

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): A Critical Review of SSA



SSA National Mission

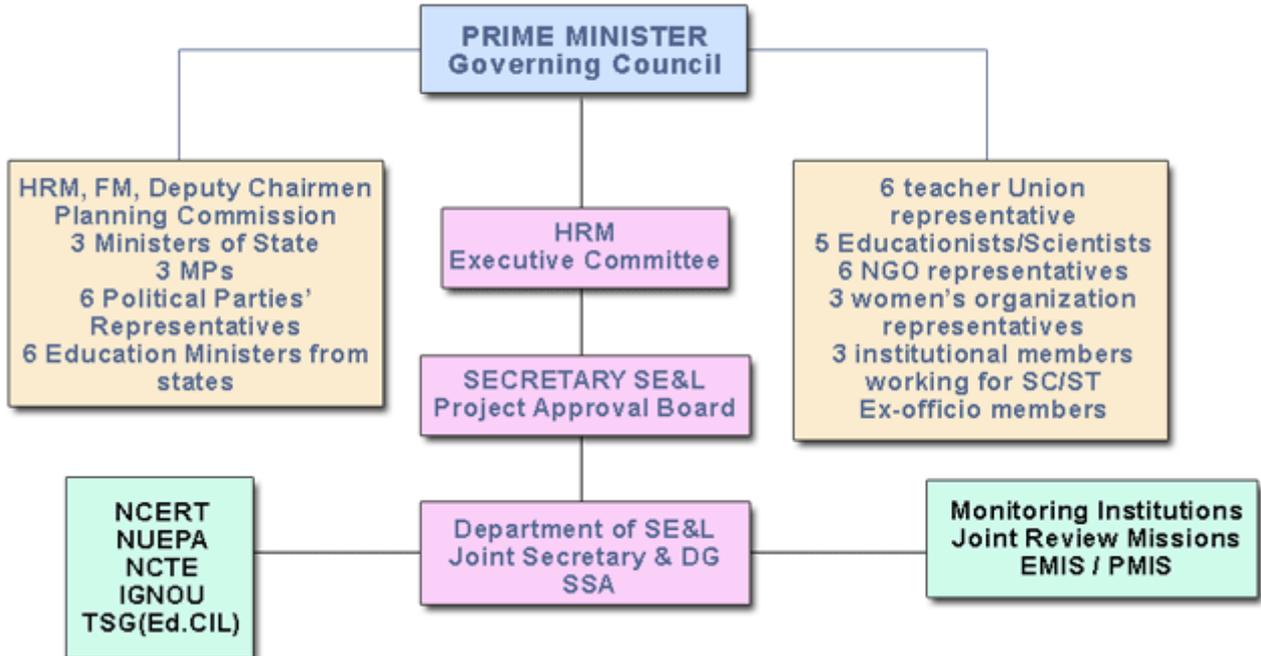


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List of Abbreviations

AIE	Alternate Innovative Education
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BEP	Bihar Education Project
BRC	Block Resource Center
CAL	Computer-aided learning
CRC	Cluster Resource Center
CTE	College of Teacher Education
DEEP	District Elementary Education Plans
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Program
DWM	Drinking Water Mission
EBB	Educationally Backward Blocks
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
EMIS	Education management information system
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
IASE	Institutes of Advanced Study in Education
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
JRM	Joint Review Mission
KGBV	Kastruba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay
LJP	Lok Jumbish Project
MDMS	Mid Day Meal Scheme
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MS	Mahila Samakhya
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCLP	National Child Labor Project
NCPCR	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
NCTE	National Council for Teacher Education
NER	North East Region
NPE	National Policy on Education
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organization
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
OBB	Operation Blackboard
PPP	Public-private partnership
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
REI	Rajasthan Education Initiative
RTE Act	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
SCPCR	State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
SCR	Student Classroom Ratio
SDP	School Development Plan
SKP	Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP)
SMC	School management committee
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSE	Statistics of school education
TE	Teacher Education
TSC	Total Sanitation Campaign
UEE	Universalization of Elementary Education
UNICEF	United Nation's International Children Education Fund
VEC	Village Education Committee
UPBEP	UP Basic Education Project

An Overview of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)



Pioneered by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the government's flagship program to provide universal access to elementary education for children 6-14 years old "in a time bound manner" as mandated by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India. It was launched in 2001 with an initial outlay of Rs 7000 crore. The scheme aims to improve enrolment, retention, and the quality of education to enable children to achieve grade appropriate levels of learning. It also aims to eliminate gender differences and gaps between different social categories. At the time of SSA's commencement in 2001 there were 3.40 crore out-of-school children between the ages of 6-14. Four

years after the launch of SSA with more than 85 percent of the funds utilized, only 1.35 crore children remained out-of-school – a reduction of 60 percent in 2005 (CAG 15 of 2006). It went down to 81.5 lakh in 2009 and currently over 96% children are enrolled.

The SSA was initiated in 2001 following recommendations from the state education ministers' conference in 1998. Soon the 86th amendment made free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. However, it took 7 years for the parliament to pass the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act that operationalized the provision of free and compulsory education. When launched, the SSA aimed to achieve 100% enrolment in a mission mode by 2010. Now SSA is the main vehicle to implement the Right to Education Act (RTE).

The costs for SSA are shared by the centre and states. In 2004-05, the central government imposed an education cess of 2 percent on all taxes to mobilize additional funds for SSA and the Mid Day Meal Scheme. In 2008-09, this surcharge was increased to 3 percent. It is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and addresses the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations.

The SSA is an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities of all children, through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode. It aims to bridge social, regional and gender gaps, with the active participation of the community in the management of schools. Thus, it seeks effective involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Management Committees, Village and Urban Slum level Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Associations, Mother Teacher Associations, Tribal Autonomous Councils and other grass root level structures in the management of elementary schools.

The program seeks to open new schools in those areas which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. The SSA also seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills and computer education to bridge the digital divide.. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs.

SSA Fine-tuned to Align with the RTE

The RTE provides a justiciable legal framework that entitles all children between the ages of 6-14 years free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education. It provides the children right to education which is equitable and based on principles of equity and non-discrimination. Additionally, it provides them right to an education that is free from fear, stress and anxiety.

With the passage of the RTE Act, changes have been incorporated into the SSA approach, strategies and norms – guided by the following principles:

- (i) Holistic view of education, as interpreted in the National Curriculum Framework 2005, with implications for a systemic revamp of the entire content and process of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, educational planning and management.
- (ii) Equity, to mean not only equal opportunity, but also creation of conditions in which the disadvantaged sections of the society – children of SC, ST, Muslim minority, landless agricultural workers and children with special needs, etc. – can avail of the opportunity.
- (iii) Access, not to be confined to ensuring that a school becomes accessible to all children within specified distance but implies an understanding of the educational needs and predicament of the traditionally excluded categories – the SC, ST and others sections of the most disadvantaged groups, the Muslim minority, girls in general, and children with special needs.
- (iv) Gender concern, implying not only an effort to enable girls to keep pace with boys but to view education in the perspective spelt out in the National Policy on Education 1986 /92; i.e. a decisive intervention to bring about a basic change in the status of women.
- (v) Centrality of teacher, to motivate them to innovate and create a culture in the classroom, and beyond the classroom, that might produce an inclusive environment for children, especially for girls from oppressed and marginalized backgrounds.
- (vi) The RTE imposed moral compulsion on parents, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders, rather than shifting emphasis on punitive processes.
- (vii) Convergent and integrated system of educational management is pre-requisite for implementation of the RTE law. All states must move in that direction as speedily as feasible.

