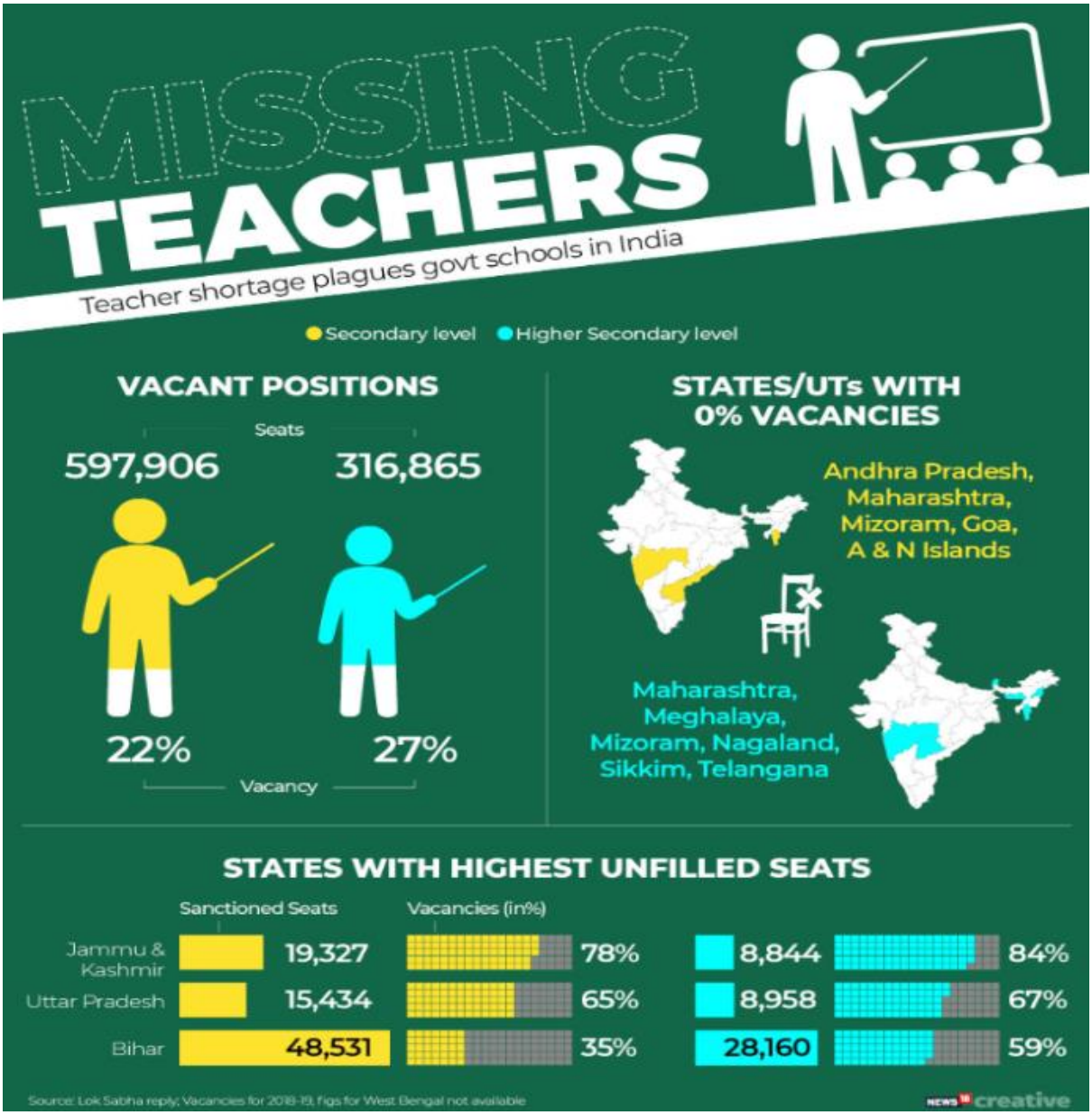
Teachers in Schools

- The acute shortage of properly qualified and trained teachers, and consequently, the poor learning levels at schools is an issue that needs to be addressed. Indian schools often fail to invest enough on the development of teachers, which is the very pillar of an educational institution. Moreover, our country has a shortage of about nine lakh teachers and qualified head teachers who can pilot a school.
- According to a reply provided by Minister of Human Resources Development in Loksabha, In secondary Education 5,97,906 seats are vacant and in higher secondary education 3,16,865 seats are vacant.

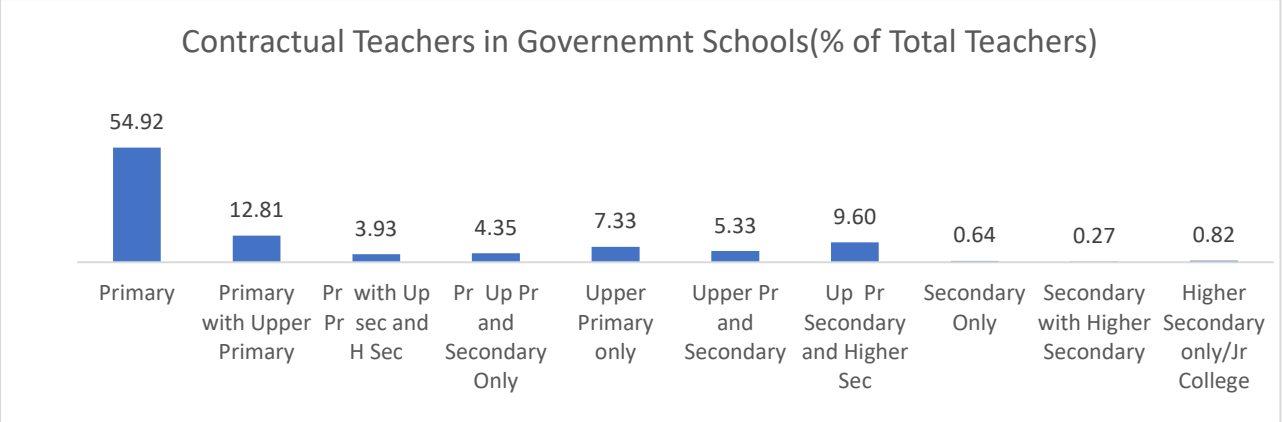
[17] *40% of girls aged 15-18 not attending school: Report: India News - Times of India. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/40-of-girls-aged-15-18-not-attending-school-report/articleshow/73598999.cms*

[18] *The thirteenth Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018) was released in New Delhi on 15 January 2019. (2020). Retrieved 26 May 2020, from https://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aser2018pressreleaseenglish.pdf*

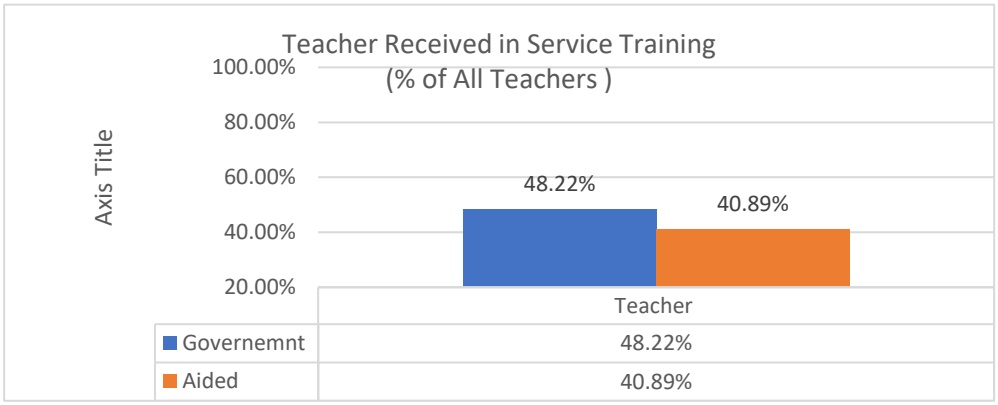
[19] *40% of girls aged 15-18 not attending school: Report: India News - Times of India. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/40-of-girls-aged-15-18-not-attending-school-report/articleshow/73598999.cms*



- Out of all teachers appointed by government schools, 54.92% teachers in primary level are contract based, 12.81% and 9.60% in primary with upper primary schools and upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools are respectively contract based. (Professionally Trained Teachers by Nature of Appointments 2019)



Out of all the teachers appointed by government and aided teachers only 48.22% government schools and 40.89% aided schools teachers have received in service training



