



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**Educational Access in Madhya Pradesh  
And Chhattisgarh - India**

**Country Research Summary**

**R. Govinda  
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**October 2010**



**National University of Educational  
Planning and Administration  
NUEPA**



Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is a Research Programme Consortium supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Its purpose is to undertake research designed to improve access to basic education in developing countries. It seeks to achieve this through generating new knowledge and encouraging its application through effective communication and dissemination to national and international development agencies, national governments, education and development professionals, non-government organisations and other interested stakeholders.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality.

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## Foreword

This Country Research Summary (CRS) summary provides an overview of recent research findings from CREATE research in India. Its scope is selective and needs to be considered alongside the portfolio of research outputs CREATE has published which cover other aspects of the programme of research. This CRS brings up to date a process that we began in 2007 in the inception phase of CREATE with the publication of a series of Country Analytic Reviews and the initiation of the Pathways to Access Research Monographs (PTA) that now include over 60 contributions. The India Country Analytic Review (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008) collated recent research, developed a baseline analysis of access to education, located pressing policy issues, generated conceptual tools, and identified key research gaps. The PTAs embrace review studies, analysis of large scale secondary data sets, empirical findings from household and school level data, and evidenced based thematic and conceptual discourses. Interim publications including earlier country level policy briefs have maintained the momentum of the impact of the CREATE research on policy and practice and made research results available in a timely way.

The CREATE team in India, along with CREATE research students and associates have published a collection of monographs and policy briefs along with a portfolio of journal articles and other research outputs with particular relevance to India. These are catalogued on the CREATE website ([www.create-rpc.org](http://www.create-rpc.org)). These extended the knowledge base we constructed in 2006/7 and contributed to building more understanding of the causes, consequences and capacity to reduce educational exclusion. They complement the generic outputs from CREATE which extend the range of insights into the opportunities that exist to enhance access to basic education consistent with the aspirations of national governments and internationally agreed goals.

CREATE seeks to inform policy dialogue at national level and international level. It depends on its networks of researchers and research associates, and its close relationships with national and local governments and with development agencies, to project its insights and ideas into evidenced based discussions. This CRS, and the associated portfolio of research products, provide a toolkit of ideas and insights to this end.

Keith Lewin  
Director of CREATE  
Centre for International Education  
University of Sussex





Consortium for Research on  
Education, Access, Transitions & Equity  
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## **EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH - INDIA**

### **COUNTRY RESEARCH SUMMARY**

**OCTOBER 2010**

This Country Research Summary describes and explains patterns of access to schools in two districts in India. It outlines policy and practice on access to education and provides an analysis of access, vulnerability and exclusion. The quantitative data is supported by a review of research, which explains the patterns of access and exclusion. Drawing upon questions and issues raised in the Country Analytic Report (CAR) on Access to Basic Education in India (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008), the paper uses the findings of empirical studies conducted in 36 villages and 88 schools covering 9,653 children located in three different clusters of two states, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh over three rounds of data collection in 2007, 2008 and 2009, to reflect on policies and practices on access to schools in India. The CREATE programme of research in India also includes numerous research monographs in the Pathways to Access series<sup>1</sup>.

#### **1. Why educational access is important in India**

Universalisation of elementary education has been a constitutional commitment in India to its citizen to provide education until the age of 14. To meet the objectives of the state, successive governments at the union and state level have implemented many policies. Despite considerable efforts, universal access to elementary education in India remains elusive and the quality of provision is far from satisfactory. Education is considered a basic need for human development as it can enhance the capability of an individual to improve their quality of life. As a result, achieving UEE has gained considerable attention from policy makers and implementers. Education has become a fundamental right, free and compulsory for children aged 6-14, mandated by the 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, the Right to Education Act 2009 and Article 21A, which has become operational from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. Various government programmes have led to progress, although the country has not achieved 100% literacy. Levels of literacy are high among the upper strata of the society, but illiteracy remains a serious issue for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Castes and Muslim minority Groups. In short, meaningful access to education varies widely by geographical location, caste, class, gender and poverty. These issues are discussed in greater detail in the CREATE Country Analytical Review (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

A lack of meaningful access to education is a major concern in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which have generally been regarded as educationally 'backward' states. These states have witnessed considerable expansion of educational facilities and unprecedented increases in enrolment of students over the last few decades. According to Selected Educational Statistics, 2006-07, the number of elementary schools in Chhattisgarh was 44,082 in 2006 with 3,195,546 students enrolled in primary classes and 1,345,855 in upper primary classes. Similarly, the total number of elementary schools in Madhya Pradesh was 135,440 in the same year (2006) and the number of students enrolled in these schools was 11,812,968 at the primary level and around 4,505,506 at the upper primary level.

However, despite improvements over the last decade, both states still have a large number of out of school children of school age who remain excluded from educational institutions for various reasons. Table 1 indicates that around 10% of children in rural areas and 6% of children in urban areas were out of school in 2005. This was revealed by a survey conducted by SRI-IMRB (2005) and may underestimate the numbers since it is based on household self reporting and does not account for

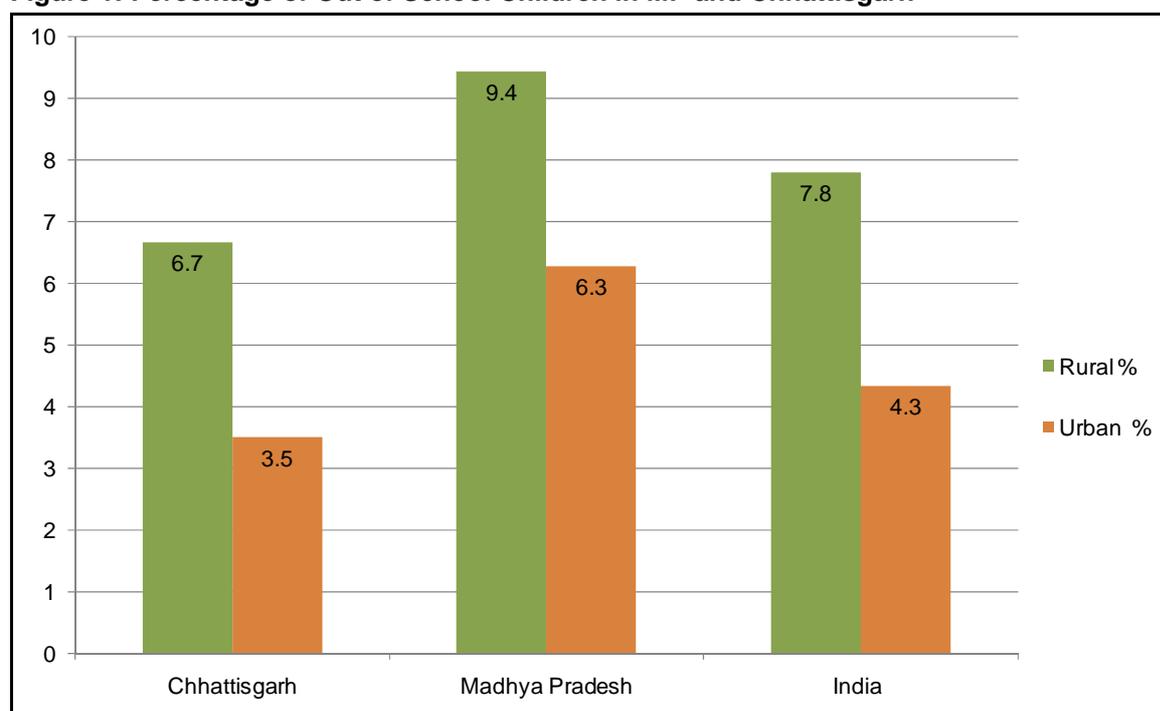
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<sup>1</sup> Authors acknowledge the support provided by CREATE team at NUEPA particularly Mr. K. Naresh Sharma, Mr. Md. Moinuddin, Mr. Jagannath Behera and Mr. Rahul Joshi for developing this paper.

those enrolled but frequently absent. Large numbers of children fail to complete the elementary cycle of school and less than half reach the end of the elementary cycle. Many drop out, many others fail to progress from one grade to another, and others do not learn even the minimum expected competencies. The priority for policy is therefore, how to move from increasing enrolment to achieving greater equity and quality.

To formulate effective policies to combat educational exclusion, sound empirical research is needed. As a result, the Community and School Survey (ComSS) conducted by CREATE provided a special focus on meaningful access and participation as well as processes of exclusion.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Out of School Children in MP and Chhattisgarh**



Source: Survey Conducted by SRI-IMPB, 2005

### 1.1 Background and Design of the study

The education system in India has steadily grown during the last six decades, moving the national literacy figures from a mere 16% to around 65%. For the last four decades, development planning has put a special focus on 'backward' localities and marginalised groups to overcome regional disparities and social inequity. Education is one of the most important components and drivers of development planning. As a result of this, the country has witnessed, in recent years, an unprecedented expansion in educational infrastructure at all levels, drawing millions of children into organised learning. Official figures indicate near universal enrolment of all children in the compulsory education age group of 6-14. The number of elementary schools has grown to a figure of more than one million. Recent figures indicate that around 93% of school age children are enrolled in primary schools, though often not at the right grade level. Recently, the Right to Education Act has made access to education a fundamental right for the 6-14 years age group.

