



Consortium for Research on
Education, Access, Transitions & Equity
Funded by DFID

EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN INDIA

COUNTRY POLICY BRIEF

MAY 2009



EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN INDIA

This Policy Brief describes and explains patterns of access to schools in India. It outlines policy and legislation 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. It is based on findings from the Country Analytic Report on Access to Basic Education in India (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008) which can be found on the CREATE website.

Why educational access is important in India

In 1950 India made a Constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. In 2002 a constitutional amendment made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14. Yet, universal access to elementary education remains elusive and quality of provision erratic.

Provision of quality education in India is an enormous quantitative challenge. In 2004-2005, data available from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) showed that 182 million students were enrolled in 1.04 million elementary schools (grades 1-8) across the country (Gol, 2007a). This accounted for approximately 82% of children in the 5-14 year age group in that year (Gol, 2007b).

Over the past two decades demand for schooling in India has increased, but provision is unequal. The National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986) and its Programme of Action (POA) (1992) state that all children, irrespective of caste, creed, location or gender, should have access to elementary education of a comparable quality.

But in reality, schooling provision favours those better off, and disadvantaged groups (including poor children, girls, children from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC) groups) have less access and access to poorer quality education. Large variations in access exist across different states, geographical areas, and social categories such as gender, caste and ethnicity. Policy makers whilst making great strides to improve physical access to schools, have ongoing challenges to provide meaningful access for all children in India.

Indian Policy Context

Education in India is the joint responsibility of the central and state governments, and educational rights to education are provided for within the Constitution. Further commitments to the universalization of education as well as the legal, administrative and financial frameworks for the government-funded education system are found in two main sources. These are the on-going series of Five Year Plans for National Development and the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986), with its Programme of Action (1992). Additionally, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan

(SSA) is a programme which aims to achieve universal elementary education of satisfactory quality by 2010.



What is Meaningful access?

Meaningful access requires high attendance rates, progression through grades with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered.

The general pattern of education adopted at the national level, commonly known as the 10+2+3 pattern, envisages a broad-based general education for all pupils during the first ten years of schooling. The elementary education which has now been made free and compulsory for the children of 6-14 years age group includes primary (I-V) and upper-primary/middle (VI-VIII) stages. Most states conduct examinations after class VIII for entry to secondary school. A policy of automatic promotion has been introduced at the elementary stages to encourage children to continue their education to at least Grade 8, whilst minimizing repetition and dropout.

As a result of the NPE policy initiatives changes are being made on the ground. A massive infrastructure development and teacher recruitment drive was initiated nationally. NPE (1986) focused on the need for improvements to school environments (including building conditions, availability of tap water and toilet facilities), instructional material and teacher training. The District Primary Education Programme (1994) brought additional resources to the sector through the involvement of bilateral and multilateral donors. Village education committees, parent-teacher and mother-teacher associations have become active across the country. Legislative moves to bring elementary education under Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-governments) have given further impetus to community mobilization at the grassroots level. Despite these changes, quality of provision continues to be a concern and is highlighted in the Tenth (2002-2007) and Eleventh (2007-2012) Five Year Plans, as well as SSA.

Various government schemes target disadvantaged children. The Alternative, Innovative and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS/AIE) provides education in smaller, isolated

habitations in rural areas and / or urban slums that do not qualify as regular formal schools; and schooling to difficult-to-reach groups such as working and migrating children. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) target girls often from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and minorities in difficult areas. Through these programmes scholarships, free uniforms and textbooks are being given to recipients. The Mid-day-meal Scheme offers free lunch to all children attending primary schools and EGS/AS throughout India. Anganwaris provides nutritional support and pre-school education to children aged 0-6 years and early childhood care and education (ECCE) centres are operational in some selected areas. These initiatives have had considerable impact on children's access to education.

Patterns of educational access in India

Access to basic education in India is improving, but areas of concern remain:

School supply: The number of primary schools 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 km and 78% of habitations had an upper primary school within 3 km (NCERT, 2005).

In addition, the number of private pre-primary, primary and upper primary schools has also increased considerably. However, 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). Questions of quality of provision persist with many schools having weak infrastructure and poor teaching and learning conditions.

Initial access to education: According to gross enrolment (GER) data available at the national level, India has achieved near universal enrolment in primary education in most areas. The average GER across all India was 108.5% at the primary level and 70.5% at the upper primary level in 2004-05. GERs at primary varied from less than 80% (Chandigarh, Punjab, to more than

120% (Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh), and at upper primary from less than 60% (Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar) to over 100% (Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh).

Patterns of access are gendered.

In 2004-05 around 88% of boys and 79% of girls were attending school nationally (GoI, 2007b).