The 86th Amendment

The Unnikrishnan Judgment

In 1993 the Supreme Court gave a landmark judgment in the case of Unnikrishnan versus State of Andhra Pradesh. In an almost revolutionary interpretation of the Constitution, the Supreme Court stated that Article 45 in Part IV of the Constitution must be read in “harmonious construction” with Article 21 (Right to Life) in Part III since Right to Life is meaningless if it is without access to knowledge. Thus the Supreme Court in 1993 accorded the status of Fundamental Right to “free and compulsory education” of all children up to 14 years of age (including children below six years of age).

The delivery of this verdict forced the then Congress government to figure out the ways and means of realizing it. The Saikia Committee was formed which in 1997 recommended an amendment of the Constitution making education for children under 14 a fundamental right. Finally, in December 2002, the 86th Amendment to the constitution was passed, inserting a new article 21A that made the new Article 45 to take care of their early childhood care and education.

The Amendment

The 86th Constitution Amendment inserted three amendments to provide for the education and welfare of children.

- First, the Article 21-A casts obligation upon the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.

- Secondly, the 86th amendment also substituted a new Article for Article 45 which provides that the State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years.
- Thirdly, the amendment also added a further clause, Article 51A which enjoins a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of 6 and 14 years.

After this amendment, it took another 8 years to actually pass the Right to Education Act, 2009 and have it enforced that would make education a fundamental right of children.

The Road to Universal Elementary Education (UEE)



The Universal Elementary Education (UEE) plays a vital role in strengthening the socio-economic base of a nation by promoting social justice and equity. Basic education is known to improve the overall well-being of people; improvements in human development indicators like life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, and nutritional status of children etc can be easily traced back to educational levels. Focus on UEE also became imperative because India has been signatory to a number of international covenants – Jomtien declaration, UCRC, Millennium declaration, Dakar declaration, SAARC SDG charter for children, etc.

However, India took 50 years to realize the goal when in 2001 the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), was launched covering the entire country. The Central funding was seen as assurance for equity in the elementary education level across the country.

Constitutional / Legal Arguments and National Statements for UEE

When the Constitution was adopted in 1950, policymakers agreed on the importance of providing free and compulsory education and made investments to improve the state of education in the country. It had defined education as a state subject. However, in 1976 an amendment was added in the Article 42 of the Constitution and education became a *concurrent list* subject enabling the Central government to legislate on the matter of education.

The original Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution (1950) mandated the State to endeavor to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to age 14 within a period of 10 years. It stated: "*The State shall endeavor to provide, with in a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years.*"

The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 prescribed "*It shall be ensured that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality is provided to all children up to 14 years of age before we enter the twenty first century.*"

The NPE was revised in 1992. Its Program of Action (PoA) stresses the need to lay down minimum levels of learning at the primary and upper primary levels as a way to promote equity and quality.

The landmark **Unnikrishnan Judgment, 1993** declared: "*Every child / citizen of this country has a right to free education until he completes the age of fourteen years.*"

The Saikia Committee, formed after the Unnikrishnan judgment in 1993, recommended in 1997 that "*an amendment of the Constitution making education for children under 14 a fundamental right.*"

The Education Ministers Resolved in 1998: *"Universal elementary education should be pursued in the mission mode. It emphasized the need to pursue a holistic and convergent approach towards UEE."*

The National Committee's Report on UEE in 1999 supported the fundamental right to education and desired quick action towards operationalization of the mission mode towards UEE: *"UEE should be pursued in a mission mode with a holistic and convergent approach with emphasis on preparation of District Elementary Education Plans (DEEP) for UEE."*

The 86th Constitutional Amendment (as already discussed) paved the way to move further without any legal hurdle. It added a new article, Article 21A, in Part I of the Constitution of India to make *"free and compulsory elementary education a fundamental right for children."*

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) came into force in India with effect from 1 April 2010.

Evolution of the SSA



With the formulation of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986, a number of programs were initiated in India with a view to achieving UEE. These efforts got intensified through the 1990s via several specific interventions such as Operation Blackboard (OBB), the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP), the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP), the Bihar Education Project (BEP), the UP Basic Education Project (UPBEP), Mahila Samakhya (MS), the Lok Jumbish Project (LJP), and Teacher Education, which put in place a decentralized system of teacher support through District Institutes of Education and Training

(DIETs) and the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) in 1993-94.

The DPEP, over several phases, covered 272 districts in 18 states of the country. The expenditure on the program was shared by the Central Government (85%) and the State Governments. The Central share was funded by a number of external agencies, including the World Bank, DFID and UNICEF. By 2001, more than US\$1500 million had been committed to the program, and 50 million children covered in its ambit. An impact assessment of Phase I of DPEP revealed that its net impact on minority children was impressive, but there was little evidence of any impact on the enrolment of girls. Nevertheless, it was concluded that the investment in DPEP was not a waste, because it introduced a new approach to primary school interventions in India. This paved the way for universalization of primary education through the SSA to cover the whole country.

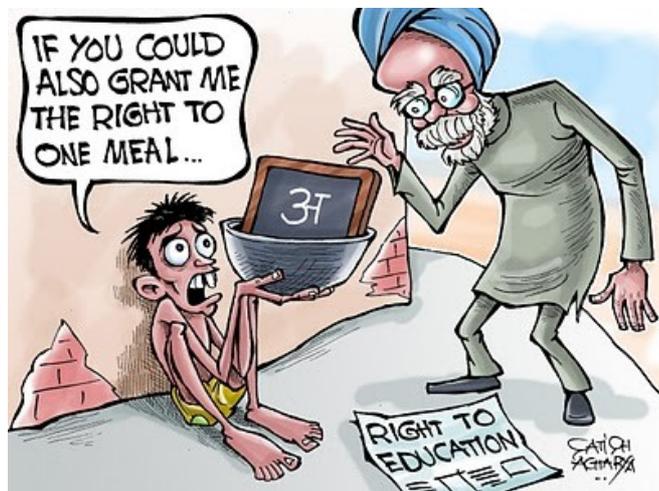
The SSA

The SSA became the most comprehensive among all efforts initiated by the GoI before 2010 and was approved by the union cabinet in November 2000 as a centrally-sponsored scheme. The goals of the SSA then were (a) enrolment of all children in schools, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centers, alternate schools, 'back-to-school' camps, (b) retention of all children till the upper primary stage, (c) bridging of gender and social category gaps in enrolment, retention and learning, and (d) ensuring significant enhancement in the learning achievement levels of children at the primary and upper primary stages.

These initiatives led to significant spatial and numerical expansion of elementary schools in the country. Today, access and enrolment at the primary stage of education have reached very close to universal levels. The number of out-of-school children at the elementary level has reduced significantly. The gender gap in elementary education has narrowed and the percentage of enrolled children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes has increased successively.

However, there still remains the unfinished agenda of universal education at the upper primary stage. The number of children — particularly those from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections — who drop out of school before completing upper primary education remains high. Besides, the quality of learning achievement is not always entirely satisfactory even in the case of children who complete elementary education.

Need for the RTE



In order to address these issues, the RTE was introduced to directly counter the problems of illiteracy, poor quality infrastructure and learning level in the elementary education sector. The main provisions in the RTE Act include the responsibilities of appropriate government and local authorities towards establishing neighborhood schools; sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the central and state governments; prohibition of capitation fee and screening procedure for admission; prohibition of detention, expulsion and corporal punishment; specification of norms and standards for schools including those related to the infrastructure and teachers; laying down of teacher qualifications

and their duties; prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational purposes; and ensuring that curriculum and evaluation is in accordance with the Constitution of India and as per child-centered principles and values. Children with disabilities and those belonging to minority communities are also covered under the Act.

As per the RTE Act, 2009, every child has the right to full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school that satisfies certain essential norms and standards. The need to address inadequacies in retention, residual access, particularly of un-reached children, and the questions of quality are the most compelling reasons for the insertion of Article 21A in the Constitution of India.