YOUTH AND SDG 4

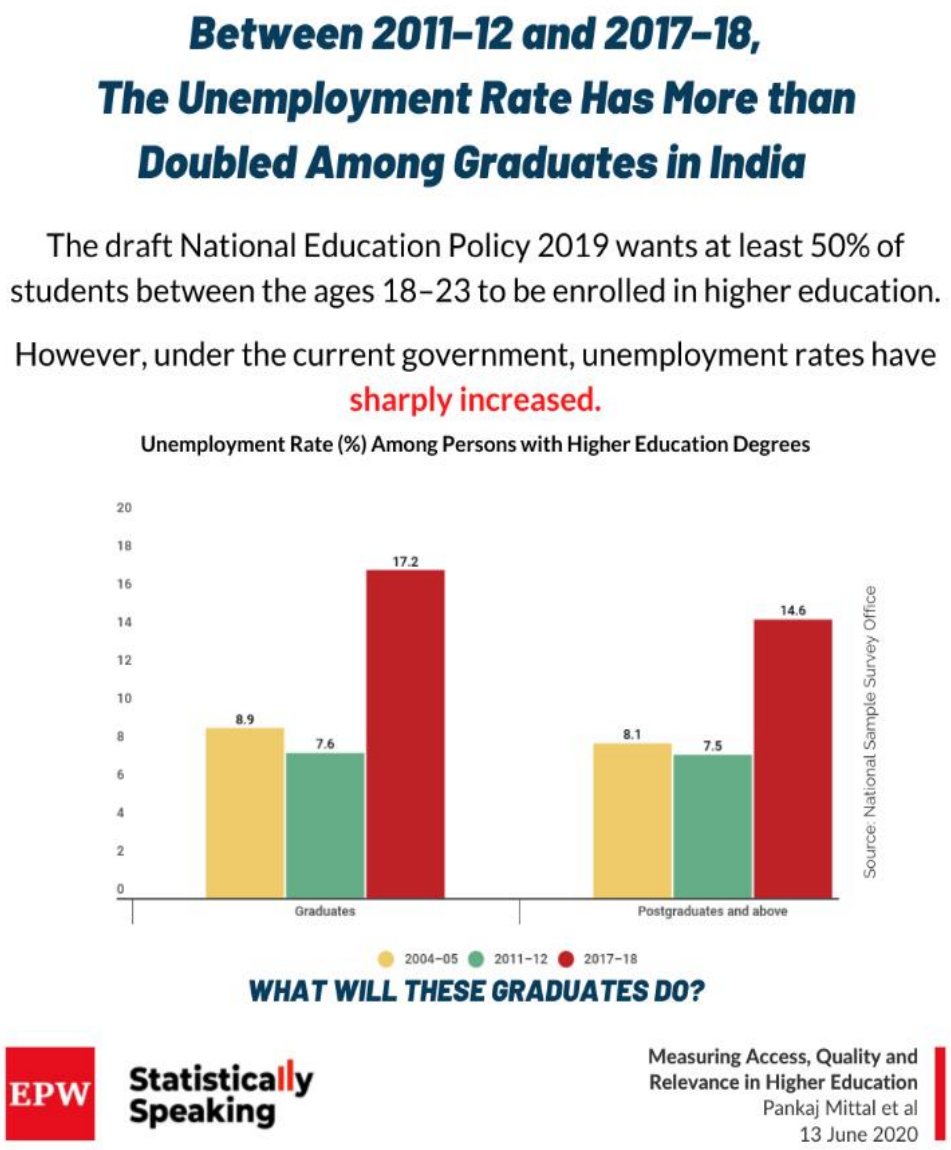
AZAD FOUNDATION

India is considered a youthful country with youth (between 15 to 29 years as defined in the national youth policy 2014) comprising of 34.8% of India's population (Census 2011). If we consider the median age of the Indian population viz 28 years, it indicates a huge potential to capitalize on this demographic dividend. However, despite showing tremendous GDP growth, being ranked as seventh-largest economy in the world and the third-largest economy in terms of purchasing power, India also holds a dismally high rate of unemployment especially among the youth.

There are my reasons to this phenomenon. A recent report by UNICEF, 2019 stated that more than half of the South Asian youth (a major percentage of which is contributed by India) do not have the necessary skills to meet the demands of the labour market.

Another reason is the inability of the labour market to meet the demands or aspirations of the educated Indians which has led to a rise in educated unemployment for both young men and especially young women. Economists argue that these educated young men and women choose to, and in some cases, can afford to stay away from the economy as their needs for work in organized sectors outside of agriculture, i.e in industry or services, is not met. A related dismal statistic is the high percentage of youth who are neither in employment, nor education nor training (NEET). In India, as much as 27% i.e 423 million youth are NEET which indicates a considerable loss in unused productive capacity at a macroeconomic level and also this represents a considerable loss in terms of unused productive capacity or loss of potential demographic dividend.

At an individual level, it however exacerbates the poverty among marginalized and has a negative impact on the wellbeing of such unemployed youth. A clear gender divide is visible here where in comparison to 6.4% of young men who are NEET in the 15 to 24 age group, a larger 44.9% comprise of young women. This divide is also visible in the differential access to education, economic opportunities, differential pay which question the structural norms that impact gender equity in educational access.



Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the unemployment rate has more than doubled for graduates in India.

As we write this report, the condition of youth unemployment has worsened with the economic impact of the COVID related lockdown. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data has indicated that 27 million youngsters in the age group 25-29 years have lost their jobs in April which will have a long-term repercussion on their aspirations, household income and

negatively impact their debt. This however may not be accurate as majority of the jobs have been lost in the informal sector. Also the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017–18 data reveal that the entry to jobs in India happens at age groups as low as 15 years (16% in the age group 15-19 years enter the labour market) on account of the severe economic need of the households. The CMIE data does share that 89% of informal workers have reported loss of income, but does not account for the potential loss of these jobs among youth informal workers. Hence, the magnitude of loss is even more.

Contextualizing the discussion: Progress towards Indicators 4.4 and 4.5 of Goal 4- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Indicator 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

Skill Training in India- The paradox of promoting Skill Education and negative growth of employment

The ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE) launched a Skill India Mission in 2015 to meet the crucial skills gap in the country. The Skill India Mission led by its flagship program Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) aimed to equip 40 crore Indians with market-relevant training and skills by the year 2022. However, despite having such a strong focus on skill building, certification, apprenticeship and introduction of vocational education it has failed to fulfill its mission of imparting skills to meet industry demands. The periodic Labour Force Survey of 2017-18 indicated that only about 2% of the population reported receiving any vocational or technical training. Of those who did receive formal training and were in the age group defined as 'youth', 42% were not part of the labour force. Underutilization of funds under the skill program have been one of the reasons for its failure to meet targets while the nature of economy where 84% of the workforce is engaged in the unorganized sector also makes it challenging to identify skill requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

However, as has been the case with numerous schemes and policies, despite having a well laid out plan beginning from vocational training and integration with sector skill councils right from secondary education systems, to imparting short term skill courses, offering polytechnics for geographically remote areas Refer Table 1 below, the schemes have been unable to integrate the skill need with employability. Data from the ministry of youth affairs on skill trained youth who received certification and placement in 2019-20 indicate that out of 97091 youth who were trained, 68% received a certification and 33% were ultimately placed in jobs. The retention rate of trainees in jobs remains a challenge with around 2% of new entrants leaving opportunities

within 3 months of joining due to lack of mentoring facilities needed for first time job entrants.

The national skill development mission also aims to be inclusive by promoting programs focusing especially on skills for women, differently abled and incentivizing women by giving them preferential treatment, ensuring reservations like In PMKVY STT (short term training) women are included under the category "special group" besides persons with disabilities. In the long term training program implemented through ITI's women have a 30% reservation besides 18 national skill training institutes located at different locations of the country are imparting skill training exclusively for women. However, despite these measures the female workforce participation rate continues to decline from 36% in 2005-6 to 24% in 2015-16 and further to 18% (SDG India Index 2019). Therefore despite focus on skill building women continue to fall out/ stay away/ or are unable to participate in the workforce.

To understand these few paradoxes it is necessary to analyse the aspirations of youth and access to decent work. As mentioned above 85% of the Indian workforce is employed in the informal economy where contractual work, lack of social security is the norm. Majority of the women, due to the disadvantage of educational achievements, work preparedness, lack of professional skills on account of the gender norms that limit their access are especially concentrated in vulnerable jobs. In addition, the dominant paradigm of 'new age' jobs promotes entrepreneurship and the gig economy as the future of work which are catalyzed by the state led programs like Start Up India. However, it needs to be questioned here whether this economic trend matches with the aspirations of the Youth. A study on young women's aspirations undertaken by Azad in 2016 and a recent study by Observer Research Group and World Economic Forum 2018 indicate similar aspirations from a **job** i.e Good salaries, ample opportunities for promotion and career development, and job security. Hence 49 percent of youth prefer a job in the public sector; while 23 percent prefer the private sector while only 17 percent chose entrepreneurship (out of which majority were males). In addition, 82 percent of females chose full-time employment. With reference to the gig economy, 63 percent youth reported being very or moderately interested-gig economy but as an additional source of income. Hence there is a clear demand for decent jobs, with career growth and security. In a situation where such jobs are unavailable, youth are choosing to stay away from jobs if they can afford to or entering jobs which not match their aspirations a situation that is applicable for most marginalized sections of youth.

Indicator 4.5: By 2030 eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations

Inequitable access to skills and the cycle of vulnerability

Understanding this experience from the perspective of marginalized women from resource poor communities and their access to livelihoods, Azad drawing from its decade long experience has understood that women still enter the job market on an unequal basis to men, earn less

income and perpetuate a never-ending cycle of poverty due to their position of disadvantage in the economy. This happens because the school system in India despite showing high gross enrollment ratio's increasing gender parity in enrollment still suffers from the inadequacy of infrastructure, quality teaching modules, curricula that has changed with pace with emerging needs and addressing core areas like comprehensive sexuality education. The differential access of young women and men is mediated by structural factors such as early marriage, childcare, and domestic responsibilities, stigma of menstruation; Infrastructural factors llike non-availability of toilets, distance of the school from home, especially for girls, coupled with family labour, economic constraints and the disconnect of education with their daily lives, resource- poor sections. The prioritization in education of male children over girls which results in low priority given to gender sensitive infrastructure impacts their chances to information, autonomy and a chance to enter the skilled economy. Hence women in most parts of the world and especially in India enter low-paid, low skilled economic roles in the informal sector which are vulnerable, insecure and do not accord them any financial or social autonomy and perpetuates the cycle of poverty and low social capital.