However, only one out of two children survives to complete the compulsory primary school cycle of 8 years. In fact, around 30% children drop out of school even before reaching Grade 5. This is for a variety of reasons. One of the main reasons emerging from research is that children begin to lag behind academically from the early grades and then eventually drop out of school by the end of or during the primary stage up to Grade 5. Many children do not make adequate progress in the early grades, and the content and pace of the curriculum (as mandated by the state government) in Grades 3 and 4 accelerates rapidly, making 'catching up' difficult. It is not unusual to have large numbers of children reaching Grade 4 or 5 without being able to read or write fluently or do simple arithmetic. Many are over age by the time they reach this level.

In view of this, a core question is whether the poor quality of schooling has become the cause for continued midstream drop out of children from schooling and eventual illiteracy and incapacity to pursue productive life in their adulthood. The largest numbers of out of school children in India start schooling but fail to complete the basic education cycle. Access to education cannot be treated only as the creation of schooling infrastructure and providing pan-systemic inputs such as teacher training, textbooks etc. Access, to be meaningful, has to pay equal and simultaneous attention to the issue of 'what happens to children who enrol in school?' There is, indeed, a growing recognition that poor quality of schools is pushing children out of education or effecting a silent and unnoticed exclusion making them vulnerable even if they have attended and completed eight years of schooling (Lewin, 2007; Reddy and Sinha, 2010).

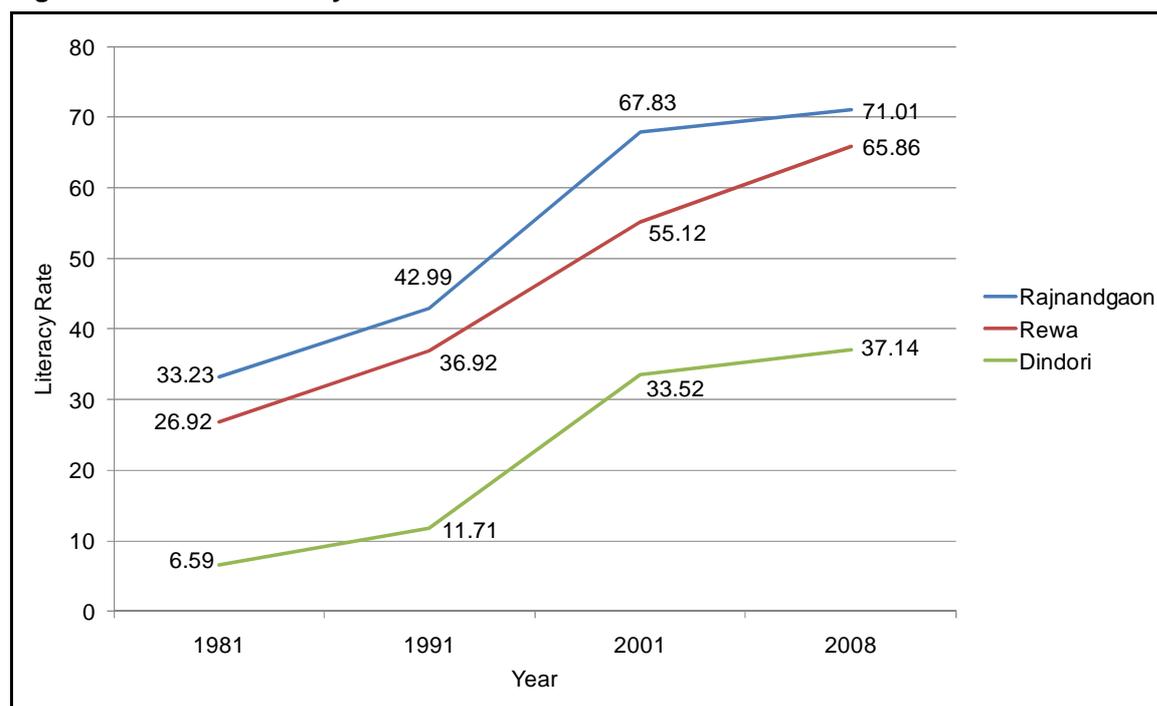
It is this area of the interface between access and quality that this policy brief explores based on research in 88 schools located in 36 villages three contiguously located clusters – one in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh and one each in Rewa and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh. These three clusters – Rajnandgaon, Rewa and Dindori, in that order present a development continuum in terms of general infrastructure as well as in literacy rates. While Rajnandgaon cluster is located alongside the main highway and has relatively better access to several other development facilities, Rewa cluster is an interior rural cluster and Dindori consists of remotely placed and difficult to access villages inhabited by a tribal population. During the last five years three rounds of school surveys and competency tests, a household survey and data collection on Child Tracking Card have been conducted. The data collected through this process provide insights into various problems pertaining to access, participation and performance of children along with an understanding about functioning of schools in these three clusters.

## **2. Patterns of educational access in India, MP and Chhattisgarh**

Access to basic education in India is improving, but areas of concern remain with respect to equity and quality (Sinha and Reddy, 2010; Juneja, 2010; Smita, 2008; Härmä, 2010; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008). Many children are still not able to access a quality education. The subsequent analysis will examine this issue. The analysis begins with literacy rates and then move onto pre-primary education. Children who lack of access to pre primary education fall into CREATE's zone 0 of educational exclusion (Lewin, 2007)

### **2.1 Literacy Rate**

Rajnandgaon cluster has an overall literacy rate of 71%, the corresponding figure for Rewa cluster is 66% and it is as low as 37% in Dindori. (CREATE Household Survey, 2008). One can see that there has been considerable increase in the literacy rate in these three clusters (Figure 2) though in recent years the rate of gain has slowed.

**Figure 2: Trend in Literacy Rate in 1981-2008**

Source: Census, 1981, 1991, 2001 and Household Survey, 2008

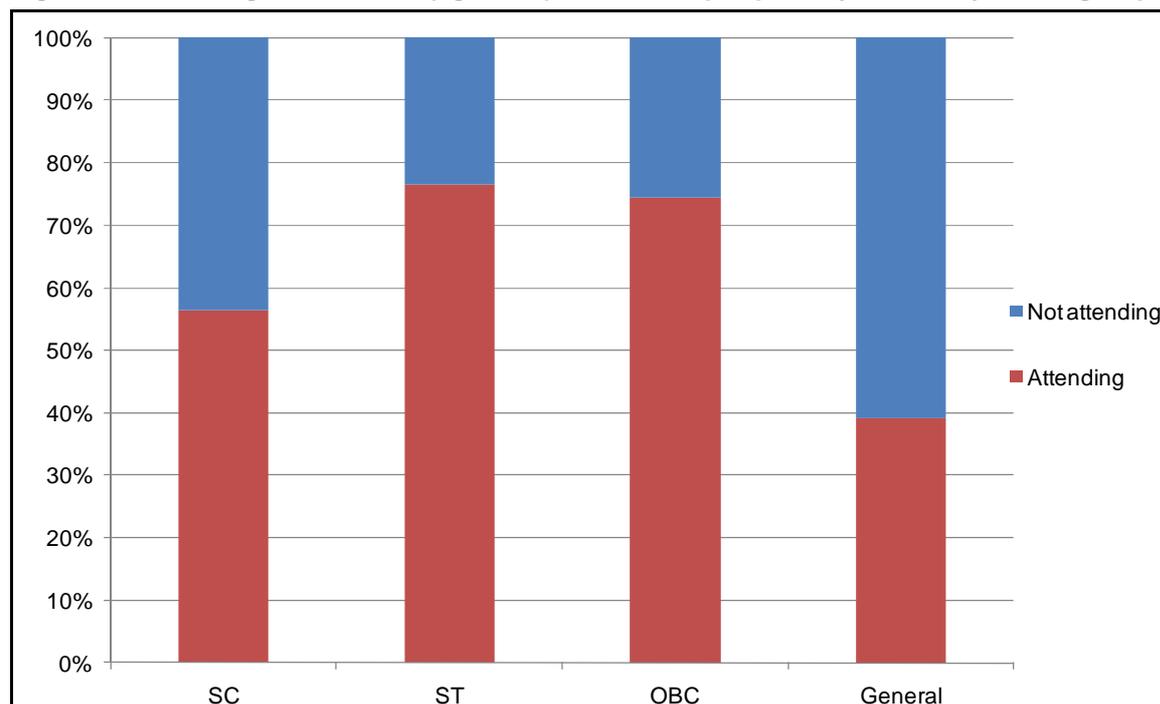
Note: the literacy rates of 2008 are based on CREATE data.