Impact of the RTE

When launched, the SSA was a centrally-sponsored scheme for the time-bound universalization of elementary education in the first decade of the 2000s. Post RTE it became the main vehicle for implementing the RTE Act. This is a fundamental shift, as the RTE Act is a legal framework, and its provisions for free and compulsory elementary education are *legally enforceable matters of law*. This is a crucial and fundamental distinction between SSA as it was and SSA post- RTE, heralding important changes in the ways that education must be conceptualized and delivered.

With the passing of the Act, the MHRD issued a new SSA framework, stating: "*The changes are not merely confined to norms for providing teachers or classrooms, but encompass the vision and approach to elementary education as evidenced in the shift to child entitlements and quality elementary education.*"

The Implementation Framework of the SSA has in fact been revised to coordinate with the provisions of the RTE Act. A comprehensive monitoring mechanism has also been put in place to ensure smooth implementation of the SSA. The major changes in the SSA norms affected by the executive committee of the SSA in January 2010 are:

- (a) School to be established/ensured within the limits of the neighborhood as laid down by the state government pursuant to the RTE Act;
- (b) All existing EGS centers that have been functioning for two years or more to be upgraded to regular schools, or closed down. No new EGS centers to be sanctioned from 2010-11 onwards;

- (c) Special training to be carried out for age-appropriate enrolment of out-of-school and dropout children through residential and non-residential courses;
- (d) School infrastructure norms to include libraries, including a one-time grant for books worth Rs 3,000 for primary schools and Rs 10,000 for upper primary schools;
- (e) Ceiling on school repairs up to a maximum of 5 percent of the existing schools for each district in a particular year, which inhibited the demand for repairs, removed;
- (f) School grant to be utilized for play material and sports equipment, in addition to the existing provision for replacement of non-functional school equipment and other recurring costs such as consumables;
- (g) Training norms to include training of resource persons, master trainers, and Block Resource Centre (BRC) and Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) coordinators for up to 10 days each year at Rs 100 per person per day;
- (h) Financial provisions for children with special needs increased from Rs 1,200 to Rs 3,000 per child per year, provided that at least Rs 1,000 per child will be used for the engagement of resource teachers;
- (i) Community mobilization provisions strengthened by raising the number of training days for community personnel from two to six, comprising three-day residential and three-day non-residential training. Financial limits for training also hiked, from Rs 30 to Rs 100 per day per person for residential training and Rs 50 per day per person for non-residential training;
- (j) Management cost for districts with small annual plan and size increased from Rs 2 million per district to Rs 4 million subject to the overall ceiling of 6 percent being maintained at the national level.

The RTE Offered Legal Cover to the SSA

The provisions under the SSA were not part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution; the RTE provisions offer the legal cover. Under the RTE, 'free education' has been defined to mean that no child, other than one who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.

The phrase 'compulsory education' casts an obligation on the appropriate government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the age group of 6–14 years. With this, India has moved forward to a rights-based framework under the RTE Act that makes governments accountable to implement this fundamental right.

The roadmap for universalising elementary education is derived from the definite timeframes mandated in the RTE Act; it prescribes a timeframe of three years for the establishment of neighborhood schools, provision of school infrastructure with an all-weather building and basic facilities, and provision of teachers as per prescribed Pupil–Teacher Ratio (PTR) (30:1). Further, the RTE Act stipulates that all untrained teachers in the system must be trained within a period of five years from the date of enforcement of the Act. The rest of the provisions are required to be implemented with immediate effect. The below table summarizes these requirements.

Activities and their Timeframes (Ministry of Human Resource Development)

ACTIVITY

TIMEFRAME

◇ Establishment of neighborhood schools

3 years (by 31 March 2013)

- Provision of school infrastructure
- All-weather school buildings
- One-classroom-one-teacher

- Office-cum-store-cum-head teacher room
 - Toilets and drinking water facilities 3 years
 - Barrier-free access (by 31 March 2013)
 - Library
 - Playground
 - Fences/boundary walls
-
- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| ◇ Provision of teachers as per prescribed PTR | 3 years (by 31 March 2013) |
| ◇ Training of untrained teachers | 5 years (by 31 March 2015) |
| ◇ All quality interventions and other provisions | With immediate effect |

Funding The SSA

Pursuant to RTE Act becoming operative, the fund sharing pattern between the Central and State Governments was also revised.

- During the 9th Plan the funding pattern between the Centre and States for SSA was in the 85:15 ratio.
- In the 10th Plan the respective shares of the Central and State Governments were in the 75:25 ratio. In respect of the states in the North East Region (NER) during the last two years of the 10th Plan 15% of the State share was sourced from the Ministry of DoNER.
- In the 11th Plan the prescribed funding pattern was on a tapering scale of 65:35 for the first two years of Plan, 60:40 for the third year, 55:45 for the fourth year and 50:50 thereafter. In respect of the NER States the funding was in the 90:10 ratio with the Central share sourced from the 10% earmarked funds for the NE States in the SSA Central Budget.
- Taking into account the requirements for implementation of the RTE Act, the Government revised the fund sharing pattern from the sliding scale ratio to a fixed share in the 65:35 ratio with effect from 2010-11. The sharing pattern for the NER States continues to be in the 90:10 ratio.

The approved outlay for SSA for the 11th Plan period was Rs 71,000 crores. However, due to impact of the implementation of the RTE Act, the Government approved an outlay of Rs 2,31,233 crore for the combined RTE-SSA program for a five year period from 2010-11 to 2014-15 to be shared between the Central and State Government in the 65:35 ratio (90:10 for North East Region). This outlay of Rs 2,31.233 crore is supported by Grant-in-Aid of Rs 24,068 crore awarded by the 13th Finance Commission to the States during 5 year period 2010-11 to 2014-15.

For the year 2013-14, an outlay of Rs 27,258 crore has been proposed.

Major Strategies of the SSA

The SSA is a well thought initiative incorporating the following major strategies;

1. **Institutional Reforms** - As part of the SSA, the Central and the State governments will undertake reforms in order to improve efficiency of the delivery system. The States will have to make an objective assessment of their prevalent education system including educational administration, achievement levels in schools, financial issues, decentralization and community ownership, review of State Education Act, rationalization of teacher deployment and recruitment of teachers, monitoring and evaluation, status of education of girls, SC/ST and disadvantaged groups, policy regarding private schools and ECCE.
2. **Sustainable Financing** - The SSA is based on the premise that financing of elementary education interventions has to be sustainable. This calls for a long -term perspective on financial partnership between the Central and the State governments.