The Azad Approach to Equitable skills and livelihoods

The critical is need to impart equitable access to skills for marginalized young women should involve a pedagogy that is gender equitable which enables and supports women's ability to enter professional markets. Azad terms this pedagogy the Gender Just Skill Education Framework. The framework includes Azad's current strategy can be understood within the framework of Gender Just Skill Education (GJSE) that has as its core components Right to access GJSE, Rights within GJSE, Rights through GJSE and Rights from GJSE.RIGHT TO ACCESS for resource poor women to GJSE programs ensures the creation of a supportive ecosystem at the community level so that women can be informed and are enabled to access skill training, i.e by balancing time for care and household work, support from family for care work, creating a safe violence free constraint free environment. RIGHTS WITHIN a GJSE programme ensures women's rights to a curriculum that can provide transformative skills, information on rights, ability to negotiate, make decisions and become an empowered professional. RIGHTS THROUGH GJSE enable their right to decent work, to dignity, to a remunerative livelihood through creation of gender sensitive markets that accept women in skilled usually male dominated professions like driving, carpentry, plumbing etc. RIGHTS FROM GJSE emerge from creation of a collective, peer-groups, CSO collectives, a movement who support women to engage with formal work spaces in a sustained manner to bring about changes in their economic and social empowerment and advocate for an enabling environment by lobbying with industry and states. This pedagogy will not just help build an equitable skill ecosystem but will bridge the gap to enable access to decent jobs interlinking SDG Indicators 4.4, 4.5 and SDG 8.5.

EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN FROM SOCIALLY EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES: EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion

COVID 19 may well become a watershed in today's world, and we may soon be defining life and times into '*pre-during-post' COVID* times. As a global pandemic of our times, it has begun to alter our lives and engagements in not 'just a few ways, but in *all ways'.* Hence, it is a befitting time to review 'equity-inclusion' dimensions in our education system – its direction, approach, and provisions from the lens of India's disadvantaged and vulnerable (D&V) children. Even as it is too broad a brush to deep dive into the specifics and details of how each group of the D&V children will access quality education, it is important to look at the broad direction, approach, and trends in education available to children from the D&V communities. This note does not go into data and numbers, as there is more a flux than stability currently.

Historically India has thousands of communities that are socially excluded and discriminated on various counts like caste, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, occupations, geographical inaccessibility, and the like. To many of these communities, education was prohibited, and their knowledge systems were not included in the mainstream knowledge. The Constitution accorded special attention to identified disadvantaged and vulnerable communities placing them under categories like 'scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, religious and other minorities, disadvantaged sections, weaker sections', etc. When community voices emerged from persons with disability, LGBTQI+ and persons living with HIV-AIDS to articulate their exclusion and discrimination like, new legislations and provisions were evolved to address social exclusion and promote their inclusion. Women in all above communities are further excluded and discriminated based on internal and external forms of patriarchy and gender norms. These journeys for the right to equity, inclusion and social justice have been long and arduous. They continue to evolve demanding greater attention to *diversities, nuances, inequalities and impac*t of such exclusions and discriminations.

Pre-COVID-19 times - Unequal education systems**:**

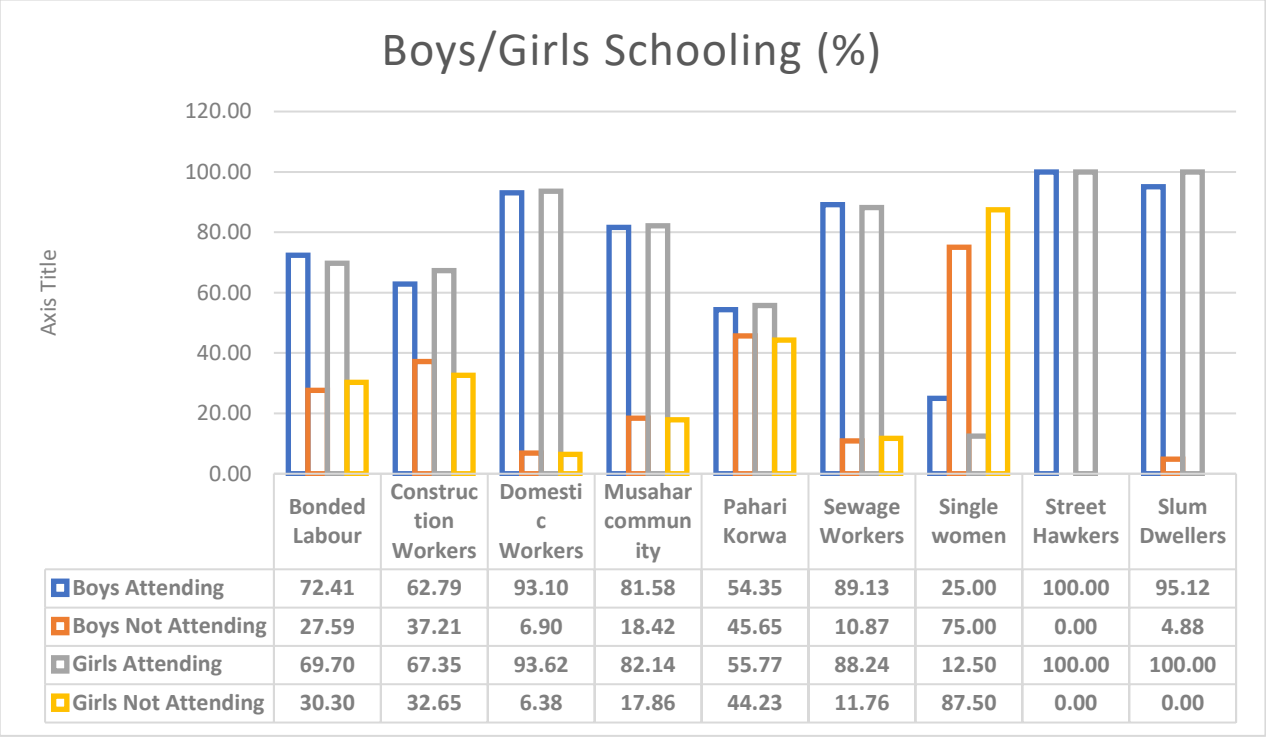
Education activists since long, highlight the systemic inequalities embedded in the provision of school education. Broadly a quick review is following:

- Non-provision of pre-school education to large numbers of children to prepare them for schooling.
- Inequalities between the private and public education systems.
- Inequalities maintained across various government education systems through different governments, boards, syllabi, and budgets.
- Poor and inadequate education systems to already disadvantaged children like dropouts, child labor, street children, children in institutions, bonded and trafficked children, children with disabilities.
- Lack of materials and mechanisms for mother tongue education in early classes

- Absence of content and materials from the context, knowledge systems and history of marginalized children.

Pre-COVID-19 times - Education inequalities

The inequalities and unequal provisions that impact children and their future is poorly captured in such broad analysis. The contexts are more complex, inter-generational and intersectional and inequalities. The broad picture does not capture the specific barriers and challenges of small communities within the larger recognized categories. To site an example– the scheduled caste category holds over 1200 smaller identified communities, the scheduled tribes hold over 750. In addition are communities like the nomadic and de-notified communities that are yet to be placed into administrative categories to address their social exclusion and discrimination. It is evident that we do not have the understanding nor the data to understand the nuances that impact education access for these communities.



	Bonded Labour	Construction Workers	Domestic Workers	Musahar community	Pahari Korwa	Sewage Workers	Single women	Street Hawkers	Slum Dwellers
Boys Attending	72.41	62.79	93.10	81.58	54.35	89.13	25.00	100.00	95.12
Boys Not Attending	27.59	37.21	6.90	18.42	45.65	10.87	75.00	0.00	4.88
Girls Attending	69.70	67.35	93.62	82.14	55.77	88.24	12.50	100.00	100.00
Girls Not Attending	30.30	32.65	6.38	17.86	44.23	11.76	87.50	0.00	0.00

Civil society/community led organizations undertook an exercise[20] to track SDG status and progress across 35 D&V communities across different states. Primary data was gathered by community leaders from 100 households in each instance, education under SDG 4 among them. A review of the enrolment rates of children across 9 socially excluded communities[21] reflect the inequalities across these communities, defying the notion of averages in tracking national

[20] '100 Hotspots: Snapshots of socially excluded vulnerable population groups and SDGs in India'; Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, 2020

[21] Children of bonded labour (Varanasi, UP), of construction workers (Jaipur, Rajasthan), Domestic Workers (Delhi), Musahar (Patna, Bihar), Pahari Korwa (Chattisgarh), Sewage workers (Delhi), Single women (Himachal Pradesh), Street hawkers (Kolkata, West Bengal) and Slum Dwellers (Mumbai)

progress on any indicator. It reflects the need for community disaggregated data for evidence-based policy and programming.

As against 96.9% gross enrolment rate in elementary education (94.5% male, 99.6% female), only 77.7% of children from all the 9 communities currently attend any schooling; 22% are out of school. Even as the communities are categorized under the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the enrolment rate also way below the aggregate enrolment rates of scheduled caste 107%, (Male 105.3%, Female110.8%) and Scheduled Tribes 103.3%, (Male103.4%, Female103.1%). The Inequalities was extreme in the situation of the children from Pahari Korwa community in Chhattisgarh, where 46% of the children are not attending schools; construction workers in Jaipur where 34% of children and bonded labor in Varanasi where 29% of children are not attending schools. Similar trends are seen in other targets in education be they community literacy rates, access to higher education, access to skills training and so on. Clearly, the education system has not been able to put in place equity measures to address the specific disadvantages and promote equality and inclusion.