**2.2 Pre-primary Education:** Various types of pre primary schools are available in India and more children are now attending pre-school (NIPCCD, 2006) indicating an overall increase in demand for education at this stage. This overall increase raises questions such as whether this demand has increased everywhere. Are all children attending pre-schools if the facility is available? Which types of preschools do children belonging to different socio-economic groups attend? Who are the children totally excluded from pre primary schooling (zone 0 of the CREATE zones of exclusion)? Quantitative data collected in National Family Health Survey, DISE (District Information System for Education) and the Seventh All India Education Survey as well as qualitative data collected in the ComSS can help us answer these questions.

We can examine the existing demand for preschool education and its present status with help of the CREATE ComSS. The analysis of this data suggests that enrolment rate in pre-primary school varies considerably across these three clusters selected for the study and it also varies between the social groups (Figure 3). Altogether, around 70% of children were accessing preschool education in these three clusters. The highest enrolment was in Rajnandgaon (89%) followed by Dindori (81%) and Rewa (35%).

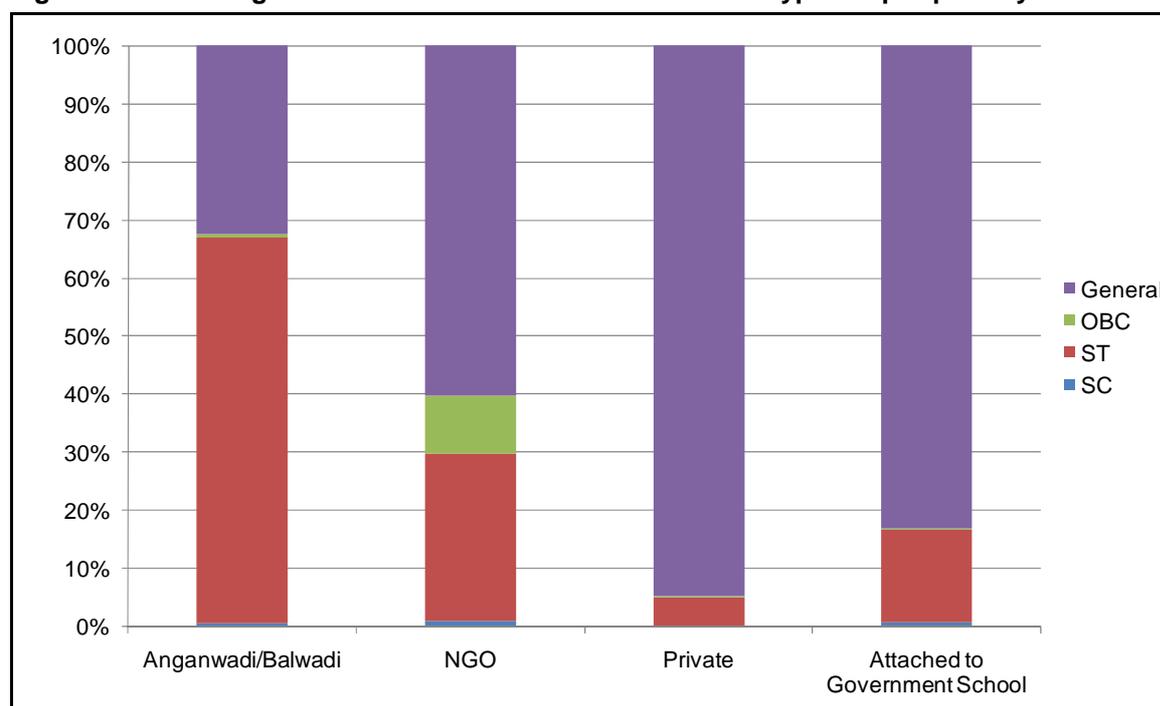
The majority of children attend *Anganwadi* (government supported child-care centres or “courtyard pre schools”) which is covered under an Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). A considerable proportion of children attend private pre primary schools. Most of these children are from ‘general’ caste or social groups rather than the marginalised groups (Figure 4). In the absence of private schools almost all the children in tribal dominated villages in Dindori are enrolled in *Anganwadi*.

**Figure 3: Percentage of children (aged 3-6) enrolled in pre-primary school by social group**



Source: Household Data, 2008

**Figure 4: Percentage share of children enrolled in different types of pre-primary school**



Source: Household data, 2008

## 2.3 Present Issues for School Education

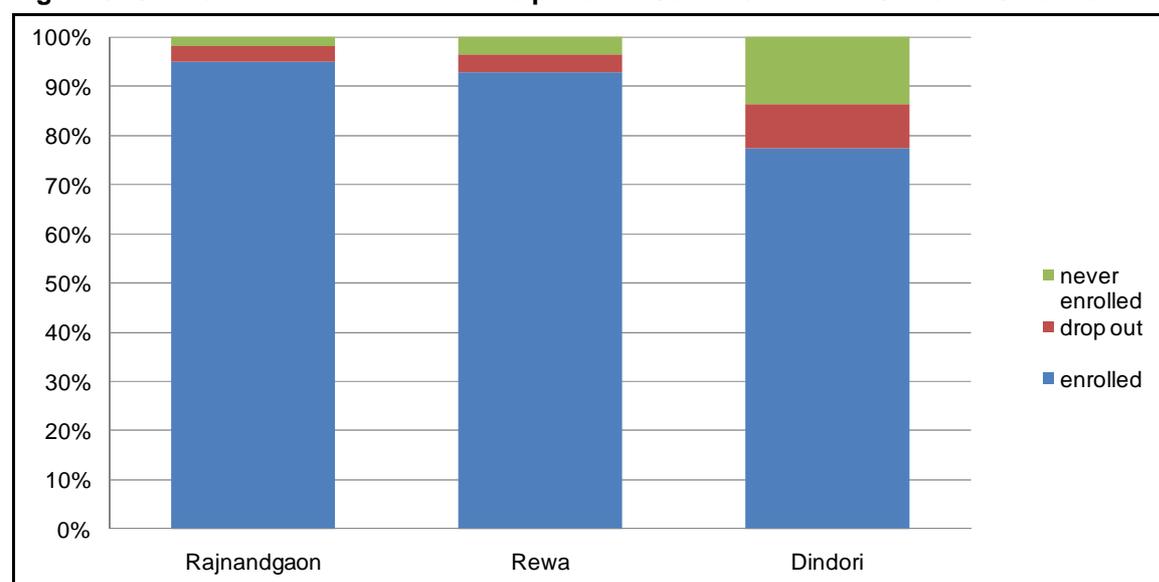
**2.3.1 School supply:** At the physical infrastructure level, access to education has been enhanced with the policy of the establishment of schools within 1 kilometre of the rural population, and now 99% of the villages in the country have a primary school (Gol, 2010). The CREATE– NUEPA Project

covers 88 schools from 36 villages. The number of primary schools in these states has grown rapidly from 529,000 in 1986 to 767,000 in 2005 and at upper primary from 134,000 to 275,000. In 2003 around 87% of habitations had a primary school within a distance of 1 kilometre and 78% of habitations had an upper primary school within 3 kilometres (NCERT, 2005). In addition, the number of private pre-primary, primary and upper primary schools has also increased considerably. Government and local bodies continue to be the main providers, managing around 91% of primary and 73% of upper primary schools. Many new schools, particularly those opened under the EGS/AIE scheme are small in size. Most are located in rural areas. Around 28% of children are educated in primary schools with 50 students or fewer (DISE, 2005-6). Primary schools generally have five grades. Small schools often have fewer than five teachers.

All the villages in these clusters have at least one primary school. According to the data collected by the school survey, 9,653 children were attending the 88 schools in the study. In the three clusters, 79 (90%) of the schools are managed and funded by the government, with 86% in Rewa, 100% in Dindori and 87% in Rajnandgaon. In the same way, in Rajnandgaon, 84% of the students are enrolled in government schools. Similarly, these percentages are 81% and 99.8% respectively in Rewa and Dindori.

**2.3.2 Initial access to education:** According to the official, Government of India report 2009-10 on education, the 'Gross Enrolment Ratio' (GER) has increased at the primary level for the 6-14 age group to 114.6% in 2007-08 from 96.3% in 2001-02. The positive trend is also seen at the upper primary level. The GER at the upper primary level has increased to 77.5% in 2007-08 from 60.2% in 2001-02. It is noteworthy that the majority of children are attending school in the villages under study in these three clusters; however, there are some children within the age group who have never enrolled in school and some who drop out from school as shown in Figure 5. These drop outs fail to complete their schooling before reaching 15 years old.