The reality of girls' exclusion is further complicated by caste, religion, ethnicity and age. Girls from poor, SC, ST and Muslim communities tend to be much more disadvantaged than their male counterparts, and a larger proportion of girls than boys from these groups are denied access to schooling.

Rural schools cater for the vast majority of students nationally (85% of total enrolments in primary schools in 2005). Yet rural schools tend to have poorer resources such as school infrastructure, teaching materials, fewer teachers per school and higher drop out rates. Over 80% of primary schools have three teachers or less.

Out of school children: There has been a steady decline in the number of out-of-school children in India. Data reported in the CAR suggests that in 2001, about 44 million (or 28.5% of the total child population) were out of school. By 2005 estimates varied from a low of about 7 million to a high of about 30 million. The differences in estimates arise from different methods of sampling and accounting for repetition, drop out and over age enrolment.

Inter-state variations are quite vast. In The Census of India in 2001 reported that about 70% of the total out-of-school children in India in the 6-10 year old age group were concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan. According to the 61st Round National Sample Survey (2006):

35% of 5-29 years old have never been to school; and around 28.5% of children dropped out of primary school in 2004-05.

Silently excluded children: 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.

Unaccounted for children: While statistics and official programmes recognise large groups of children that might be excluded from education, a substantial number of children in India are

unaccounted for and unregistered. These children may be migrants, street children or children living in unauthorised slums. Many of these children will not be accessing education.

Transition patterns: Not all children who complete primary schooling enter the upper primary stage. Data collected on all-India basis under the District Information System in Education (DISE) for 2005-06 showed that:

on average, 16% of children who reach Grade 5 fail to make the move from primary to upper primary school.

Similarly about 15% of children who reach Grade 8 fail to make the move from upper primary to secondary schooling because of a lack of schooling facilities near their homes, the direct and indirect costs, and because they haven't reached appropriate attainment levels.

The Causes of Exclusion

There are many interacting factors which 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 Organization (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. While small community-based schools help enrolments, there is some concern that many small schools have low standards and limited amounts of 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. However, a closer analysis shows that economic impoverishment itself is deeply embedded in discriminatory social structure.

Gender: Girls are more likely than boys to be not attending school in India. Gender disparities in enrolments have reduced, especially in richer States, but girls remain more likely to drop out where enrolment rates are low. Boys often withdraw from school for economic reasons,

while girls are more likely to be involved in domestic chores. For some (generally) rural households, educating girls continues to be seen as unnecessary.

Socially disadvantaged groups: Programmes have been instituted to help traditionally disadvantaged groups (SC, ST, OBC) to attend school. However educational access and retention remains unsatisfactory. In recent years Muslim minority 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.

Health: Malnutrition and repeated illness combined with a lack of healthcare facilities lead to many children not attending school.

Quality of provision: The quality of provision in some schools in India is weak. Many schools have inadequate infrastructure, facilities and resources. Many teachers are untrained or under-trained and some of the curricula seen as irrelevant. Many children learn little and are at risk of being silently excluded from the schooling process. The situation of 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.



CREATE in India is managed through the National University of Education Planning and Administration, New Delhi. To contact the CREATE team in India, email Professor R. Govinda at: rgovinda@nuepa.org.

CREATE in India is currently working on community / school studies as well as thematic reviews on a range of issues relevant to access.

Policy focus and research gaps

The Country Analytic Report for India highlighted the need for research to focus on the following:

- Exclusion from schooling as a process rather than a single event. Looking at life histories of children; tracking them individually and in groups; looking at children as they join school, move up the grades or drop out.
- Analysis of the complex relationships between factors such as gender, disadvantaged social groups, location and poverty.
- Longitudinal studies on factors which affect decision making and choices around schooling. It is particularly important to understand about how households make choices around educating girls and / or boys.
- Empirical studies are needed which examine the exclusion of the many children in India who are not accounted for, including street children, migrants and children with special needs.
- It is important to understand how schooling provision and the quality of schooling impacts on decision making at the household level with regard to schooling.
- Studies are also needed which analyse the links between ECCE, nutrition, health and access.
- The viability of small schools and the sustainability of such provision. Also how these schools link with formal providers.
- A detailed analysis of state expenditure on elementary education. A study of decentralised funding of education and its utilisation at the school level, would help understand how the system of financing influences education provision.
- The interface between adult education programmes and schooling access, particularly in the context of poverty.
- The link between schooling governance, community participation and access.

Research into these areas would further enhance policy initiatives around educational access in the Indian context which is diverse and unique in nature.

Selected References

- Gol [Government of India]. (2007a) *Selected Educational Statistics, 2004-2005*. New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Gol. (2007b) *Annual Report, 2006-2007*. New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development. [Full references for all citations given can be found in the Country Analytical Report.]