II

In COVID 19 times- A shock to the system

The COVID 19 and resultant lockdown has seen an unprecedented step in the government closing all schools, universities, training centers, and other education institutions from 20 March 2020. Examination schedules have been put on hold. This has resulted in:

- Large numbers of children in marginalized communities suddenly bereft of any form of formal education. Schools which provided the only access to formal learning suddenly stopped being there for these children. Communities and families whose culture and knowledge are not wired into the modern forms of knowledge or learning are suddenly without any mechanism to facilitate their children into mainstream learning systems.
- In the wake of COVID 19, the education system has transferred many of its functions to families and parents. Families and parents from marginalized communities do not have the formal education, infrastructure, information, or other support mechanisms to take on this responsibility and fulfill it for their children. The gap in education between children from the D&V communities and others will further widen in the absence of the functional schools.
- The social interface space available in the schooling process, crossing community boundaries for children is no longer available. This space that promoted social inclusion and fraternity, central to their socialization and citizenship building is suddenly withdrawn.
- On-line education has become the alternate mode of education implemented by both the government and the private education systems to ensure the continuity of learning. However, the large majority of government schools and middle level and budget private schools are not equipped to provide on-line education to their children. There is little guidance to schools or teachers in this regard. The reach of on-line education to children from marginalized sections is negligible and sub-standard.

- Poor and marginalized communities and families do not have the resources of the information/knowledge to provide the necessary equipment like mobile phones, laptops, computers, television sets for on-line education to their children. Their habitations do not have the technical infrastructure like uninterrupted power supply or Wi-Fi connections to reach on-line education to these children.
- The large scale 'reverse migration' of workers from the informal sector in urban centers moving back to their hometowns with their children is a lasting image of COVID. Even if schools re-open, how children from these households will access schooling in the new places is not clear. Are there adequate schools to admit these children, do the schools have adequate infrastructure, teachers, and other necessary mechanisms to admit them, do children have necessary documentation for their admission, do children have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to determine their admission are questions that currently have no clear direction.
- The changed family contexts in terms of unemployment, increased poverty, increased uncertainty, fragility, and stress may not allow the families to choose education for children. They may have immediate concerns of poverty, hunger, greater household stress to name some to attend to and children may be required to chip in.

It is clear that we have limited understanding of the COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on the education of children from D&V communities. Some trends are emerging, and it is evident that in the absence of formal schooling, they are losing out on their learning. A simple holiday season would often set them a few steps backward in their learning and COVID 19 has more long-term negative impacts on their learning and education.

III

Post COVID-19 times: An unclear future

What the post COVID times will bring is yet too sketchy to draw a pattern. There is no indication on when and how schooling will be revived. However, some things that are being articulated are:

- The learning gap between D&V and other children will increase with negative trends for the D&V children and there do not seem to be mechanisms to address the gap or inequalities.
- The employment scenario will take a long time to recover and hence the economic situations of the families may not support the education of children immediately. This also means that families may prioritize survival and sustenance over investing in education.
- There may be a greater convergence between demand and supply of labor from children and hence many more children will fall into or be forced into child labor. This includes child labor within families and family enterprises which got a boost from the amendments made to the child labor Act, allowing families and kith and kin to allow children to work in family enterprises.
- Other negative forms of child abuse and violence will emerge – child marriage, labor bondage of children, trafficking of children, increase abuse and violence to name some.

More children will fall victims to these, and we have no mechanisms to track or reverse their negative impact.

- In the absence of new market opportunities, children and families will engage more in traditional occupations which include caste-based occupations, gender division of labor, primary forms of forest and land-based livelihood occupations, self-exploiting own-enterprises, and the like. This will strengthen the social hierarchies, social exclusions, and economic inequalities.
- The perception of shrinking opportunities and market occupations may also push families to not invest in higher education of their children, knowing the poor immediate and long-term returns from the investment. This will be set off against the immediate survival needs.
- The economic slowdown and COVID pandemic may become the excuse for the government to not invest in social and development sector. The state support to specific marginalized communities will be further reduced and hence the communities will find it more difficult to promote education for their children.
- The shrinking civil society space with greater state controls and reduced financial resources will also take away the space for communities to highlight their needs and demands to the state. Civil society organizations will reduce in numbers, their capacity to take up community issues may come down and the state response will be more controls against articulating voices.

Key Recommendations

- Greater volunteerism and community-based actions and support to the marginalized communities – strengthening and being with the D&V communities
- Disaggregated and nuanced community specific data to input into planning and strategies.
- Greater articulation of issues with local governance in panchayats and Urban local bodies.
- Greater civil society collaboration and coordination regionally and globally on specific concerns, including SDGs with a focus on leaving behind no one.
- More effective use of technology and virtual platforms to raise issues and make them visible.

We are living in COVID times with little navigation tools or road map. It is the time of experimentation and learning from one another. It is the time to hear unheard voices, count invisible communities and revise the framework for collaboration, dismantling some know ways and adopting some new ways.

TOWARDS EQUITABLE FINANCING

Sukanya Bose and Priyanta Ghosh, NIPFP

In 2015, India adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, which affirms that education is a–*public good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. The declaration acknowledges that "the aspirations encompassed in the proposed SDG 4 cannot be realized without a significant and well-targeted increase in financing…"*

The commitment of public financial resources to back the policies on education has always been weak in India. International comparisons of overall spending present the country in a poor light. The share of expenditure devoted to education at 3.8% of GNP, places India at 122nd rank among 158 countries. Government of India's Economic Survey (2016) acknowledges the low levels of public spending on health and education, a mere 5.1% of GDP, compared to emerging market economies average of 7.5% and OECD average of 11.6%. Notwithstanding the target of 6% of GDP set by the Kothari Commission in the mid-sixties and reiterated again and again in other policy statements, Incheon declaration being the latest in line, actual expenditure on education has continued to suffer.

The impact of the cumulative neglect and inability to secure adequate and equitable public financing has meant a fragmented and inequitable education system, across class, caste and gender. The enhanced demand for education especially among the most marginalised sections of the society has gone hand in hand with increasing stratification of education. The "crowding out" of public schools by private schools has led to opportunities for schooling being distributed in an unequal manner depending on the position in social and economic hierarchy. Admittedly, the low standards of public education with the weak functionality of the government schools offers little alternative to the private sector schools, even if the latter is of largely ramshackle quality. Unless there are reforms in government schooling system, strong market advocates of low-cost private schools will make deeper inroads. Adequate and equitable financing is key to such a reform agenda as we argue below.

Inequities in Educational Participation and Need for Equitable Finances

One of the main SDG 4 targets is to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes. While the progress in educational participation in India has indeed been impressive in the last twenty to thirty years, the persistence of inequities cannot be ignored. The participation rate of the children in the age group 6-17+ increased from 66% in mid 1990s to nearly 90% in 2017-18. There have been impressive gains in gender parity and greater participation of children from marginalised social groups. And yet, the proportion of children who are out of school (OSC) remains disturbingly large (Table 1). Both drop outs and never enrolled children are more among girls (12%) compared to boys (10%). **More than 34 million children are out of school, of which about 18 million are girls. For a child belonging to**

the scheduled tribe community in the age group 6-17+, the chances of being out of school is as high as 16%, based on current trends. The comparable figure for a child from a SC family is 12%. Notice the significantly lower secondary participation rates among ST and SC children at the secondary level (Table 1), which shows the inability to enrol or retain those who enter. The large number of out of school children, and their concentration in disadvantaged groups and regions (Figure 1), indicates the road to SDG 4 would be a challenging one.

Table 1: Who is in School? Who is not?

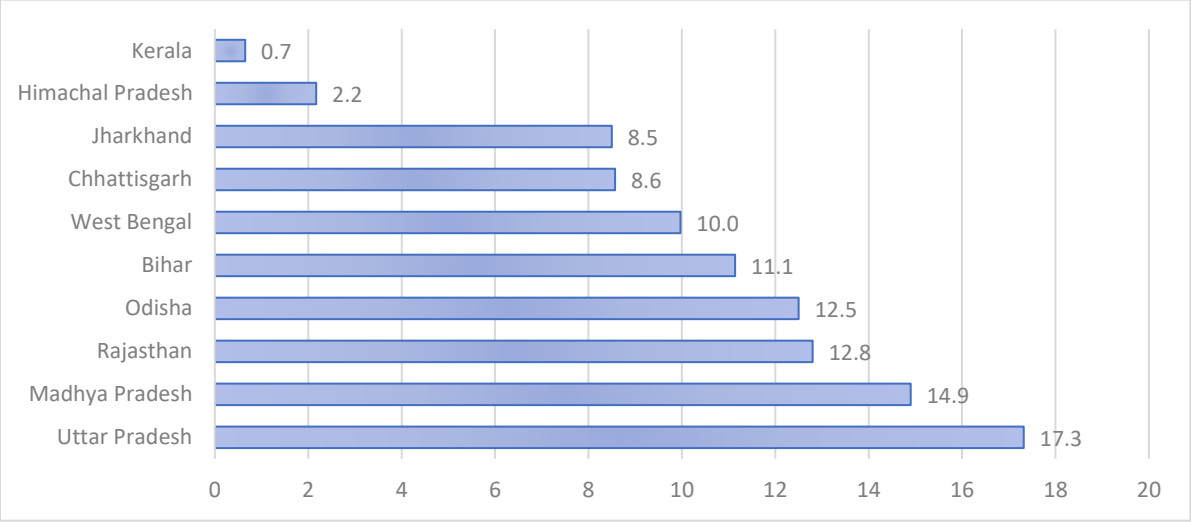
Distribution of children in the age group 6-17+ across participation status by gender and social group, India 2017-18

		Gender		Social Group			
Participation Status		Male	Female	ST	SC	OBC	Others
In-school children (%)	Pre-primary including non-formal	2.1	2.1	1.8	2.1	2.0	2.3
	Elementary	63.5	62.2	62.1	62.7	63.2	62.7
	Secondary & above	24.6	24.2	19.9	23.0	24.3	28.0
Out of school children (%)	Never enrolled	2.9	3.9	4.5	3.7	3.6	2.1
	Drop out	7.0	7.7	11.8	8.6	6.9	4.9
Total (%)		100	100	100	100	100	100
Out of school children (in million)		*16.6*	*17.6*	*5.4*	*7.9*	*15.7*	*5.2*

Source: National Sample Survey (NSS), 2017-18.