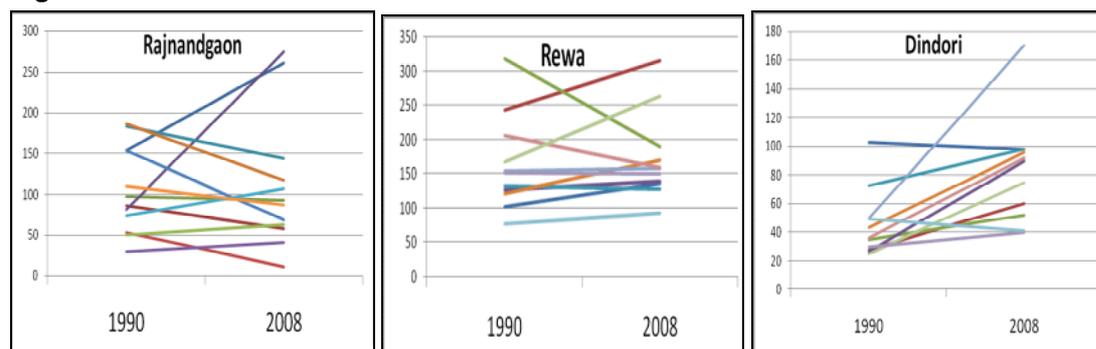
**Figure 5: Status of Enrolment and Participation in Schools in Three Selected Clusters**



Source: HH Survey, 2008

Figure 6 shows that while most schools have shown an increase in enrolment, a few schools in Rajnandgaon and Rewa have shown a decline. Since the graph considers only government schools which were available in both survey periods, the opening of new private schools in Rewa and Rajnandgaon and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) schools in Rewa may be the reasons for this decline. It is worth mentioning that Dindori has no private schools although it has four EGS schools.

**Figure 6: Enrolment in Schools**



Source: School Survey data, 1991, 2008

### 3. What is Meaningful access?

Meaningful access requires high attendance rates, progression through grades at the correct age with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered, and no gender discrimination. Too many children are physically present in school but not learning, and are therefore falling into the category of zone 3 or 'silent exclusion' (Lewin, 2007; Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

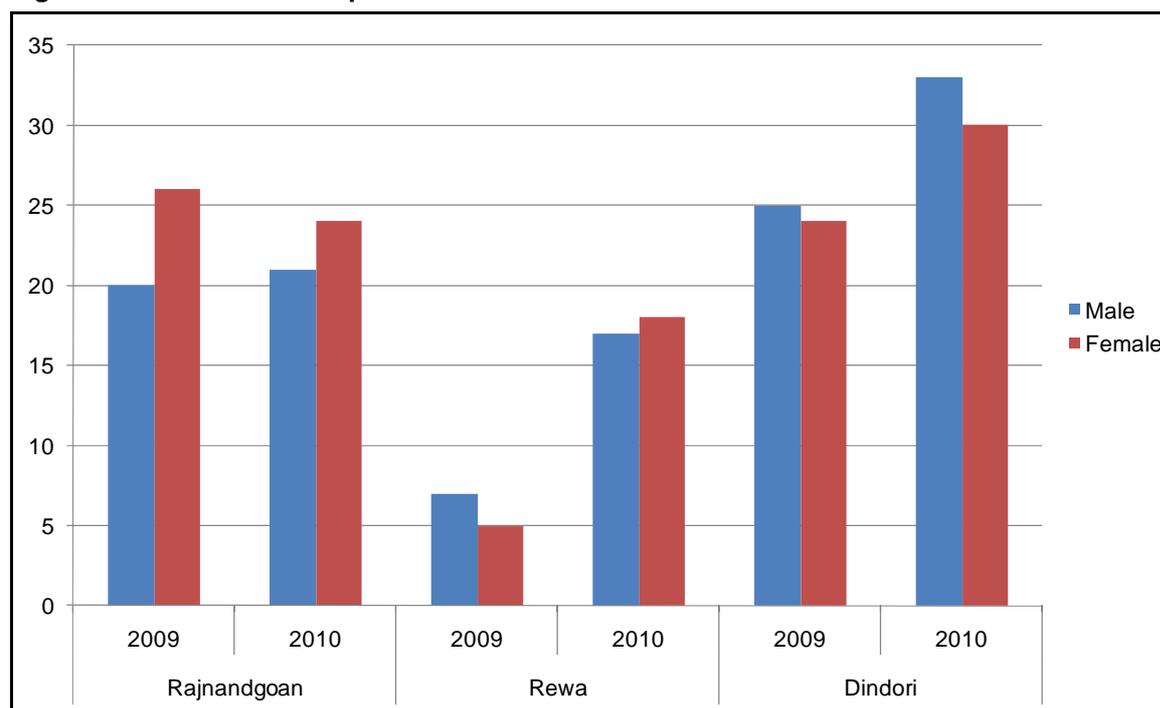
CREATE research has revealed that all the case study clusters are facing tremendous challenges ensuring meaningful access due to the presence of a high percentage of absentees. Some children are absent for more than 15 days per month. The proportion of children absent for four or more days a month is about 12% in Rajnandgaon, 15% in Rewa, and over 25% in Dindori. Only in Rajnandgaon were more than half of children present every school day (ComSS Report 2009). The most frequent reason given for absence was illness, with domestic chores and work being given as the next most common reasons.

There is a high incidence of repetition in all three clusters particularly in Rewa and Dindori where around one fifth children were found to have repeated their class at least once since they entered school. However, in Rajnandgaon only 7% had repeated grades. These children are mostly attending government run formal or EGS schools while repeaters were hardly found in private schools.

The proportion of over age pupils in each of the three clusters was also striking. Those who are one year over age or more account for between 40% (Rajnandgaon) and 70% (Dindori) of all students in Grade 5. Those two years over age or more account for between 16% and 49% in the respective clusters. By Grade 8 between 25% and 50% are over age by at least two years. In Grade 1 between 30% and 40% are one year over age and 6% to 12% are two years over age (ComSS 2009). This suggests that the problem of over age is both due to late entry and to repetition in higher grades. Children who are over age are at risk of drop out and may not reach the end of elementary school until they are well over 16 years old.

The incidence of drop out has increased. In 2009, 446 children dropped out, while in 2010, 602 children from the 88 schools dropped out. Figure 7 shows that even in Rajnandgaon, a large number of children dropped out despite the fact that this cluster is equipped with better schooling facilities than Dindori and Rewa. The highest proportion of drop out took place in Dindori in both years, the least developed cluster. It is noticeable that there is not much difference in dropout rates of boys and girls in both years. More girls than boys dropped out in Rajnandgaon and Rewa while boys were in a disadvantaged situation in Dindori in 2010. The children in Rewa which has 13 EGS and 6 private schools as well as 16 government schools seem to be in a better situation than those in the other two clusters. Overall between 20% and 35% fail to complete Grade 5 in the case study clusters.

**Figure 7: Gender Wise Drop Out in 2009 and 2010**



Source: Roster Data 2009, 2010

Note: Drop outs were determined by comparing those enrolled in the 2008 baseline and tracking them individually into 2009 and 2010.

**3.1 Transition patterns:** For access to school to be meaningful, students should be able to progress through the stages of education – primary, upper primary and secondary. The beginning of this process is the first clearance of the first hurdle, i.e. transition from primary to upper primary. Though enrolment is high in the primary stage, the transition of these students to upper primary is not encouraging. 11% in Rajnandgaon, 29% in Rewa and 38% Dindori did not transit from primary to upper primary (Grade 5 to Grade 6).

### 3.2 Reasons for Out of School for Children of 6-10 and 11-14 years:

The costs of education are the determining reason for children to be out of school in Dindori. This applies to children from 6-10 years old and 11–14 years old. “Unable to bear expenses” was the most common reason for never enrolment and drop out from school (36% and 61% in 6-10 years and 11-14 years age group). This is understandable as the district is a poor and underdeveloped region. Many children help in household activities, an issue which is more common in the higher age group, with the children losing interest in education. Costs and needs for children to help domestically and in agriculture contribute to the high percentage of children who never enrol and drop out.

In the developed and developing districts of Rajnandgaon and Rewa, cost issues do not play such an important role in causing children to be out of school. In these clusters, children drop out or have never enrolled more often as a result of the lack or loss of interest in education. In some cases children stay away from school because they are engaged in work for their families that contributes to the family income, as is also the case in Dindori.

**3.3 The Causes of Exclusion:** There are many interacting factors that contribute to exclusion from schooling. The Indian context is so diverse that social stratification, gender inequity, location and poverty vary greatly across states and communities and often interact. Together they can form a complex nexus of exclusion and it is important to understand relationships between factors.

**Location of school:** The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data (GOI, 2006) suggests that although distance between home and schools is not a critical issue, the remoteness of

habitations within rural areas still affects the participation of children, particularly girls and those with disabilities. 11% of children in the CREATE household survey did not go to school due to the unfavourable location of the school. While small community based schools help enrolment, there is some concern that many small schools have low standards and limit the chance for meaningful learning.