3. **Community Ownership** - The program calls for community ownership of school based interventions through effective decentralization. This will be augmented by involvement of women's groups, VEC members and members of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
4. **Institutional Capacity Building** - The SSA conceives a major capacity building role for national, State and district level Institutions like NUEPA / NCERT / NCTE / SCERT / SIEMAT / DIET. Improvement in quality requires a sustainable support system of resource persons and institutions.
5. **Improving Mainstream Educational Administration** - It calls for improvement of mainstream educational administration by institutional development, infusion of new approaches and by adoption of cost effective and efficient methods.
6. **Community Based Monitoring with Full Transparency** - The Program will have a community based monitoring system. The Educational Management Information System (EMIS) will correlate school level data with community-based information from micro planning and surveys. Besides this, every school will be encouraged to share all information with the community, including grants received. A notice board would be put up in every school for this purpose.
7. **Habitation as a Unit of Planning** - The SSA works on a community based approach to planning with habitation as a unit of planning. Habitation plans will be the basis for formulating district plans.
8. **Accountability to Community** - SSA envisages cooperation between teachers, parents and PRIs, as well as accountability and transparency to the community.
9. **Priority to Education of Girls** - Education of girls, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and minorities, will be one of the principal concerns in SSA.
10. **Focus on Special Groups** - There will be a focus on the inclusion and participation of children from SC/ST, minority groups, urban deprived children, children of other disadvantaged groups and the children with special needs, in the educational process.
11. **Pre-Project Phase** - SSA will commence throughout the country with a well planned pre-project phase that provides for a large number of interventions for capacity development to improve the delivery and monitoring system. These include provision for household surveys, community-based micro-planning and school mapping, training of community leaders, school level activities, support for setting up information system, office equipment, diagnostic studies, etc.
12. **Thrust on Quality** - SSA lays a special thrust on making education at the elementary level useful and relevant for children by improving the curriculum, child-centered activities and effective teaching learning strategies.
13. **Role of teachers** - SSA recognizes the critical and central role of teachers and advocates a focus on their development needs. Setting up of Block Resource Centers/Cluster Resource Centers, recruitment of qualified teachers, opportunities for teacher development through participation in curriculum-related material development, focus on classroom process and exposure visits for teachers are all designed to develop the human resource among teachers.
14. **District Elementary Education Plans** - As per the SSA framework, each district will prepare a District Elementary Education Plan (DEEP) reflecting all the investments being made and required in the elementary education sector, with a holistic and convergent approach. There will be a Perspective Plan that will give a framework of activities over a longer time frame to achieve UEE. There will also be an Annual Work Plan and Budget that will list the prioritized activities to be carried out in that year. The Perspective Plan will also

be a dynamic document subject to constant improvement in the course of program implementation.

Monitoring of SSA Implementation

Monitoring of the program is a vital aspect so that the implementation stays on the right course, besides injecting transparency. The SSA has involved several stakeholders for monitoring the scheme.

Monitoring Institutes

41 Social Science Institutes of national stature have been given the work of Monitoring of implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in States & UTs. In larger States, more than one Institute have been assigned the task of Monitoring. These Monitoring Institutes (MIs) are required to make field visit and report on progress of SSA at the ground level every six months. The MI is expected to cover 25% of the Districts allotted to them in a period of six months so that all districts are covered in a two- year period. This cycle will be repeated every two years. The half yearly monitoring reports received from the Monitoring Institutes are available on the [website](#). SSA program would modify the terms of Reference of the Monitoring Institutes as and when required.

Community Based Monitoring, EMIS, Research and Evaluation

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has a community-based monitoring system. The Educational Management Information System (EMIS) incorporates provision for correlation of school level data with community-based information from micro planning and surveys. Besides this, every school must have a notice board showing all the grants received by the school and the details thereof. All reports sent to the Block and the District level with regard to enrolment, attendance, incentive, etc. are be displayed on the school notice board. A school is required to display the information it sends up so that attendance and performance of pupils is public knowledge.

Besides this, trainers will act as classroom process observers to record changes in classroom practices. Periodic monitoring teams will make random visits to selected schools and these will be discussed at various levels. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will make efforts to develop partnership between communities and research institutions in order to improve the quality of monitoring and research.

State Implementation Societies (SIS)

The State Implementation Societies (SIS) also undertake intensive monitoring. Besides, representatives of the National Mission for UEE and National level institutions like NCTE, NUEPA, and NCERT also undertake periodic monitoring and provide resource support to the SIS to strengthen appraisal and monitoring systems. More efforts to associate autonomous institutions for research and evaluation are also made. Effective community based-monitoring requires demystification of processes.

Educational Development Index (EDI)

The Education Development Index (EDI) is a joint effort of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA). The EDI ranking of states started in 2005-06 in order to track progress of the States towards Universal Elementary Education (UEE), for Primary and Upper Primary levels as well as for a composite look at Elementary Education.

The purpose of EDI is to summarize various aspects related to input, process and outcome indicators and to identify geographical areas that lag behind in the educational development. Initially 24 indicators were indentified for computing EDI. These indicators were based on the data collected by the District Information System for Education (DISE). In 2009, the indicators for computing EDI were revised from 24 to 29. These indicators have been grouped under four areas namely Access, Infrastructure, Teacher and Outcome.

Educational Development Indices (EDIs) for each district clearly indicate the journey a district is to traverse to reach the overall goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). A study of the related parameters provide insight to prioritize the activities which will ultimately improve the elementary education scenario in the district/State as well as to monitor the parameter that have low EDI value.

The EDI ranking is expected to encourage the States to improve their performance and have closer look at both the inputs and the outputs of the parameters that affect elementary education to a larger extent. It is expected that EDI will also enable more effective targeting of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to the neediest regions.

List of EDI Indicators

COMPONENT	INDICATOR
ACCESS	Density of Schools per 10 Sq. Km
	Availability of schools per 1000 child population
	Ratio of primary to Upper Primary Schools/Sections
INFRASTRUCTURE	Percentage of Schools with Student-Classroom Ratio: Primary >30 and Upper-Primary > 35
	Percentage of Schools with 1:1 Classroom-Teacher Ratio
	Percentage of Schools with Drinking Water facility
	Percentage of Schools with Boys Toilet
	Percentage of Schools without Girls Toilets
	Percentage of Schools Required and have Ramp
	Percentage of Schools with Kitchen-Shed (Government & Aided Schools)
TEACHER	Percentage of schools with female teachers (in schools with 2 and more teachers)
	Percentage of Schools with Pupil-Teacher Ratio: Primary >30 & Upper Primary > 35
	Percentage of Single-Teacher Schools
	Teachers without Professional Qualification
OUTCOME	Average number of instructional days -Upper Primary
	Average number of Instructional days
	Average working hours for teachers
	Percentage of change in enrollment in Gov schools over the previous year
	Gross Enrollment Ratio
	Participation of SC children: Percentage of SC Population (2001 census): Percentage of SC Enrollment
	Participation of ST children: Percentage of ST Population (2001 census): Percentage of ST Enrollment
	Participation of Muslim children: Percentage of Muslim Population (2001 census) : Percentage of Muslim Enrollment
	Ratio of Girls Enrollment to Boys Enrollment
	Drop-out rate
Transition Rate for primary to upper primary level	

Government Schemes Complementing SSA

There are a few other schemes that are being implemented simultaneously by various ministries / departments of the GoI. Some of the requirements mandated under the RTE also exist under certain other schemes of the Department of School Education and Literacy, such as Teacher Education and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Certain other provisions of the RTE are sourced through convergence of agencies other than the MHRD, such as facilities of drinking water and toilets for existing schools. Therefore, these schemes directly and indirectly facilitate the attaining of the goal of UEE and fulfilling the mandate of the RTE. In this context, a few prominent schemes are mentioned here:

1. The Mid Day Meal Scheme

The Mid Day Meal Scheme of the Department of School Education and Literacy for providing a noon meal to elementary school children.



With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995. The Scheme went through several revisions along the years and in April 2008 the scheme was extended to recognized as well as unrecognized Madarsas / Maqtabas supported under SSA.

It involves provision for free lunch on working days for children in Primary and Upper Primary Classes in Government, Government Aided, Local Body, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternate Innovative Education (AIE) Centers, Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Child Labor Project (NCLP) Schools run by Ministry of Labor.

The primary objective of the scheme is to provide freshly cooked meal to children of primary and upper primary classes with other objectives of improving nutritional status of children, encouraging poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities, thereby increasing the enrollment, retention and attendance rates. It is the world's largest school feeding program, reaching out to about 120,000,000 children in over 1,265,000 schools and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centers across the country.

The 12th Plan outlay for the scheme is Rs 90,155 crore, of which Rs 11,937 crore has been allocated for 2012-13.

2. The ICDS Scheme

Pre-primary education under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development;

It is one of the world's largest programs for early childhood development and is implemented through the *Anganwadi* system in the country. Launched in 1975, the ICDS scheme aims to improve nutritional health of children under 6. It not only lays the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child but also helps reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and school dropout. The Anganwadis also help enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education. This pre-school non-formal education along with nutritional enhancement plays a significant role in the smooth sailing of a child from preschool to pre-primary school.