Figure 1: Regional distribution of out of school children

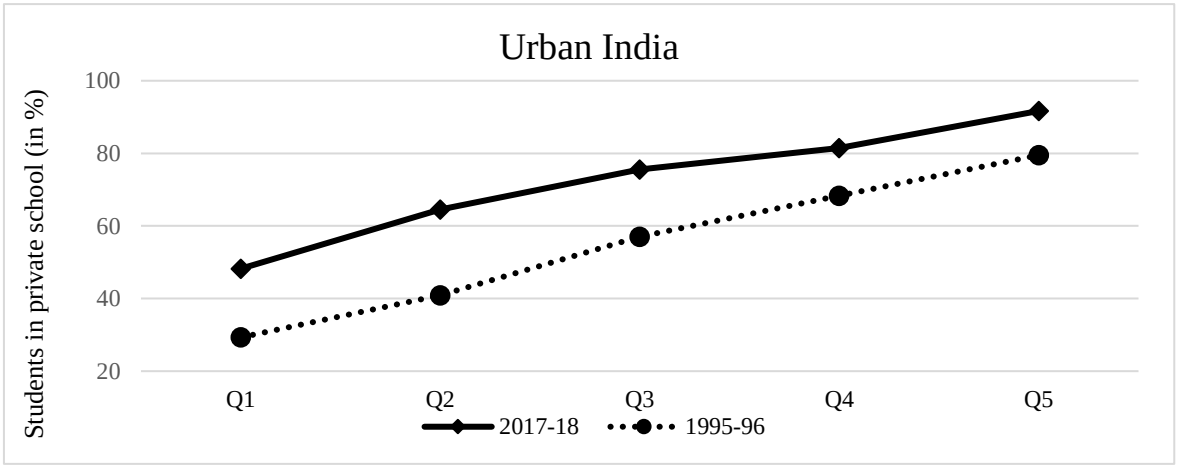
Out of school children as a % of population in the age group 6-17+



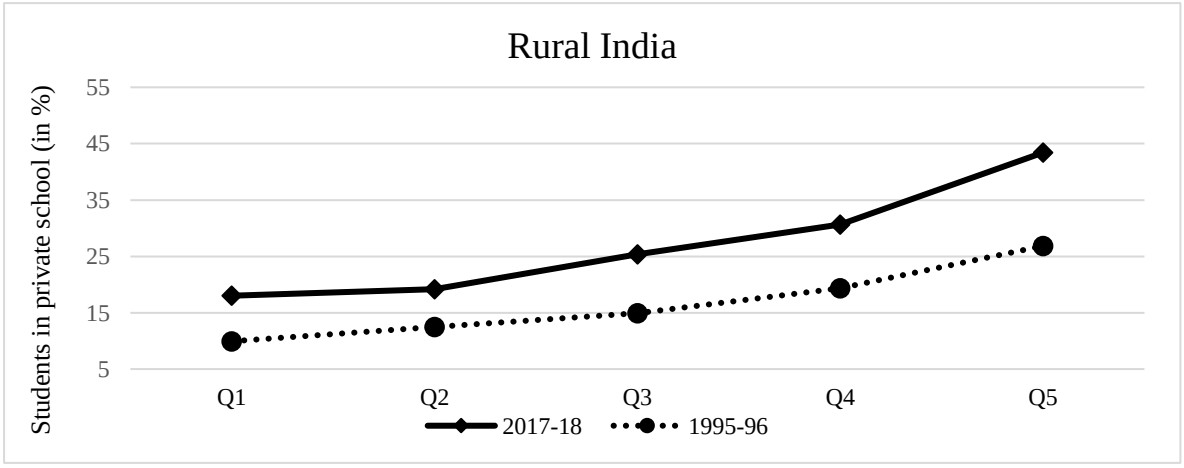
Source: NSS, 2017-18.

If the growing school participation of children from diverse social backgrounds over the years, represents a positive trend towards inclusion, rising privatisation has reinforced the exclusionary tendencies. A comparison of the trends in proportion of children attending private (unaided) schools between 1995-6 and 2017-18 shows a sharp increase in children attending private schools (Fig 2). Private schooling option is more readily available to the rich. More than 90% of the children in the top income class attend private schools in urban areas, a privilege that decreases steadily for lower income classes. In the rural areas, the inequality seems less sharp, though private schools are steadily gaining ground. A similar pattern emerges across social groups vis-à-vis participation in private schools. There is a clear streaming of students into public and private educational institutions depending on their economic status and location in the social hierarchy (Majumdar, 2014). The rising inequality and reproduction of pre-existing social inequalities, at the lowest elementary level, is of deep concern from the equity and social justice perspective.

Figure 2: Rising Privatisation at the Elementary School level



Pattern of children attending private schools by income classes



Source: NSS.

Note: Q1 to Q5 represent lowest and highest per capita consumption class, respectively.

As the more wealthy and powerful choose private options, the voice for improvement of the government schools from within has declined. These schools now have an overrepresentation of poor and marginalised communities (Table 2). Further, the expansion of the private schools has not only attracted the better-off segments, the proportion of children attending private school among low income and marginalised social groups has also increased (Fig 1). Low fee private schools (LFPS) have sprung up to cater to the demands of private schooling from low income families. Typically, these are schools run at a low cost with minimum infrastructure and resources. The existing literature highlights the problematic and limited nature of the LFPS alternative for educational quality, equity and affordability.[22] **Nonetheless, the sector has seen rapid expansion, aided by cheap informal workforce, lax school regulations and weak public school supply response. In Delhi, about 50% of children enrolled in private schools are estimated to be going to LFPSs**. [23] **The average educational expenditure burden of households on LFPS is more than three times that of the government schools, indicating major sacrifices in essential consumption to support private school choice by those who can ill-afford it.**

Table 2: Social Composition of Government schools

Proportion of students attending government schools within each category, India 2017-18

	By Gender		**By Social Group**			
	Male	Female	ST	SC	OBC	Others
Elementary	62.78	65.97	83.52	76.15	62.28	49.05
Secondary and Higher secondary	57.22	62.49	75.22	69.12	57.72	50.44

Source: NSS, 2017-18

The above paragraphs describe the broad contours of school participation in India. The growth in market for education has intensified the pre-existing inequalities in educational participation. Public-school system needs to provide a credible alternative to private options, particularly to stop the exit at the bottom. The streaming of students into public and private means that the dependence on the state sector for school education is significantly higher for girls and children from marginalised social groups (Table 2). Similarly, many of the poorer states have a far higher dependence on government schools, which need to be supported with adequate and equitable financing (Table 3). There are significantly large number of children out of school, who have a right to be part of the formal education system. Market is unlikely to be an option for them.

Bridging Resource Gaps

The usual practice of incremental budgeting followed by governments where budgets are determined as an increment (a small percentage increase) on previous year's budget cannot serve the objective of universalisation of equitable quality, especially when the gaps are large as we will see below. It becomes even more problematic in the context of elementary education

[22] See Srivastava (2013)
[23] See Bose et al. (2020a)

which has the status of a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution for all children between the age of 6-14. Entitlements such as the RTE require an unequivocal commitment of resources**. A better way to approach education financing is to focus on a financial roadmap based on desired norms. This normative estimate can then serve as benchmark against which to evaluate present expenditure levels**. The distance of the actual expenditure from the normative is the gap to be bridged.[24] **Calculation of the financial normative should be a periodic exercise as some goalposts are achieved and others need to be emphasized.**

In an all-India study of resource requirements (Bose et al., 2020b), we drew up state-wise estimates of resource requirement for universalization of elementary education using a normative framework. Right to education Act lays down the physical norms for every school (like pupil teacher ratios, infrastructure requirement, etc.), as well as system-wide norms (eg., trained teachers), the latter being an important component of public education system. These are to be achieved in an integrated and timebound manner. Our financial estimates have their basis in a thorough stocktaking of facilities available in each school against the prescribed RTE norms. Stocktaking is done using school level data from UDISE and system level information. Unlike the school level data, the latter is not easily available**. There needs to be greater focus on collation and dissemination of system level information which actually is the backbone of the school system.** Field studies across different states point to major vacancies and lack of personnel in the administrative ranks, academic support structures, etc. And yet this data is neither collected systematically, nor shared. The same is the case for infrastructure requirement at the system level.

Financial norms – which essentially have to do with costing each requirement - provides a window to review and critique the present arrangements and suggest alternative formulations. **Equal pay for equal work for teachers is a principle, presently not followed in most states, should form the core of a sound public system** and therefore its normative estimate. Similarly, **equal treatment of unequals cannot ensure equality and social justice. Many categories of children – such as those with special needs, children from marginalised groups, girl children, children in hilly regions and out of school children need more than the per capita share of expenditure per child.** Besides, several of the existing financial norms including those on teacher training, maintenance and development grants, textbooks and other entitlements warrant upward revision based on actual costs. Financial norms, **rather than being defined in static terms, must take into account actual costs and accordingly be revised periodically.**

Financial Estimates for elementary education

All-India average, per student required recurrent cost, for the year 2015-16 is estimated at around Rs 23,200. (For the year 2018-19, it is Rs 29,620).[25] This is the desirable level of expenditure per child, on average. The average hides the considerable variations that will be required. **Per student recurrent costs needs to be higher by around Rs 3,400 for children in the target group who need special focus for inclusion**. The following points need mention.