**Poverty:** A major factor affecting schooling access is poverty. The children of the poor tend to be relegated to the margins of the system, and eventually pushed out altogether. 11% did not go to school as they were working, 20% contribute to the maintenance of the family income and 5% could not avail themselves of the opportunity of learning as the family could not afford it. A closer analysis shows that economic impoverishment itself is deeply embedded in a discriminatory social structure. 20% of Scheduled Caste (SC), 9% of Scheduled Tribe (ST) and 9% of Other Backward Class (OBC) children contribute to the income earning activities for the family. Further, 16% of SC, 19% of ST and 26% of OBC children are engaged in household activities which inhibit school attendance.

**Gender:** Although access of girls to education has improved, patterns of access are gendered. More than half of the parents of girls who never attend school were of the opinion that they do not need to send their girl children to school. The reality of girls' exclusion is further complicated by caste, religion, ethnicity and age. Rajnandgaon and Rewa have fewer girls than boys enrolled – about 48%, but girls make up 51% of those enrolled in Dindori. Further, percentages of girls amongst those never enrolled in the three clusters are 57% in Rajnandgaon, 47% in Rewa and 54% in Dindori. These percentages are less than the national level; nevertheless, these are worrisome figures. Girls from poor, SC, ST and Muslim communities tend to be more disadvantaged than their male counterparts, and a larger proportion of girls than boys from these groups are denied access to schooling.

**Socially disadvantaged groups:** Programmes have been instituted to help traditionally disadvantaged groups (SC, ST, OBC) to attend school. 88% of Scheduled Caste, 79% of Scheduled Tribe and 95% of Other Backward Class children are going to school in the case study areas. However, educational access and retention remains unsatisfactory. 43% of ST and 44% of OBC students are recorded to have dropped out before completion. In recent years Muslim children have been identified as having unusually low levels of access.

**First generation learners:** Children from households with little or no previous educational experience are more likely to be excluded from schooling. Many first generation learners live in environments that do not encourage them to learn and continue their education. 38% of students were first generation learners in the case study villages.

### **3.4 Availability of Schooling Space and Access**

State managed schools cater for the vast majority (85%) of students nationally. Yet most of these schools tend to have poor resources with inadequate school infrastructure and teaching materials, few teachers per school and high dropout rates. Over 80% of primary schools have three teachers or less but cover five Grades. Many of the study schools are in this situation of having fewer teachers than grades. Except for one or two privately managed schools, 26 (72%) schools in Rajnandgaon, 30 (86%) in Rewa and 23 (100%) schools are government run schools most of these schools are not adequately equipped with the necessary school facilities. The following section provides a brief account of the issues around school facilities.

## **4. Exploring the Quality of Schooling Facilities**

The clusters under study have experienced a rapid increase in number of schools. It may further be observed that 25% of the schools are very small with less than 50 children enrolled and another 31% have less than 100 children. Though such small schools do provide physical access to children, they may also fail to provide adequate physical and academic facilities to make the teaching learning process effective. Table 1 shows changes in school size over time. The number of schools has increased from 35 to 88. The proportion of small schools with less than 50 enrolled has doubled in Rewa and more than quadrupled in Dindori.

**Table 1: Distribution of Different Sizes of Schools Across Clusters**

| Enrolment→  |      | Up to 50 | 51-100 | 101-200 | 201-400 | Total |
|-------------|------|----------|--------|---------|---------|-------|
| Rajnandgaon | 1991 | 1        | 1      | 6       | 3       | 11    |
|             | 2008 | 1        | 6      | 18      | 5       | 30    |
| Rewa        | 1991 | 2        | 5      | 5       | -       | 12    |
|             | 2008 | 13       | 10     | 9       | 3       | 35    |
| Dindori     | 1991 | 10       | 1      | 1       |         | 12    |
|             | 2008 | 7        | 12     | 4       | -       | 23    |
| Total       | 1991 | 13       | 7      | 12      | 3       | 35    |
|             | 2008 | 21       | 28     | 31      | 8       | 88    |

Source: School Roster, 2008

Analysis of the empirical reality across the three clusters clearly shows that school expansion programmes have not helped bridge equity gaps (Table 2). The data shows that the expansion processes both in the government and private sectors favour the more developed localities thereby increasing existing disparities. In Rewa there are 6 private schools and in Rajnandgaon, there are 4. In Rewa, surprisingly many of these villages with private schools also have government run schools including formal primary and upper primary schools and even schools under the EGS / AIE scheme. In Dindori there is no private provider to open schools in the remote villages surrounded by forest but it has 4 EGS schools. But are these schools are providing high quality education?

**Table 2: Management wise Distribution of Schools**

| Cluster     |      | EGS | Govt | Pvt | Total |
|-------------|------|-----|------|-----|-------|
| Rajnandgaon | 1991 | -   | 11   | -   | 11    |
|             | 2008 | -   | 26   | 4   | 30    |
| Rewa        | 1991 | -   | 12   | -   | 12    |
|             | 2008 | 15  | 14   | 6   | 35    |
| Dindori     | 1991 | -   | 12   | -   | 12    |
|             | 2008 | 5   | 18   | -   | 23    |
| Total       | 1991 | -   | 35   | -   | 35    |
|             | 2008 | 20  | 68   | 10  | 88    |

Source: School Survey Data, 2008

The quality of schools has been assessed with respect to (a) physical infrastructure; (b) availability of teachers and their training status (and absenteeism); and (d) learners' participation and performance – in terms of achievement test results and teachers' expectations

#### 4.1 Physical Infrastructure

Beginning from the Operation Blackboard Project, the Government of India has been investing enormous resources in strengthening the physical infrastructure of the schools. This has been further strengthened with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. However, the majority of the schools lack even the most basic facilities such as drinking water and toilets; electricity is available in only one out of five schools; even in Rajnandgaon electricity is available only in 30% of schools. This is surprising as all the villages in Rajnandgaon cluster have access to electricity. Yet at the same time, several schools in Rajnandgaon and Rewa clusters had computers. Further, the mid-day meal programme has made kitchens a common feature in most schools. The first impression one gets in the field is that schools have the necessary physical facilities. In fact, school buildings can be found in almost all villages. But good quality education requires several other facilities in the school. There are indeed improvements taking place with respect to infrastructure. But this seems to be only in bigger habitations and in schools close to main roads.

The data suggests that most schools are not adequately equipped with necessary facilities. The situation is most alarming in the schools located in the Dindori cluster, situated in the tribal area. Not a single government primary school in this cluster has a toilet. Around 27% of schools in Rajnandgaon

do not have toilets and 16% do not have drinking water. In Rewa, all government primary schools have drinking water but only five have toilets, i.e. 60% of schools in Rewa do not have toilets. Space for learning beyond the classroom is a scarce property in most of the schools. 47% of schools in Rajnandgaon, 60% of schools in Rewa and 94% of schools in Dindori do not have any playground. Beyond the lack of physical infrastructure, many of these schools are single teacher and single classroom schools practicing multigrade teaching, some schools do not even have a blackboard. A library is a rare facility, available only in a few schools.

The data compiled through the classification shows the extremely poor conditions of schools in the tribal cluster of Dindori with one out of four schools not meeting even the basic level requirements. The mismatch in terms of electricity and computers is serious. For instance in Rajnandgaon cluster, while ten schools have computers, only 9 have electricity; 7 of the 10 schools that have computers do not have electricity. This clearly points out the need to establish a set of priorities in equipping schools with infrastructure and also the need to give urgent attention to ensuring the provision of basic facilities in tribal areas.

The supply of facilities and equipment has to be contextualised. Further, mere availability of material will not suffice. One has to examine if the material/equipment are in a usable condition. Even more important is to observe if equipment is being regularly and appropriately used in classroom teaching. This would require careful observation and analysis of classroom teaching. It is generally assumed that the availability of school is not a problem with the enormous expansion that has been witnessed in recent years. Research revealed that while expansion in facilities can be seen in these clusters, it is quite uneven across the clusters and does not fully guarantee adequate access even to 8 years of elementary schooling.

#### 4.2 Where are the children enrolled?

If the goal is to provide access to equitable quality of schooling, it is important to examine who goes to which type of school and with what kinds of facilities. While in Rajnandgaon 13% children are going to 4 private schools, around 11% are enrolled in 6 private schools located in the Rewa cluster. It has been found that a large proportion of children enrolled in government schools are studying in very small EGS centres and may therefore be disadvantaged (Table 3).