Despite shortcomings the scheme has played a significant role in boosting nutrition status of kids,

immunization as well as pre-school education. As per data provided by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, over time there has been an improvement in the number of children who attended pre-school. While 30 million children attended pre-school in 2010–11, the figure increased to 35.8 million in 2011–12. The evaluation of the ICDS by the Planning Commission, conducted through the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 2009, observed that the scheme has positively influenced formal school enrolment and contributed to reduction in early discontinuation among beneficiaries.

3. Teacher Education

The centrally-sponsored scheme of re-structuring and reorganization of Teacher Education was initiated in 1987 pursuant to the formulation of the NPE in 1986. It envisaged teacher education as a continuous process with pre-service and in-service training being its inseparable components and emphasized the significance and need for a decentralized system for the professional preparation of teachers. It was in this context that DIETs, Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs) were established.

At present, more than 555 DIETs are functional and 105 CTEs and 31 IASEs have been set up as resource institutions in the country. The DIETs run a pre-service Teacher Education Program. About 60,000 innovative teachers are trained every year through the DIET's two-year diploma in Education. As per the evaluation report by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 2009) these institutions have played a positive role in improving the quality of school and teacher education. The DIET programs have given a platform towards undertaking research and experimentation among practicing teachers. Almost all teachers who received training were found to be competent to conduct the action research and solve their own problems.

The Scheme has continued with modifications in the 8th, 9th and 10th Five Year Plan periods. The Government gave its approval for revision of the Scheme for the 12th Plan in March, 2012. It aims to strengthen the teacher education system through qualitative and quantitative strengthening of the teacher education institutions so as to prepare an adequate number of qualified persons for the schools. The revised Scheme has an estimated outlay of Rs 6308.45 crore, to be shared between the Centre and the States in the ratio of 75:25 (90:10 for the NE Region). Consequent upon the revision of the Scheme, the meetings of Teacher Education Approval Board (TEAB) in respect of 26 States has already taken place for implementing the Scheme in 2012-13.

For 2012-13, an allocation of Rs 500 crore has been made. An outlay of Rs 500 crore has been proposed for the year 2013-14.

4. Residential facilities for girls from the backward communities (SC, ST, OBC)



A Centrally Sponsored Scheme titled "Construction & Running of Girls Hostel for students of Secondary and Higher Secondary schools" was launched in October, 2008 and is being implemented from 2009-10 to set up Girls' Hostels with 100 seats each in about 3479 Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) in the country. The scheme replaces the earlier NGO driven Scheme for Construction and Running of Girls' Hostels for Students of Secondary and Higher Secondary schools, under which assistance was

provided to voluntary organizations for running Girls' Hostels.

The main objective of the revised Scheme is to retain the girl child in secondary school so that the girl students are not denied the opportunity to continue their study due to distance to school, parents' financial affordability and connected societal factors. The girl students in the age group of 14-18 studying in classes IX to XII and belonging to SC, ST, OBC, Minority communities and BPL families form the target group of the scheme. The hostels are to be constructed preferably in KGBV compound wherever space is available. Where there is no space in KGBV compounds or in the blocks where no KGBV has been sanctioned, the hostels may be constructed in the compounds of Secondary/Higher Secondary Schools.

Students passing out of KGBVs will be given preference in admission in hostels. In blocks without any KGBV, students in all Government/Govt. aided Schools in the vicinity of the hostel will be eligible for admission. 50% of girls admitted will belong to SC, ST, OBC, Minority communities. Central Government will bear 90% and State Government will bear 10% of the recurring and nonrecurring project cost. During 11th Five Year Plan, 1925 girls' hostels were approved by PAB and funds to the tune of Rs 315.88 crore were released for construction of 958 hostels in 14 states.

As on December 31, 2012, total of 1999 hostels stand approved, and funds to the tune of Rs 546.78 crore have been released for construction of 1079 hostels in 17 States.

An outlay of Rs 450 crore has been proposed for the year 2013-14

These EBBs blocks were identified by following methodology: Initially a list of 3073 educational backward blocks (EBBs) was drawn up in connection with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This was arrived at on the basis of twin criteria of Female Literacy Rate being below the national average of 46.13% and Gender Gap in Literacy being above the national average of 21.59%. Both these criteria had been earmarked by the RGI. Subsequently this list was expanded to include 406 more blocks, out of which 404 blocks were having rural FLR of less than 45% irrespective of the Gender Gap. Besides, one SC concentration Block from West Bengal with SC Rural FLR on 19.81% and one ST concentration block in Orissa with ST rural FLR of 9.47% were also included, taking the total number of EBBs to 3479.

5. The National Child Labor Project (NCLP) of the Ministry of Labor to provide special schools for child laborers withdrawn from work;

6. The Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) and **the Drinking Water Mission (DWM)** under the Ministry of Rural Development for providing drinking water and toilets in schools;

7. The School Health Program of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Current Status of SSA

The biggest challenge thus far has been to set up enough infrastructures across the country. Being a pan India activity of its own kind, the problems have been numerous. But ultimately things appear to improve and settle down year by year. In order to gauge progress, there are two very useful measures: One is the education development index (EDI) provides useful insight into how things have been progressing in different states. It also offers a relative picture of the current status across states. The other is the annual state of education report (ASER) from watchdog NGO Pratham since last six years.