[24] This has been the method adopted by Tapas Majumdar Committee report of 1999, among others.

[25] The estimates for 2018-19 incorporate 15% salary hike due to 7th Pay Commission.

(i) When compared to KV per student recurring expenditure being incurred by the Central government at Rs 32,700 for 2015-16, the normative estimates of per child required recurring cost at Rs 23,200 appear in a very reasonable range.

(ii) A narrative has been built around the cost inefficiency of the government schools citing high per child costs, the comparison often being with the LFPSs. The high costs of public education are blamed to high teacher salaries of government school teachers and the small enrolment size**. Our estimates prove that the required recurring costs per child compliant with RTE norms and reasonable teachers' salaries for all teachers is not high, but in a reasonable range**. Rather the exploitative model of LFPSs needs to be rejected and abandoned summarily.

Small school size definitely raises costs per child (besides reducing the variety of teachers available in a school). To the extent we are addressing a basic entitlement, however, higher cost cannot be an overriding concern. Access to schooling is a far more important consideration and remote areas need to be served even if these schools are not "cost efficient". In urban contexts where school sizes are small, it is important to recognize that small sized schools are a result of past neglect. Greater neglect today would mean higher required spending per student in the future as demand gets further and further fragmented.

(iii) Even with such reasonable per child requirement, actual expenditures are only a fraction of the requirement, particularly in the poorer and educationally lagging states of India.

Table 3 gives the public schools' share in overall enrolment, teacher gaps and financial estimates for ten states - eight lagging states and two of the better performing states Kerala & Himachal Pradesh. Public schools' share in overall enrolment differs widely across states. In the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, an overwhelming proportion of children attend public schools, whereas UP and Rajasthan have far higher levels of privatisation. This needs to be remembered while comparing financial requirements across states. Privatisation will dwarf the requirement for public spending.

Table 3: Gap in teacher requirement and financial requirement, 2015-16

State	Share of Government (including Aided) Schools in Total Elementary Enrolment (%)	Deficit teacher as % of Required teacher$	Untrained teacher as % of existing teacher	Actual Expenditure to Total Requirement (%)	Additional Requirement to GSDP (%)
Bihar	**92.2**	**52.8**	**40.2**	**25.1**	**10.1**
Chhattisgarh	74.4	8.8	13.3	52.3	1.9

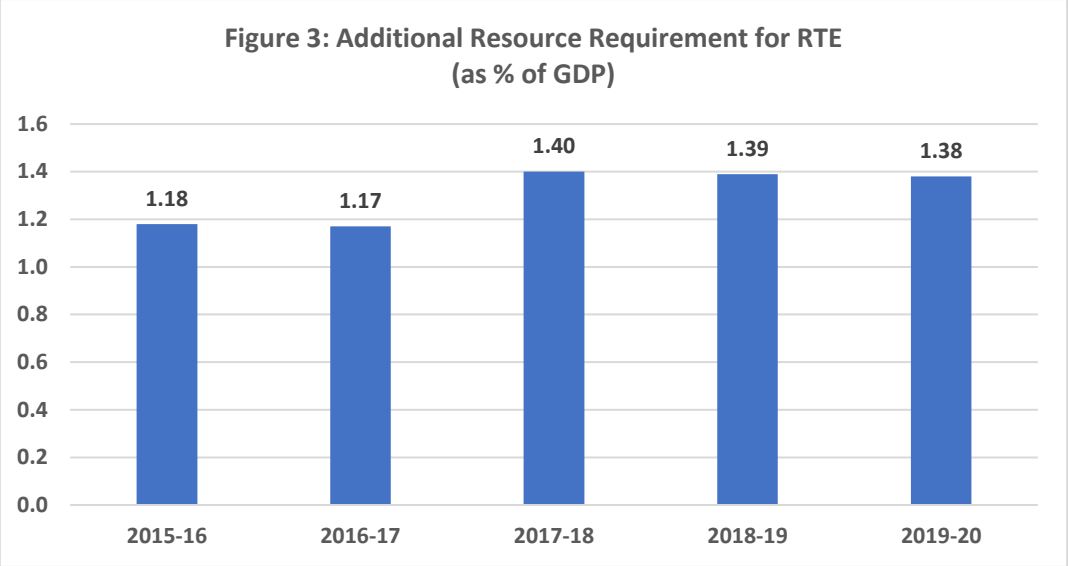
Jharkhand	76.4	43.6	11.4	37.9	3.2
Madhya Pradesh	62.5	27.0	3.2	45.7	2.6
Odisha	83.7	22.7	10.9	38.5	3.0
Rajasthan	50.4	22.2	1.9	49.8	1.6
Uttar Pradesh	51.4	30.0	15.6	64.2	1.8
West Bengal	86.8	18.1	48.6	45.6	1.9
Himachal Pradesh	59.6	0.0	2.9	80.5	0.5
Kerala	62.2	0.0	0.5	101.0	0.0

Note: $ Refers to teacher requirement for enrolled children. Para-teachers and guest teachers are counted as part of existing teachers
Source: Bose et al. (2020b).

There are massive teacher deficits in Bihar (53%), Jharkhand (44%) as well as in several other states. Teacher gaps within a state are concentrated in the most backward and remote areas. Of the elementary teachers, a significantly large percentage are untrained. **Across the country, the estimated teacher gap stands at 25% of required teachers, whereas a significant 16% of teachers at the elementary level are untrained.**

Actual expenditure is alarmingly low in many States compared to normative requirement. The ratio of actual expenditure to total requirement for Bihar is only about 25%. In Jharkhand, Orissa, MP and West Bengal the ratio lies between 38-46 %. The deficit is only a bit less in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. **It establishes the widespread phenomenon of under-spending**. At the upper end, more adequate spending is observed for Kerala and also relatively speaking for Himachal Pradesh.

Additional requirement measured as total requirement minus actual expenditure indicates the financing gap. Additional requirement is normalised with GSDP to understand the capacity of various states to finance it. Unequal fiscal position of the states in financing the additional requirement comes out clearly. **The revenue base is disproportionately small relative to the resource requirement in a number of states. These states are Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Fiscal position is worst in Bihar with additional requirement estimated at 10.1% of GSDP!** It is a double arrow. States that have the highest requirements and gaps, have the lowest revenue base. For these eight states - universalization of elementary education can only be achieved through additional funding and financial assistance from the union government. **At the all-India level, additional resource requirement is around 1.4 percent of GDP (see Fig 3), with major requirements located in the poorer states. Equalisation of disadvantages in financing elementary education is an immediate need.**



Source: Bose et al. (2020b)

Note: Estimates include anticipated wage hike due to 7th Pay Commission in 2017-18; 2016-17 to 2019-20 are projections.

Resource Requirement for Secondary education

The National Education Policy (GoI, 1986) had laid down that children graduating from elementary stage must have access to two years of secondary schooling and a further two years of senior secondary schooling as only after that, all children would have equal opportunity to access higher and professional education or to go in for meaningful employment or self employment. The draft new education policy (2019) reiterates the objective. Access to secondary schooling however still remains a challenge as witnessed in the high share of out of school children (Table 4). In the absence of a detailed normative estimation based on costing of individual facilities as has been done for elementary education, a back of the envelop calculation of total financial requirement (to be distinguished from additional requirement) is presented.

Overall Ask for secondary education

Table 4: Financial Requirement (Recurrent) for Secondary Education, 2018-19.

Projected population of children in the age group 14-17+	109 million
Estimated OSC (NSS, 2017-18)	23.5 million (22% of population)
Estimated children attending government (including aided schools)	65.5 million
Per child required recurring cost[$]	Rs 36,000
Recurrent Requirement for Secondary in 2018-19*	Rs 2,44,332 crores (1.29% of GDP)

Source: Own calculation based on NSS, Census and Annual Report of KVS.
Note: $ Per child recurring cost is assumed at 80% of that of Kendriya Vidyalayas. The correction to KV per child recurring cost is necessary as states have been observed to follow lower pay scales including lower allowances compared to KVs.
** Assuming 10% of OSC will be absorbed in the government schools in 2018-19.*

The normative secondary education financial requirement (recurring) calculation comes to around 1.29% of GDP (2018-19). Adding financial requirement for capacity creation would mean that not less than 1.4-1.5% of GDP is necessary, annually, to finance secondary education[26].

At present, the Central contribution to secondary education financing through Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, which is the main vehicle for intervention in secondary education, is minimal (0.02% of GDP in 2018-19). For elementary education, the Central contribution through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid- Day Meal Scheme is relatively higher (0. 2% of GDP in 2018-19), but nowhere compared to what is necessary. A major thrust in financing public education is necessary in an urgent manner.

Key Recommendations

- The challenges for universalisation of school education of equitable quality are substantial. There is a very large chunk of children who are still out of school. Access to schooling is deeply divided across privileged and underprivileged groups, further sharpened by rising privatisation. These require a decisive response in terms of expansion of government schooling and improvement of its quality. Adequate and equitable finance has an important enabling role to play.

- We have argued for a clear and detailed financial roadmap based on normative requirement as per the RTE norms. This should be adopted as the basis for budgetary allocations rather than incremental budgeting.

- In contrast to the commonly held view of satisfactory levels of facilities for elementary education, we find that elementary education alone requires an additional spending of 1.4% of GDP. The deficits are concentrated in the poorer and educationally lagging states. In Bihar, actual spending is only 25% of the overall requirement, and the additional requirement is 10.1% of GSDP, indicating the need for a major Central push in terms of additional finances. Underspending is observed for several other states, who also need central assistance based on the principle of equalisation.

[26] As school participation increases and the share of OSC decline, expenditure requirement would rise, and so would the states' ability to finance the expenditure.