**Table 3: Management wise Enrolment in Schools**

| Clusters   | Rajnandgaon |     | Rewa  |     | Dindori |     |
|------------|-------------|-----|-------|-----|---------|-----|
|            | N           | %   | N     | %   | N       | %   |
| Private    | 568         | 13  | 331   | 11  | 0       | 0   |
| Government | 3,757       | 87  | 1,750 | 57  | 1,523   | 90  |
| EGS        | 0           | 0   | 969   | 32  | 171     | 10  |
| Total      | 4,325       | 100 | 3,050 | 100 | 1,694   | 100 |

Source: School Roster Data 2008

#### 4.3 Is there adequate provision of teachers?

The teacher is the central figure in organising and managing any school. Timely recruitment of teachers and their rational deployment in schools is the core function that every school system has to manage in a systematic manner. The average figures on teacher provision at the macro level appear to be satisfactory. There is serious distortion in matching teacher supply with number of students in the school. This again is evident from the data. Then average Pupil Teacher Ratio in each of the clusters is between 32:1 and 35:1 which seems appropriate. But a careful look at the variations even between schools within each cluster indicates the degree of the problem of teacher deployment. The variation in PTR is wide - Rajnandgaon varies between 9:1 to 51:1; Rewa 10:1 to 61:1; and Dindori 8:1 to 56:1 indicating very uneven teacher deployment. There are similar mismatches between number of teachers and number of classrooms to teach.

No careful planning has been done in the creation of infrastructure; there are several schools where the number of teachers is more than the number of classrooms, some where the opposite is true and many where the number of classrooms is inadequate. As a result, a large proportion of schools continue to be single teacher schools. In fact, only a small number have 5 or more teachers to teach

five classes. The more under developed the cluster is, the more single teacher and two teacher schools are to be found. About 50% of all schools in the case study district have only 4 teachers or less.

The disparity in the PTR is compounded with the presence of large number of untrained teachers. 25% of teachers in Rajnandgaon are untrained while around at 67% are untrained in Dindori cluster. There has been an improvement in the qualification and training status of teachers in all three areas as compare to 1990 and 2008. Yet, Dindori is still lagging behind the other two clusters. It is heartening to see that 29% of teachers are holding a post graduate level qualification which was not the case in 20 years back. The increased in the presence of trained and qualified teachers can have a considerable impact on teaching learning process.

#### **4.3.1 Teaching Learning Process and Classroom Transaction**

One fourth of teachers reported that they have difficulty in teaching any of the subjects taught in school. This is surprising since it includes about one fifth of those with post-graduate qualifications. Around 13% of teachers reported that they don't feel competent to teach the subject that they are assigned to teach. Around 67% of teachers have problems conducting multi-grade teaching which is a common phenomenon in most of these schools.

Very few (25%) teachers meet parents to inform them about their child's progress while only 14% reported that they change the seating arrangements of students to improve their performance. The majority of teachers take special care for weak children by providing them extra time. Finally, while teachers invariably place the blame of poor learning on irregular attendance of learners, not much is said about absenteeism among teachers. About one out of six teachers were found to be absent on the day of the visit in Rajnandgaon and Rewa clusters, it was one out of four teachers in Dindori cluster. Non-availability of trained, experienced and competent teachers has serious impacts on learning level of children and teachers' absenteeism seems to be an additional problem. Teacher absenteeism greatly reduces time on task.

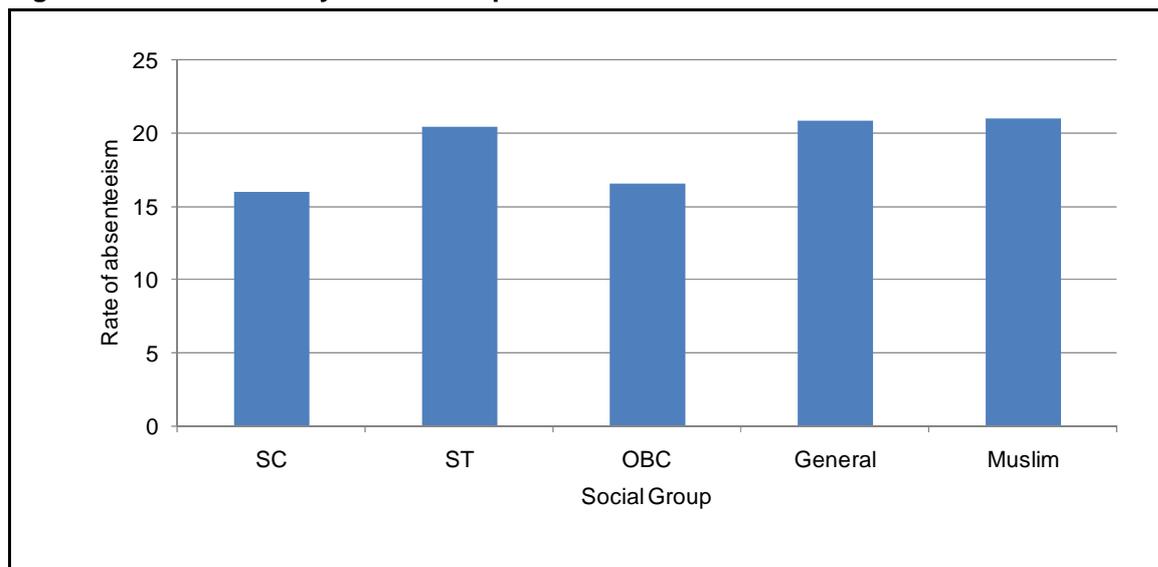
### **5. Silently excluded children (zone 3 and 5)**

Many children, who have initial access to school, attend irregularly, learn little and repeat grades. These children are at risk of dropping out. Numbers of silently excluded children are substantial, but difficult to quantify, not least because there is no standardised achievement data across India. The competency test that was conducted in the primary schools in the study area in 2008 was only for Class 4 and 5 and is reported in more detail below. It was found that a large proportion of children had low competency levels especially in Grade 4. Children in Dindori were found to have the lowest performance. Many of these children were irregular attenders and repeaters.

#### **5.1 Exploring Attendance and Absenteeism**

The central characteristic of school education is the sustained and active participation of children in teaching learning processes organised according to a predetermined curriculum. Learning outcomes are to be viewed largely as the product of such organised learning experiences. To what extent is this taking place in the schools under study? This has been examined partly in terms of their attendance patterns. As part of the investigation, every child's recorded presence in the school register for the previous month was collected. Secondly, the actual presence of the child on the day of the visit was also taken to find out the average presence of children in the class and the school. Third, for each child, the responsible teacher was asked to indicate how regular the child has been; specifically, how many days did the child attend the school on average in a month. The analysis of data highlights the very high levels of overall absenteeism among students in all the localities (Figure 8). The rates of attendance are particularly low in Rewa and Dindori with many children missing a week or more of schooling each month. Most intriguing is that a high proportion of children are absent in EGS schools which are supposed to be established and managed by local communities. With such high incidence of student absenteeism, the official claim of a very small proportion of 'out-of-school' children sounds quite hollow.

**Figure 8: Absenteeism by Social Group**

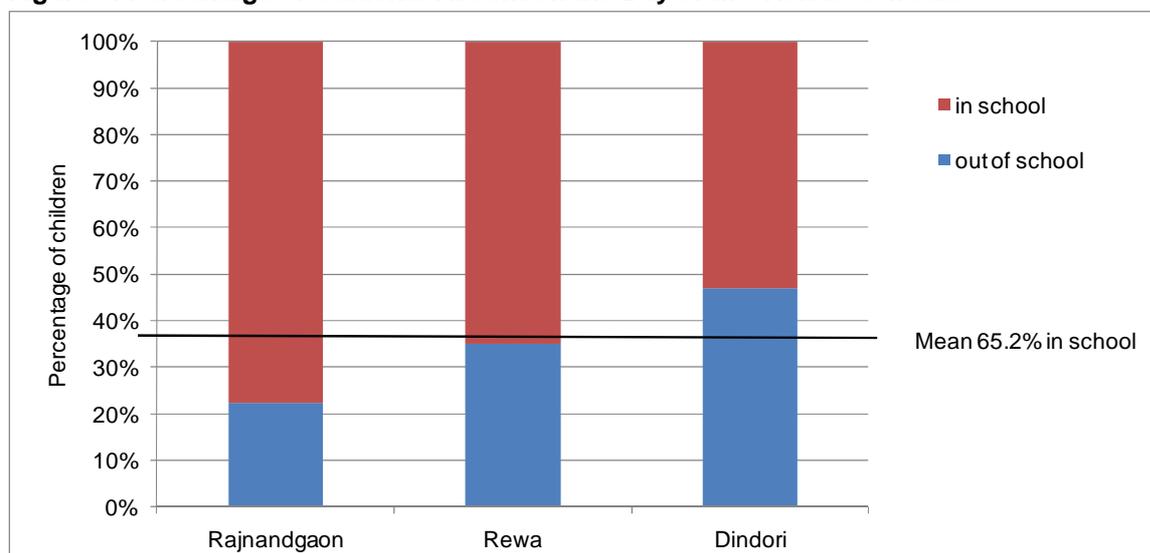


Source: School Roster, 2008

Data collected in 2009 and 2010 confirm that many children are unable to attend their school regularly. According to the school register, absenteeism is quite high in government schools. For instance, around 20% of children attended school for 15 days or less in Dindori and the corresponding figure is as high as 25% in Rewa. Surprisingly, even private schools in Rewa seem to face this problem to a high degree. Interestingly, teachers do not seem to perceive the problem to be as serious as it is.