Education Development Index (EDI) 2012-13 Report

Analysis of the EDI 2012-13

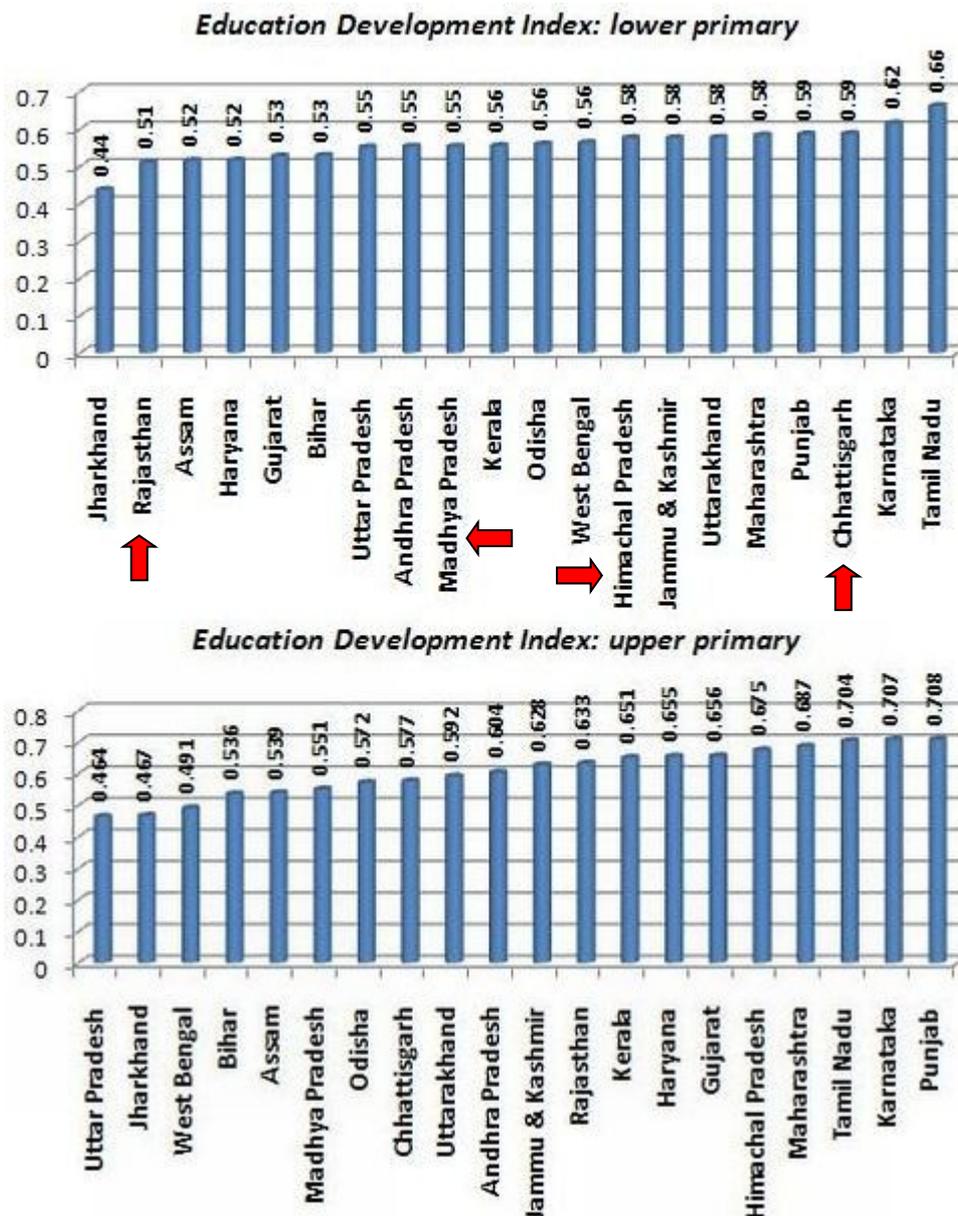
Summary of the EDI Analysis

The rankings reflect the achievements of the states in the education sector. Variety of indicators presented in the flash statistics revealed improvement in all the components of universal elementary education including average annual drop-out rate and retention at primary level of education. Moreover, more schools now have drinking water and toilet facility and other necessary infrastructure in school than in the previous year.

The EDI rankings reflect that there remains huge gap between the southern and the northern region. When the EDI of southern and northern States is compared, it indicates that the southern states have improved leaps and bound after the enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. However, the northern States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and others despite their best efforts have proved to be no match.

Released on Dec 6, 2013 the latest annual Education Development Index (EDI) for 2012-13, calculated by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) on the basis of mammoth District Information of School Education (DISE) data, presents a comprehensive picture of the elementary education in India.

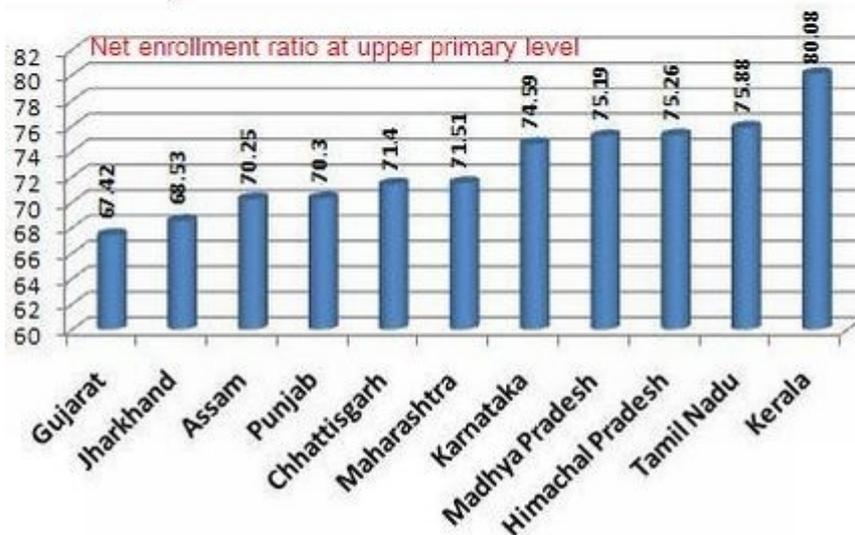
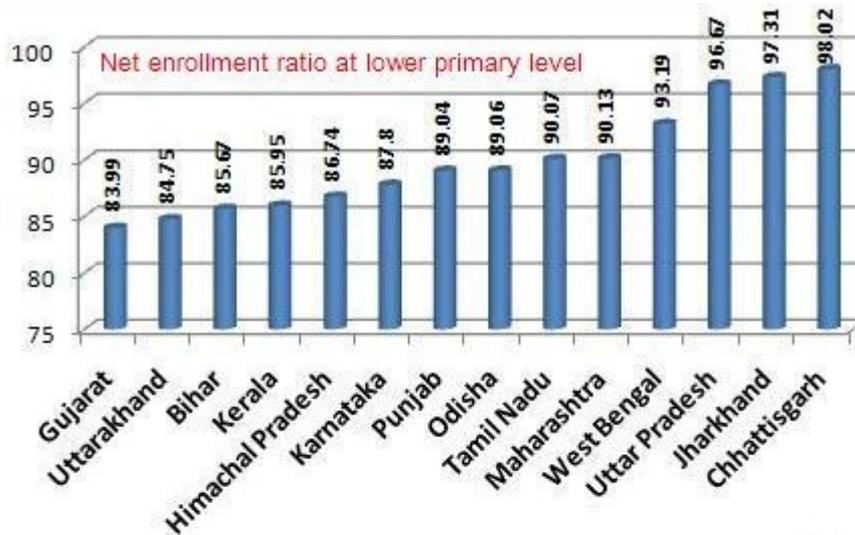
The following image gives a clear picture of how states stand relative to each other.



It is heartening that an otherwise considered backward state like Chhattisgarh has EDI score to put it in the company of the best performers like TN and Karnataka and is placed above Punjab in the lower primary category! It however goes down in the upper primary.

For net enrollment in the lower primary Chhattisgarh tops, followed by Jharkhand, UP and West Bengal lead in the net enrollment at the lower primary level. But they tend to lose out in the upper primary – indicating drop outs after class V.

A surprising laggard is Gujarat, at least in terms of enrollment. Critics say it is due to not having schools within reach in many areas – availability of schools per 1000 children.



North-South Divide

An overall analysis of the data tells that there is north-south divide polarization in the states' performances. Not only that, the gap is widening because the southern states are improving in leaps and bounds after the enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. On the other hand, the northern states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and others are too sluggish despite their best efforts.

Southern States

Composite EDI score takes into account both the performances in primary and upper primary levels. States were judged on four parameters: access, infrastructure, teachers and outcomes. It ranked Lakshadweep on top (with a composite EDI score of 0.712). Lakshadweep is followed by Puducherry (0.696), Tamil Nadu (0.683), Sikkim (0.672) and Karnataka (0.661). Among the southern states the biggest decline has been of Kerala, once among the best performers. It went down to 14th position with an EDI score of 0.603 from 7th in 2011-12.

Northern States

Among the northern states, Punjab recovered a lot of ground occupying the sixth position with an EDI score of 0.647, a remarkable recovery from its 13th rank in 2011-12. While Delhi has slipped from 6th to 11th in overall ranking, Maharashtra has shown consistency retaining its eighth position with an EDI score of 0.635. Gujarat slipped from 9th in 201-12 to 18th in 2012-13 with an EDI score of 0.591. Delhi slipped from 6th in 2011-12 to 11th in 2012-13 in overall ranking with an EDI score of 0.627.