- Total financial requirement for secondary education is estimated at 1.4-1.5% of GDP (2018-19). The substantial spending requirements at the secondary level should not be met at the cost of elementary education expenditure. Both need to grow simultaneously.

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the extensive reverse migration to the poorer regions of the country makes the case for resource augmentation more urgent. Just as for public health, the pandemic has proved that there is no alternative to a well-functioning public school system.

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ADULT EDUCATION

Nirantar

INTRODUCTION

Education is a significant marker of human development and is used widely in development indices, including those developed by the United Nations. The National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) identifies education as an important determinant of the economic well-being of households. In one of its reports on Human Development[27], NCAER recognizes education as an issue that is linked to other dimensions of wellbeing, in addition to monetary returns. This includes health outcomes, investments in the next generation, social networks and civic participation.

ADULT EDUCATION IN INDIA- CURRENT SCENARIO

The SDG motto "Leave no one behind" and more specifically SDG 4 to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" will only be theories on paper unless emphasis, effort and resources are invested in adult education as well as elementary and secondary education for the most marginalized even within the marginalized communities.

As per Census of India (2011), there are 257.6 Million illiterate people in the age group of 15+ years. This is not much of a significant change from the 2001 Census where the number was 259.5 Million. Despite universal access to elementary education, the number of non-literates is either constant over the years, or decreasing only minimally, making no difference in the overall literacy scenario of India. It is rather an issue of concern that in a span of ten years, only less than 2 million people were added to the literate population of India. Our country also accounts for 35 percent of the world's total adult illiterate population (Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-18).

According to the UNESCO report "Accountability in Education: Meeting our Commitments" (2017-18) that takes data into account from 2010 to 2016, India is in the bottom five countries for the adult literacy rate (15 & above age group) in South Asia, with literacy rate lower than smaller countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

S. No.	Country	Adult Literacy rate (15 years +)
1	Maldives	99%,
2	China	95%,
3	Sri Lanka	91%.

[27] Sonalde B Desai, et. al. (2010), Human Development in India: Challenges for a Society in Transition, Retrieved from http://demo.ncaer.org/downloads/Reports/HumanDevelopmentinIndia.pdf

4	Iran	85%
5	Bangladesh	73%
6	India	69%
7	Nepal	60%
8	Bhutan	57%
9	Pakistan	57%
10	Afghanistan	32%

Source: UNESCO Report "Accountability in Education: Meeting our Commitments" (2017-18)

Further detailing of the current statistics show that the marginalized communities in rural areas, especially women from marginalized communities, are the farthest from literacy. The literacy rate among rural Schedule Caste (SC) is just 52.6% and Schedule Tribe (ST) women even lower at 46.9%. The overall literacy rate in Muslim communities is just 57% which is much lower than the national average of 75%.

This is also a stark evidence of the lack of commitment and investment by successive governments in India for tackling the problem of adult illiteracy. A lack of commitment at the policy level is directly related to insufficient financial resources, which affects other literacy issues such as reaching out to the marginalized and providing the quality of literacy programs.[28]

DISPARITIES IN ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ALE)

Gender Gaps

India's patriarchal structure and its norms place severe restrictions on girls, women and gender non-conforming persons, often denying them mobility and equal access to education as well as opportunities created by education. The gender gap among male and female in the overall literacy rate of India is 16.7 percent. However, it varies for diverse communities, with some of the most marginalized communities having very little access to education. Additionally, the gender gaps are higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas as shown in the table. The gender gaps amongst rural SC and ST communities are further wider than the overall gender gap in literacy levels in rural India.

15+ Age group	Literacy Rate – Male (LRM)	Literacy rate – Female (LRF)	Gender gap
Overall	74.1	50.6	23.5
SC	68.1	43.0	25.1
ST	61.6	37.0	24.5
Muslims	66.5	47.2	19.2

[28] Hiroshi Ito (2013). Literacy for All: A Neglected "EFA" Goal?, *Journal of International Education and Leadership*, Volume 3 Issue 3 Fall 2013

Source: Census 2011

There are 10 states, namely, Uttaranchal, Orissa, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan and 1 union territory, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, whose gender gap in literacy rates are more than Indian national average i.e.; 16.7 percent. Among them, Rajasthan has the highest gender gap with 27.8 percent followed by Jharkhand 22.3 percent, Chhattisgarh 20.9 percent, and Madhya Pradesh 20.5 percent and so on.

Year	**U.P**			**Jharkhand**			**Rajasthan**		
	LRM %	LRF%	Gender Gap	LRM %	LRF%	Gender Gap	LRM%	LRF %	Gender Gap
	72.8	43.8	29.0	68.3	37.6	30.7	71.9	35.1	36.8
	65.9	34.9	31.0	56.8	26.6	30.1	66.5	29.3	37.2
	60.6	30.1	30.5	61.2	32.9	28.3	61.0	24.3	36.8
	61.1	36.7	24.4	66.7	36.7	29.9	66.7	27.7	38.9

Transgender Persons and their Exclusion from Education:

The Census of 2011 recorded transgender persons in India for the first time. There are at least 487,803 self-identified transgender persons in the country. There may be many more that have not disclosed their identities fearing social stigma and fear of discrimination. Their literacy rate is at 56.07 percent which is lower than the national average literacy rate. It is also lower than the literacy rates of females in the country. One of the biggest reasons for illiteracy and high drop-out rates among transgender persons and gender non-conforming children is the non-conducive environment of learning spaces in schools[29] and exclusion of their identities from pedagogies and textbooks, often leading to them being bullied, harassed and marginalized.

There is a dearth of government data related to various issues, vulnerabilities etc. faced by transgender persons in places of education and employment, making it difficult to formulate policies and programmes for the same. In Census 2011, transgender persons were categorized under males which means that this is only the data of trans-persons either self-identifying as male or are assigned gender male at birth which presents a partial picture of the population of transgender people in the country.

SC, ST and Minority Communities Literacy Rates

Education is a significant marker of human development and social justice. In the last 10 years despite the progressive policies and programmes (Right to Education Act and Saakshar Bharat Mission) that have been in place to address the issue of adult education and literacy, there

[29] UNESCO, Be a Buddy, Not a Bully: Experiences of sexual and gender minority youth in Tamil Nadu schools, p iv

remain huge gaps in making good quality education accessible to adults, adolescents and children; resulting into 280 million illiterates in India, the largest in the world (Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-18).

A majority of those non-literates are the girls and women from the marginalized communities.

As mentioned earlier, gender gaps are higher for Dalit and tribal communities, and the overall literacy rates are also lower for the SC, ST and Muslim Communities. While the overall literacy rate of India is 74 percent, the literacy rate of Muslim communities is merely 59 percent. If we take a look at some of the most marginalized tribal communities that also do not have access to other aspects of socio-economic development, we see that the literacy rates are alarmingly low. For example, the female literacy rate of the Musahar community of Bihar is alarmingly at a mere 3.9 percent[30] and female literacy rate of Meo's is just over 35 percent. Even the overall literacy rates of some of the tribes in the country are not more than 40-45 percent. This calls for special programmes and provisions to reach out to difficult to reach communities and devise programs to address their context and challenges. However, the current adult education programmes continue to work with generic strategies and approaches that have repeatedly failed to reach out to the most marginalized communities. Policies and programmes need to be strategized and reprioritized in order to truly "Leave No One Behind".

Community	Total	Male	Female	Gender gap
Meo in Haryana	51.7%	69.5%	33.9%	35.6%
Musahar in Bihar	9%[1][31]	14.1%	3.9%	10.1%

Source: A Baseline survey of minority concentration districts of India by Ministry of minority affairs GOI & ICSSR, pg. no. V and Report by SC & ST welfare department, Government of Bihar, 2012, Pg. no. 21

State Disparities The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, recognized literacy as the basic human right and committed to education for all. India is a land of diversity and contradictions. Some of those are glaring when it comes to human development indicators. Education is one of the indicators which have a huge disparity across states. On one hand, Kerala state in India has 94 percent literacy followed by Lakshadweep with 92 percent and Mizoram with 91.5 percent literacy rates. On the other hand, Bihar has just 63.8 percent overall literacy rate of the state, followed by Arunachal Pradesh with 66.9 percent and Rajasthan with 67 percent literacy rates. However, it is heartening to see the gains Bihar has made from 2001

[30] A Baseline survey of minority concentration districts of India by Ministry of minority affairs GOI & ICSSR, pg. no. V and Report by SC & ST welfare department, Government of Bihar, 2012, Pg. no. 21

[31] Report by SC & ST welfare department, Government of Bihar, (2012), Pg. no. 21 http://scstwelfare.bih.nic.in/docs/scst%20report%20of%2016th%20August%20Copy.pdf

to 2011. While the overall gain in literacy at the all India level has been 38.8 percent, Bihar almost doubled its literacy gains at 74.8 percent[32].

Six Indian states account for about 70 percent of all illiterates in India, namely: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Slightly less than half of all Indian illiterates (48.12%) are in the six Hindi-speaking states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh[33] A very important aspect that determines the investment and allocation of resources in education depends on the priorities of the states. Unless there are specific strategies devised by the states to address these current situations, the reduction in the absolute number of illiterates will remain a far cry.

While there are several reasons for the stated statistics, one of the key reasons for low literacy rates in these states is also because of the wide gender gaps that exist in literacy rates. While Kerala has the least gender gap (less than 10 percentile points), Rajasthan has the highest gender gap of more than 30 percentile[34]. Thus, other than focusing on states with lowest literacy rates, focusing on reaching out to the most marginalized people in the different communities, including women and girls, will further strengthen the literacy interventions and ensure high gains in lowest performing states like Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

There is disparity among states in regards to transgender persons literacy rates as well; with states like Rajasthan (48.34 percent) and Bihar (44.35 percent) having low literacy rates while Kerala (84.61 percent) had a relatively high rate of literacy among transgender persons[35]. These numbers also are reflective of how the states and their governments prioritize access to education for the most marginalized communities, including the transgender communities.