Considerable numbers of children were absent on the day of visit to school. Between 20% and over 40% were absent (Figure 9) during headcounts when schools were visited suggesting that the data gathered from registers underestimated absences.

**Figure 9: Percentage of Students Absent on the Day of the Visit to Schools**



Source: Roster Data 2008, 2009, 2010 (All Schools – N=88)

## 5.2 Assessing the Nature and Extent of Repetition

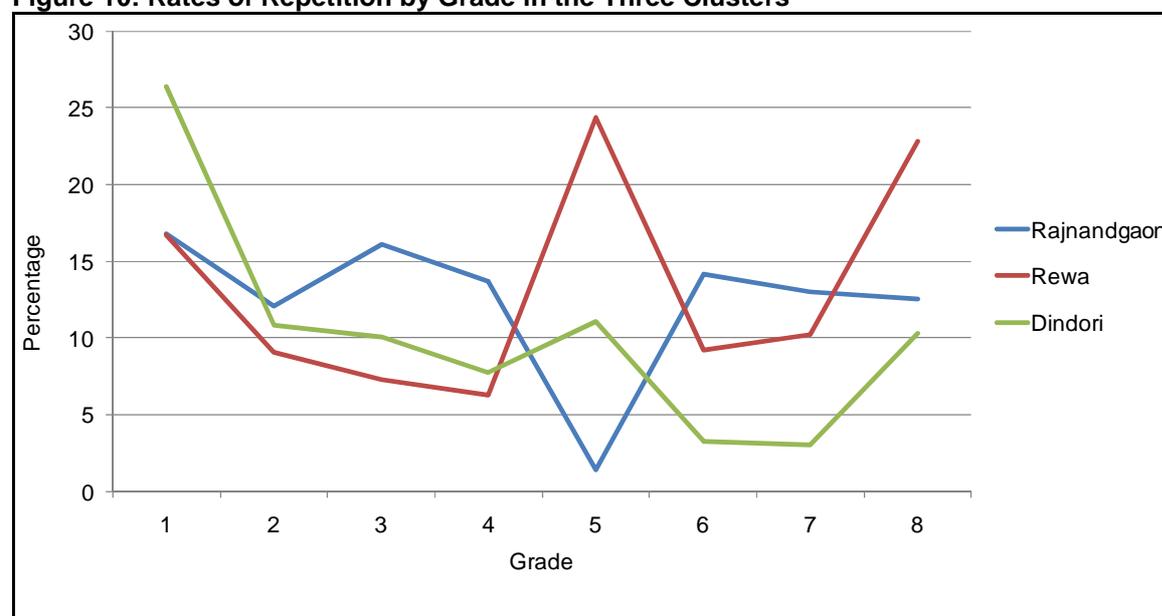
An important feature of effective schooling is the smooth progression of children from one grade to another. The policy of automatic promotion is expected to ensure that children do not repeat same grade and lose their motivation to learning. Do teachers and school authorities follow this policy and

implement it in the right spirit? Field data show that the situation is quite variable. The rate of repetition has gone down from 11%, 2008 to 5%, 2010 in Rajnandgaon. Whereas in Rewa, where the repetition increases from 18% in 2008 to above 20% in 2009 & 2010. Surprisingly, Dindori has recorded a repetition rate of 7% in 2010 that is comparable with Rajandgaon from 15% in 2008 and 24% in 2009.

The high rates of repetition found in the early grades, especially Grade 1, are surprising considering that both the clusters (Rajnandgaon and Rewa) follow an automatic promotion policy (Figure 10). Teachers and head teachers pointed out that they detain children based on examination performance. Some also mentioned that poor attendance of the children is the reason for their failure to progress to the higher grades. Invariably, the blame is placed on the poor capability of the children or the disinterest of their parents. The records also show that, over the years the situation is gradually improving in Rajnandgaon schools but not so in the other two clusters.

As mentioned above, data collected in 2009 and 2010 confirm that a large number of children have repeated their grades in 2008-09 and 2010. The data from 2008 shows the proportion of children who have repeated a grade at least once since they joined the school. In all the clusters repetition in Grade 1 is high. Figure 10- shows that in Rewa and Dindori there is an upward spike in repetition at Grade 5, the transition year, but not in Rajnandgaon.

**Figure 10: Rates of Repetition by Grade in the Three Clusters**



Source: Roster Data, 2008

In view of this high level of repetition, it is important to examine the policies adopted by the state governments to determine if the examination practices adopted at the primary classes have any impact on the levels of repetition. Traditionally, Madhya Pradesh conducts an external test at the end of Grade 3 and failures are asked to repeat. In Chhattisgarh where Rajnandgaon cluster is located this examination has been abandoned in favour of a Grade 5 assessment. High levels of repetition should be a serious cause of concern since they lead to over age enrolment and increased risk of drop out. So also does late entry into Grade 1. As noted above in Grade 1 between 30 and 40% of children are 7 years old or more. By Grade 5 in Rewa and Dindori more than 60% are one or more years over age and by Grade 8 over 70%. In Rewa over 25% of those in Grade 8 of primary school are 16 years or older and in Dindori over 33%. Older children are more likely to drop out, especially if they are girls. It is important that more in depth investigations are done to determine the cause of varying trends across clusters.

### 5.3 Are Children Learning?

This is a key question as initial enrolment rates increase to higher and higher levels. As noted earlier, poor learning in early stages is seen as the main stumbling block for progress of children through the

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grades and transition to upper primary and thereafter to secondary stages of schooling. No attempt was made in the survey to evaluate the learning levels of children in all grades. Instead it was considered that the measures of learning outcomes among Grade 4 and 5 children work as useful indicators of the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes taking place in the school. This is also significant since Grade 5 is the final grade of the lower primary cycle determining if children qualify to enter the upper primary cycle. Further, a large majority of the 88 schools in the three selected clusters have only lower primary sections.

The achievement tests used in the CREATE survey were specially constructed to correspond to competencies expected in Grade 4 children. It is evident that the situation is not encouraging as indicated by the mean scores, particularly in Hindi. In 2008 the mean performance in mathematics was slightly higher than in Hindi in all the clusters, even though the differences were not statistically significant except in the case of Rajnandgaon. Yet, such poor performance in the first language is a cause for concern as it would seriously affect reading and learning capabilities of the children as they progress through education. The situation remains more or less the same in 2010 showing competency levels of Hindi are lower than mathematics but the gap is quite significant in Rewa.

The competency values (Table 4) for performance in mathematics between 2008 and 2010 show that the disparities within the student group have decreased, but, the level of learning has not improved much between 2008 and 2010. It can be noted that, in all the clusters, the standard deviation in mathematics scores has decreased - from 23.2 to 19.5 in Rajnandgaon, 24.9 to 24.3 in Rewa and 27.6 to 17.6 in Dindori. However, the average score of the students has not followed a simple pattern. The score of mathematics in the Rajnandgaon cluster has increased from 49.1 to 56.7 while, in the other two clusters it has slightly decreased, from 48.3 to 45.9 in case of Rewa and 30.6 to 28.4 in Dindori. The situation is not very different in case of Hindi. In Rewa the average score in Hindi has seen a decrease of 10 points, but in the other districts the scores remained almost the same. This invites more investigation.

**Table 4: Competency Level of All Children in 2008 and 2010**

| Clusters    | Competency level 2008 |       |      |       | Competency level 2010 |       |      |       |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|
|             | Mean                  |       | SD   |       | Mean                  |       | SD   |       |
|             | Math                  | Hindi | Math | Hindi | Math                  | Hindi | Math | Hindi |
| Rajnandgaon | 49.1                  | 40.6  | 23.2 | 19    | 56.7                  | 41.9  | 19.5 | 20.3  |
| Rewa        | 48.3                  | 42.2  | 24.9 | 21.5  | 45.9                  | 32.1  | 24.3 | 21.8  |
| Dindori     | 30.6                  | 26.2  | 27.6 | 18.8  | 28.4                  | 23    | 17.6 | 19.2  |

Source: Analysis of competency test, 2008 and 2010

Quality assurance has become more complex with the growing number of private and small schools. Small schools in particular often have fewer teachers than grades (16.6% of primary schools in India have only one teacher). This means teachers have to teach across grades, but many have little or no training in multi-grade pedagogy and the curriculum is geared towards mono-grade schools, where there is at least one teacher per grade. This is reflected in the competency level of the students. In Grade 4 (Table 5) the competency level of students in language is below 40% and 50% in language and mathematics in Rajnandgaon and Rewa. There is slight improvement in Grade 5 with the score being below 50% and 60%. Achievement levels are very low in Dindori, less than 30% and 40%. The presence of a high standard deviation indicates that there is high variation in learning among the students across the regions.