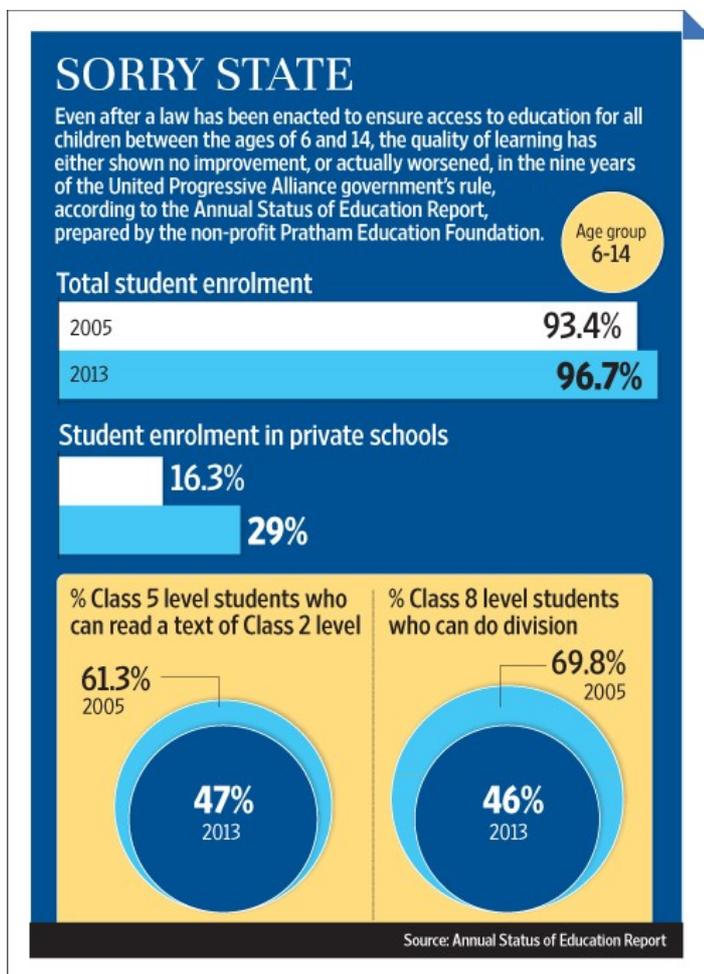
Among the perpetual laggards, Bihar recovered a bit; it moved to 30th from 33rd in 2011-12. UP's downward slide continues, from 32nd to 34th (EDI score 0.508). Rajasthan moved to 25th from 23rd position (0.572). West Bengal is yet to see Mamata effect. It slipped to 31st rank from 29th in the previous EDI ranking. Madhya Pradesh slipped from 26th to 28th slot (EDI score 0.552).

Annual State of Education Report (ASER) of November 2013

ASER is the largest annual household survey of children in rural India that focuses on the status of schooling and basic learning. Facilitated by Pratham, ASER 2013 reached 550 districts and close to 16,000 villages, 3.3 lakh households and 6 lakh children in the age group 3-16. Since the implementation of the RTE Act in 2010, school visits in ASER have included indicators of compliance with those norms and standards specified in the Right to Education Act that are easy to measure. In 2013, ASER visited 14,724 government schools.

Since 2005, every year ASER tries to find out status of rural children going to school and how best they can read simple text and do basic arithmetic.

The Sorry State of Learning



The report reveals two major findings: The worsening of learning level and preference for private schools or private tuitions in the rural India.

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) published in Jan 2014, the quality of learning—as measured by reading, writing, and arithmetic—has either shown no improvement or actually worsened in the last nine years. However, the enrolment level in schools has significantly increased: now 97% children are in schools, compared with 93% in 2005.

The proportion of all children in Class 5 who can read a Class 2 level text has declined by almost 15% since 2005. Similarly, the portion of students in Class 8 who can do divisions has declined by almost 23% during the same period. While 60% students in standard 5 were able to read the text books prescribed for pupils who were three years junior in 2005, now only 50% are up to the task.

There are several major challenges for the education sector, from introducing at least one year of pre-school education to building mechanisms for open learning, continuing education, vocational training and quality education and research at the university

level.

A major trend that needs urgent tackling is the dramatic shift to private school enrolment in rural areas. In 2005, the all-India rural private primary school enrolment was about 17%. It has gone up to 29% by 2013. In some states such as Manipur and Kerala, nearly 70% of the students are in private schools. Top 5 states with highest enrollment in the private schools are: Manipur (70.50%), Kerala (68.80%), Haryana (51.40%), Uttar Pradesh (49%) and Punjab (46.70%).

Moreover, in states where enrolment in government schools is high, a higher portion of students were found to depend on private tuitions to supplement what they learnt in school. For example, in Bihar and Odisha, where only 8.4% and 7.3% of students are in private schools, respectively, 52.2% and 51.2% of students were taking private tuitions.

Improvement in RTE Compliance

Compliance with most measurable Right to Education (RTE) norms continues to grow. The proportion of schools that comply with RTE pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) norms has increased every year, from 38.9% in 2010 to 45.3% in 2013.

The proportions of schools with an office/store, a playground, and a boundary wall have increased slightly over 2012 levels.

Overall, the percentage of schools with no drinking water facility has declined from 17% in 2010 to 15.2% in 2013. In seven states, more than 80% of schools visited had both the facility and drinking water was available. These states are Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala and Karnataka.

Since 2010 there has been a significant increase in the proportion of schools with a useable toilet, from 47.2% in 2010 to 62.6% in 2013. In 2010, 31.2% of all schools visited did not have a separate toilet for girls. This number has declined to 19.3% in 2013. The percentage of useable toilets for girls has also increased from 32.9% in 2010 to 53.3% in 2013.

Over the last three years, there has been a steady increase in the provision of libraries in schools that have been visited. The All India figure for schools with no library provision dropped from 37.4% in 2010 to 22.9% in 2013.

Small schools

The proportion of "small schools" in the government primary school sector is growing. The proportion of schools with a total enrollment of 60 students or less has increased steadily since 2010, from 27.3% in 2010 to 33.1% in 2013. This means that almost a third of all government primary schools in India are "small schools". In Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram this figure is higher than 60%. Eight states show an increase of more than 10 percentage points in the proportion of small schools in the period since 2010.

Girls not in school

At the national level, the proportion of girls (6-14) who are not enrolled in school decreased from 6% in 2012 to 5.5% in 2013. The greatest progress is visible in Uttar Pradesh, where this percentage dropped from 11.5% in 2012 to 9.4% in 2013. In contrast, in Rajasthan the proportion of out of school girls age 11 to 14 rose for the second year in a row, from 8.9% in 2011 to 11.2% in 2012 to 12.1% in 2013.

Policy changes to enhance learning outcomes

Authorities are aware of the poor quality of the SSA. Since 2012 the policy framework in India for elementary education is changing. The focus is shifting to learning outcomes. The 12th Five Year Plan document, in its chapter on its education, states that education policy "...will place the greatest emphasis on improving learning outcomes at all levels."

Additional guidelines are being issued by SSA for the planning process for 2014-15 school-year which directs states and UTs to plan and implement interventions to ensure learning enhancement in children.

Is There Anything Positive in the Poor Findings?



Although the picture presented by the above two studies and others done at more regional levels do not portray a very good picture of the realities of the SSA, but taking a balanced and pragmatic approach should be the best choice.

On the positive side, enrolments in the 6-14 age group have increased everywhere, for both boys and girls, and drinking water and toilet facilities in schools have risen too, though not in line with enrolments. On the flip side, the actual attendance nowhere matched the enrollment levels. States like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand showed attendance figures of less than 60

per cent.

Learning quality is certainly better in the private schools: On checking Class III children's ability to read a Class I textbook, only 33% children from government schools could do that compared with 60% children from the private schools.

Such a difference could reflect the worsening performance of government schools or the improving performance of private schools, or both. But at least a part of it could also reflect merely a transfer of the better achieving students from government to private schools, thus lowering average achievement levels for the former and increasing them for the latter. This is corroborated by the ASER finding that private school enrolments have risen from 19 per cent of total enrolments in 2006 to 29% in 2013. Further, children in private schools come from relatively better off families; thus their better performance is not a surprise compared with government school children.