THE FUTURE OF ALE IS DIGITAL LITERACY

Being able to read and write is not sufficient to overcome the technical and social barriers that women and girls have to face particularly those from marginalized communities. In today's time, even the most literate especially the women and girls are afraid to use technology because of a process of constant socialization. In the current 'Digital Age' lack of literacy among women, especially from marginalized communities lead to their marginalization in digital spaces as well. The problem has been realized even more so with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent nation-wide lockdown since all teaching learning processes have now shifted online.

The marginalization of already marginalized communities and its women was clearly visible during the lockdown period due to covid19 pandemic wherein most of the unskilled labour

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[32] Literacy Achievement in India Across the States and Over the Age Cohort - Vachaspati Shukla https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/48/special-articles/literacy-achievement-india.html

[33] https://www.k12academics.com/Education%20Worldwide/Education%20in%20India/Literacy%20in%20India/literacy-rate-variations-between-states

[34] https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/mp/07Literacy.pdf

[35] Census 2011, retrieved from https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php

force (a majority of the people in the unorganized sector are women) faced challenges in accessing their entitlements due to their state of non-literacy and inaccessibility of mobile and internet. When lockdown made everything go online, people who were marginalized on accounts of resources and employment became doubly marginalized. The ability to access information and services was no longer dependent on being just literate; one had to be digitally literate. Only people with access to digital information and knowledge networks were the only ones able to access this information and negotiate structural power, and hence, their own rights.

The government of India has introduced policies and programmes to incorporate digital demand through its Digital India Programmes. One of the 9 pillars of this programme is 'information to all'[36]. One of the schemes under this programme is the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA). Aim of this scheme is to reach 40% of rural households in India by making one member of the eligible households digitally literate. Priority is to be given to participants of adult literacy mission, SC, ST, BPL, women, differently-abled persons and minorities. For individuals who are completely illiterate audio-visual-touch representation would be used to make them digitally literate.[37] However, it needs to be asked whether audio-visual touch representation is sufficient to enable one to navigate in digital space and retrieve information from the digital world.

Interventions for Adult Education - *Padhna Likhna Abhiyan (PLA)*

The Government of India has launched a new Adult Education Programme called "Padhna Likhna Abhiyan" (literally means reading and writing campaign) with the principal target to impart functional literacy to 55 lakh adult illiterates in the age group of 15 years and above under basic literacy programme in a period of one year i.e Financial year 2020-21. (Guidelines on Padhna Likhna Abhyan Within these targets, the Abhiyan will focus on women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) Minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. While it is an appreciable effort, there are many questions and concerns to be addressed given the Covid-19 impact and programme's ability to actually become implementable on the ground.

As shown in the table, the total of these five states is equal to 52% of the total illiterate population of India. However, PLA has no specific strategies to address the gamut of these states. Unless the most populous states with highest illiterate populations and biggest gender gaps are helped in developing state specific interventions, we will remain among the last five countries even within Asia.

	Total No. of Illiterates	Total No. of - Female	Total No. of - Male

[36] Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India / NIC. (2019, January 01). PROGRAMME PILLARS. Retrieved January 08, 2019, from Digital India Power to Empower: http://digitalindia.gov.in/content/programme-pillars

[37] e-Governance Services India Limited. (2019). Overview of PMGDISHA. Retrieved January 08, 2019, from Digital India Power to Empower: https://www.pmgdisha.in/about-pmgdisha/

	Number	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
India	25,75,83,612	16,68,19,149	65	9,07,64,463	35
Uttar Pradesh	4,82,72,087	3,12,81,375	65	1,69,90,712	35
Bihar	2,78,15,648	1,72,10,766	62	1,06,04,882	38
Andhra Pradesh	2,37,06,198	1,47,96,219	62	89,09,979	38
Madhya Pradesh	1,74,24,138	1,13,82,768	65	60,41,370	35
Rajasthan	1,78,08,955	1,23,14,993	69	54,93,962	31

Source **https://seshagun.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/PLA-Guidelines.pdf**

In the current 'Digital Age' where the economy is based on information technology[38], everything is going online. India is the second largest market for the internet in the world and is at the threshold of becoming the largest internet market. In 2018, over 4 billion people were online.[39] In 2017, urban India had 295 million internet users and rural India had an estimated 186 million internet users. It is estimated that by 2021, there will be about 635.8 million internet users in the country[40]..

However, programmes like PLA are still far from this reality and continue to see literacy constituting basic skills of reading and writing. This is even starker as a programme that has been launched during the time of the lockdown has not taken into account digital literacy that became the largest and biggest means of accessing rights and resources. In India 35% women identified lack of literacy and digital literacy skills which debar them from using mobile and internet services.

The PLA is completely oblivious to the social and economic reality of a large number of rural and urban populations in India. It is not only regressive in its definition of literacy but also in

[38] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age

[39] Internet World Stats.(2018, August 24). *TOP 20 Countries With The Highest Number Of Internet Users*. Retrieved September 10, 2018, from Internet World Stats: https://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm

[40] Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI).(2018, February 20). Press release. New Delhi, Delhi, India. Retrieved from IAMAI Media

its approach which is based on the idea of voluntary teaching. The PLA is designed on the idea "Voluntary Literacy Educators, who will not be paid any remuneration"[41]. The school and college students including volunteers of NSS, NCC and NYKS will impart basic literacy to adults[42]. This approach raises several questions on conceptualization of the programme:

- Volunteers cannot be held responsible if they do not teach. A country with more than 250 million illiterates cannot rely on school and college volunteers to provide adult education of the quality that can be used by men and women in their everyday life.
- The training budget of the programme is negligible with an assumption that unpaid volunteers will not need much training to become adult educators.
- The programme seems to be considering adults as small children, who can be taught by school going students. This discounts the knowledge and learning needs of adults which demand different strategies for teaching . It also undermines the adult education as area of expertise and specialisation.

PLA guidelines also exemplifies that the existing school teachers and headmasters will work as village literacy teacher and school college literacy teacher[43]. The teachers who are already burdened by other non-academic/administrative work will be given additional responsibilities to work under PLA. There are studies showing burden on teachers in conducting and implementing activities like census surveys or election duties in addition to being responsible for maintaining records. Due to these extra responsibilities, teachers spend less time in the classroom teaching[44]. Additional responsibilities of PLA on the teachers will further burden them and their accountability for adult education will be difficult to seek.

BUDGET FOR ADULT EDUCATION

The Financial outlay for the Abhiyan is Rs. 224.95 crore for the year 2020-21. The financial allocation for a population of 5.5 million to be covered in a year, it is a meagre Rs. 409 (US$5)/learner/year and that too for setting up systems and infrastructure etc as the teaching and learning is left to the volunteers with close to no budget for training and capacity building. The component wise tentative outlays indicate that all the funds will be utilized at the national, state and district levels to set up literacy centers. Significant funds will be utilized for developing Literacy Application for promotion of literacy through mobile phone and developing ICT software for real time monitoring and maintenance. On the other hand the scheme proposed zero expenditure on adult educators/volunteers. Also per learner expenditure on material is kept at meager i.e. Rs. 155 (US$2) annually.

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[41] Guideline on PadhnaLikhnaAbhiyan (Scheme of Adult Education) May 2020; Page no. 4

[42] Y.S Rana, (May 2020). 'Padhna Likhna Abhiyan' launches by the MHRD, Tribune News Online, Retrieved from http://www.tribunenewsline.com/padhna-likhna-abhiyan-launches-by-the-mhrd/

[43] Ibid, pp 22- 23

[44] Nisha Vernekar and Karan Singhal, (June 2018). Administrative Duties Are Stealing Valuable Time from Government School Teachers, The Wire. Retrieved from https://thewire.in/education/non-teaching-duties-government-school-teachers-india

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Padhna Likhna Abhiyan should not rely on “Voluntary Literacy Educators”. This strategy undermines the need for the trained and skilled adult educators who can provide good quality education to adults. While it might be easy to recruit volunteers initially, their motivation levels go down when they realize that their aspirations are not met. For those who are not ideologically motivated, it becomes difficult to sustain their interest when they realize that they have to spend considerable time without any monetary benefits. There should be dedicated adult educators under DIETs who go through capacity building and training to be able to cater to the specific needs of the adult learners.
- Budget allocated for Adult Education under Padhna Likhna Abhiyan is extremely low at Rs. 155 per person annually. More resources should be invested in the learners, their specific learning needs, establishment of specified learning spaces along with content and material. There should be a minimum standard quality policy made for the implementation of the programme and it should be monitored regularly for each learner. The budget for the programme should be allocated based on rational calculations keeping the target and outcomes in the view. The arbitrary allocation of funds has been a core problem in implementing AE programmes in the past with quality.
- Keep functional literacy as a primary skill and upgrade it with digital to give new sets of capabilities required to adapt to the post COVID realities. The digital skills will also enable adults the acquisition of a vast array of other skills needed to become more employable.)
- Presently, the Directorate of Adult Education at the national level and the State Resource Centers at the state levels have either been closed down or have become largely dysfunctional. It is important to resurrect these organizations and use the resources-human and otherwise- that is already available with them for the PLA to implement it with quality and specialized set of skills acquired by these institutions over the years.
- PLA must have a specific and separate strategy to reach out marginalized communities and the communities which are most difficult to reach with need-based content and culturally sensitive pedagogies.