**Table 5: Results of Competency Tests in 2008 for Grades 4 and 5**

| Clusters    | Grade 4 |       |             |       | Grade 5 |       |             |       |
|-------------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|
|             | Hindi   |       | Mathematics |       | Hindi   |       | Mathematics |       |
|             | Mean    | S.D.  | Mean        | S.D.  | Mean    | S.D.  | Mean        | S.D.  |
| Rajnandgaon | 34.63   | 17.91 | 43.1        | 21.18 | 47.42   | 17.95 | 54.44       | 23.6  |
| Rewa        | 38.32   | 21.35 | 42.65       | 24.74 | 45.95   | 21.01 | 52.96       | 24.17 |
| Dindori     | 22.65   | 17.65 | 26.12       | 26.28 | 29.71   | 19.26 | 35.01       | 28.21 |

Source: Analysis of competency test, 2008

A second observation is that invariably, Grade 5 students have done better in both the tests. This indicates that children are indeed progressing by acquiring additional competencies as they continue to attend school even if the pace of learning may not match the grade in which they are placed. Rather, this calls for re-examining the pace at which curricular inputs are provided and also on the pedagogic strategies adopted.

Table 6 shows that performance is distributed differently within each case study site. Even where performance is low some learners score at higher levels (Level 1 and Level 2). When the analysis of the competency test is used to develop a classification of schools based on mean performance in Grade 5 mathematics, it shows strong interschool variation in achievement patterns. Though the relative position of the three clusters on average performance remains the same, it is clear that several schools seem to be performing well. About a third of the schools in Dindori and a fifth in Rewa, appear to be supporting learning quite well.

**Table 6: Level wise Distribution of Learners (%) - Grade 5**

| Clusters | Rajnandgaon |       | Rewa  |       | Dindori |       |
|----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|
|          | Hindi       | Maths | Hindi | Maths | Hindi   | Maths |
|          | N=330       | N=333 | N=375 | N=348 | N=110   | N=111 |
| Level 0  | 51          | 22    | 49    | 22    | 78      | 58    |
| Level 1  | 45          | 52    | 43    | 50    | 22      | 15    |
| Level 2  | 1           | 16    | 3     | 16    | 0       | 9     |
| L3       | 3           | 10    | 5     | 12    | 0       | 18    |

Source: Analysis of competency test, 2008 and 2010

How do the teachers perceive the academic performance levels of their students? This information was gathered with respect to every student studying from Grades 1 to 8 in all the schools of the three clusters. It is interesting to note that the pattern of perceptions across the three clusters fairly resemble the picture drawn by the mean scores from the competency tests at cluster level. Lower proportions of children are rated as better performing in Dindori as compared to the other two clusters. However, the proportion of children at different levels within the clusters does not correspond to the empirical evidence. In fact, disaggregation of Grade 4 and Grade 5 children according to their test scores and teacher expectations showed that the two are at considerable variance with teachers over estimating the level of performance of children. This may lead to under performance in the long run if teachers over estimate levels of achievement.

## 6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The analyses presented in CREATE research addresses the interface between indicators of access and quality and gives some indication of the strategies that would help bridge continuing disparities and inequities between the clusters. Development strategies in education have already begun to recognise the interaction between access and quality factors. The preceding discussions also reveal that though much remains to be achieved there has been a perceptible improvement in infrastructure. Other indicators including teacher provision, student absenteeism, and learning achievement have not significantly improved. Under these circumstances it can be understood that despite policies aimed at bridging disparities and achieving greater social equity, development inputs seem to be simply reproducing the existing inequities, if not aggravating their differences.

The above analysis indicates that there are several areas that need further attention for policy intervention that would make a difference to educational access in the case study areas and other similar districts.

- First, major attention is required to children falling in zone 0 who are denied access to early childhood care and education. Many of these children are deprived of basic nutritional requirements and cognitive skills. States like MP and Chhattisgarh are facing challenges of malnutrition and undernutrition as revealed the recent NFHS data. The states need to put attention on improving the services provided by ICDS that run Anganwaris which are attended by the majority of poor and disadvantaged children particularly girls, as revealed by the field data.

- Both states have shown considerable progress in educational provision resulting in improvement in enrolment of girls and boys from 'backward' areas. However, a large section of children are absent and miss many school days, repeat grades and finally drop out from school in a vicious cycle of deprivation and disadvantage. Clearly there are home related factors like lack of parental support due to illiteracy and poverty. But school related factors are also an important cause of learning deficiencies and lack of achievement. Poor functioning of schools, inadequate physical and academic infrastructure, and lack of adequate teacher supply, poor attendance, over age enrolment, and repetition are some of the reasons that need immediate attention. Following the recommendations of RTE Act, each school needs to draw up its plan with help provided where necessary, and budget the activities for its further improvement involving local people and local government agencies. This needs to be prioritised and has to be part of policy of local governing bodies like Panchayati Raj Institutes.
- The analysis highlights the need for policy initiatives with respect to recruitment of teachers and upgrading their capacity. It is indicative from the analysis that there are many single or two teacher schools, and these need multi-grade teaching approaches. The fieldwork indicates that many teachers, despite increasing levels of qualification, have difficulties dealing with multi-grade system classrooms and schools.
- These problems of small schools are accentuated by the shortages of qualified and trained teachers. The largest numbers of the under-qualified and untrained teachers are found in Dindori district where schools are not equipped with even basic facilities. Policy makers need to pay attention on availability of improved physical facilities along with provision for improving teacher supply and deployment, and teacher attendance, across the states.
- Other factors are important. There is a need for a proper database on the status of teachers at the school level. The low motivation of teachers to serve in remote rural areas also needs to be taken into account so that more rational and equitable deployment of teachers can be achieved. This is an important issue in these clusters where there is a wide range of Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTR) between schools. For example, the government primary and middle school located in Kolhuwaru village in Rewa has seven teachers though it has only 11 students. At the same time some schools in the three clusters have high enrolments in schools with only 1 or 2 teachers, leading to a PTR of over 60:1. Extreme values of PTR should be addressed and all schools staffed at similar levels of 30-35:1.
- Another major concern with respect to the teaching learning process is the subject mastery of teachers. As the data indicate, around one fourth of teachers face difficulty in teaching any subject taught in school while one out of 12 teachers including a few with post graduate qualification feel they are not competent enough to teach the subject that they have been assigned to teach. This is a disturbing situation in the context of silent exclusion that is attributed to absenteeism, poor learning level, and the high repetition and drop out prevailing in these three clusters. In view of this, the professional development of teachers needs adequate attention and they should also be encouraged to receive further education to improve their subject knowledge. In addition, there is a need to influence teachers' perceptions about the performance of their students since this often seems to overestimate actual levels of performance and may send the wrong signals to students. Levels of teachers' morale are central to attempts to improve learning.
- The absence of remedial teaching needs special mention in the context of high absenteeism and repetition of children as it can improve the learning level of such children over a period of time. It is very important that schools and communities take action within the school to encourage regular attendance of children and monitor their learning level.
- Provision of free nutritional meals and health care facilities in school protects children from poor nutrition and ill health which also cause low attendance and poor learning levels.
- The result of the competency tests shows that the learning level of children in Grade 5 is higher than in Grade 4. This indicates that one additional year of attending school makes a significant difference in the learning level of children. Thus, retention of children with promotion to the next levels despite

their poor learning level has positive value in curbing the chances of further failure and frequent repetition. On the contrary, making children repeat the same grade may de-motivate them, causing early dropout. It certainly increases problems associated with being over age in grade. In view of the above shortcomings, it is important to implement the 'no detention' policy and ensure as far as possible, progression at the right age for the grade. This needs to be coupled with continuous and comprehensive evaluation of learning with diagnostic characteristics.

- The data indicates that there is a way to travel to achieve gender and social equity. Girls from disadvantaged groups are more likely to attend government and EGS schools which often provide low quality education because of poor infrastructure facilities. Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste children remain disadvantaged. Though incentives are given for disadvantaged children these have yet to overcome disparities in access and achievement. Real challenges remain to retain all children in school and help them learn adequately.
- It is essential to give more intensive attention towards underdeveloped areas like Dindori which is still not provided with adequate schooling facilities. These kinds of disadvantaged areas are inhabited by large sections of poor and disadvantaged groups. The data indicates that better developed areas get more attention from private providers and government, and that underdeveloped areas may be improving more slowly than developed areas. As a result of this, despite being enrolled in school, children living in remote areas are denied 'meaningful access'. Provision of quality schooling facilities by government may break the nexus between location, social inequality, gender and poverty that together cause exclusion of children from schooling. If it is to do this then new approaches are needed to overcome the limited impact of current policy and practice.

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