While no one can deny that efforts to improve government school performance should continue, but for optimists a child in school is better off than a child outside school. But the question arises: Does just being in school help students in any way?

Just Being in School Helps!

Even if we think about performance as pure literacy, there are findings from other countries as poor as India – Mexico, Venezuela, Nepal and Zambia – that *adult* women who have been to school in childhood display impressive literacy skills, suggesting that literacy improves with time and continues to improve even *after* the child has left school. And this seems to correlate strongly with the number of years spent in school, even for very few years of school attendance.

There is a universal finding that women with just a few years of schooling experience more favorable outcomes on a variety of things – infant and child mortalities and illnesses, children's cognitive development, family nutritional levels – than women with no schooling. Every additional year of maternal schooling, after the first one year of schooling, is associated with a 2-5% fall in the risk of a child death).

What it implies is that mere presence in the school, regardless of the quality of teaching, is rewarding in indirect ways! This indirect learning appears to promote the sense of self-discipline, obedience of authority and time-routine and ability to interact with peers and non-peers. Such attributes don't show up in the form of academic "output" but they go a long way towards increasing one's ability to negotiate the world outside home boundaries.

No wonder primary schooling is also associated with the largest rises in economic productivity in developing countries.

In the longer run, of course we want the school to be a platform for *education* rather than just the producer of a disciplined and obedient workforce and responsible and efficient parenthood. And so it is right that we may be dismayed at the poor showing of most of our schools in the ASER surveys. But in the meantime, sending our children to and keeping them even in our poor performing schools is one small step towards giving them and society some of the social and economic spin-offs that are not to be scoffed at.

Discrimination in Schools



While the government may celebrate implementing Right to Education and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 'exclusionary and discriminatory' practices are still prevalent in schools in some states which pose a serious threat to long-term education policies and reforms. A study commissioned by ministry of human resources development, conducted in six states — Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and Rajasthan — has revealed widespread 'discrimination and exclusion' on the basis of caste, community and gender, with Rajasthan being one of the worst hit.

The study by the NUEPA and MHRD, covering 120 schools, explores the 'blatant, subtle and hidden practices' that influences the ability of children to learn, grow and become confident. This includes sitting and eating on the basis of caste during mid-day meals, girls cleaning toilets of the schools and cooks preferred from particular caste or community.

Even teachers in all the six states were found have skewed notion against the children from deprived social groups. Contrary to their misconception that children from these groups are poor in academics, the study found that they were performing well. However, regular attendance was an issue among children from these disadvantaged and marginalized communities, but mostly due to poor health, migration of parents for work, recurring illness and taking on household responsibilities.

In Rajasthan, upper caste students in most schools drank water or cleaned mid-day meal dishes before the SC and ST children. In another school of the state, water pitcher was not available to SC and ST students.

Even in some schools in Andhra Pradesh, ST and SC students stay away from hand pump and wait for others to pour water. In some schools in Madhya Pradesh, girls from general category and OBC were practicing untouchability, arguing that their parents have asked them to conform to the prevalent social norms.

Similarly, in MP and AP girls mostly from SC community had to help in cleaning toilets and girls also cleaned toilets of teachers in many schools. In Rajasthan and Bihar, most of the toilets were unusable and locked, because as per the prevalent notion "children spoil and dirty toilets." Ironically, some children in Andhra Pradesh even prefer to go out in fields rather than cleaning a toilet after use.

The seating arrangement in the classes in many schools also reflected the discrimination and exclusionary practices. In almost all the states children were separated by gender, caste and community, violating the Constitutional spirit.

Clearly, the social mindset has yet to change for better so that schools have equitable environment.

SSA in Chhattisgarh, MP, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh

Chhattisgarh

Naxal affected areas still have high dropout rate

While in rest of the state the enrolment and dropout rates might be improving, but naxal affected areas are still keeping children out of school. However, most of these children missing from schools in these areas are actually victims of conflict. During the time of the now disbanded Salwa Judum, the state-sponsored anti-Naxal militia, and later Operation Green Hunt from 2005 to 2010, the biggest casualties apart from human lives were schools and education. Salwa Judum destroyed schools as they went on a rampage vacating villages suspected of supporting Naxals; while Naxals did the same, fearing that schools would be used as camps by the security forces.

Most of these areas are still not well connected through roads and without sign of administration. Regular schools in these areas have rarely been successful. Residential Ashram schools and Porta Cabins (structures made of bamboo), being run by the Tribal Welfare Department and the Department of School Education under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, are a common sight all across these areas.

However, near most of these schools there are Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camps, ostensibly to prevent the ration supply meant for the schools to the naxals. This makes these schools vulnerable to their attacks too. The dropout rates are as high as 25% in many areas, as opposed to national average of 5.5%. Surprisingly, Chhattisgarh tops the country in lower primary enrolment with over 98%, though its drops to 71% for the upper primary level.

The fad of private tuitions has not yet touched Chhattisgarh; less than 5% children in lower primary take private tuitions.

Madhya Pradesh

The State is among the worst performers in the country

Madhya Pradesh may be advancing economically very fast, but it occupies the lowest rankings when it comes to primary education – not only in the country but also among the backward states of the Hindi belt like Bihar, Jharkhand and UP. Even tribal-dominated and Naxal infested neighboring Chhattisgarh fares better.

Barely 38% students of Classes III-V can read a Class I text while a measly 22.3% of them can do basic subtraction against the national averages of 54.8% and 39.7%, respectively – according to the ninth annual status of education report (ASER) 2013 recently released by NGO Pratham. These findings are also lower than last year's reading level of students of Class III-V, 39.3% and 23.1% who could do basic subtraction.

This figure slides further when it comes to Class V student's reading and arithmetic levels of Class II. Compared to all-India average, arithmetic proficiency levels are also low - about 11% points below the national average. Barely 31.9% Class V students can read Class II level text compared to the national average of 47%. Also, only 14.2% students can do basic mathematics like division, which is far behind the national average of 25.6. Here again, the state fares worse than neighboring Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

Another finding is the low attendance of barely 60% as opposed to the enrolment level of over 96%. The national average attendance was found to be 71%.

On the EDI ranking also with a score of 0.552 Madhya Pradesh is among the worst performers only ahead of Bihar, UP Jharkhand, West Bengal etc. It even slipped from 26th to 28th place compared with last year ranking.

Rajasthan

Girl dropout rate high and rising

Declining enrolment of girls is the main disturbing feature of Rajasthan, according to the ASER 2013 report. The proportion of out of school girls in the 11-14 age groups increased from 11.2% in 2012 to 12.1% in 2013. These numbers are almost twice the national dropout rate of 6% in 2012 and 5.5% in 2013.

Educationists feel that the reason lies in the rather inferior status of women and girls who are traditionally seen within the home boundaries. Additionally, the lack of infrastructure facilities for girls like absence of proper toilets deters the girl child to continue education.

They also feel that the ideal model for girls' education is the Kasturba Gandhi girls schools which have almost negligible dropout rates. Developing similar mechanism should help increase enrolment of girls.

Another highlight is the increasing role of private schools in terms of enrolments – currently almost 40% children are enrolled in the private schools. In the age group of 6-14, the private school enrolment has increased from 25.2% in 2006 to 39.5% in 2013. Talking in terms of number of schools, 25% of private schools are catering to 40% of the total students whereas 75% government schools are catering to 60% of the total students.

A likely reason for preference for private schools is the bad reputation of government schools.

Himachal Pradesh

Aims to set "learning standards" to improve quality

Himachal Pradesh has done fairly well in implementing the SSA – in north India it among the top performers but not as good as the southern states. It is among the best in enrolment in the lower primary classes (over 96%) but goes down when it comes to upper primary (about 75%). It means many children drop out after class V.

In a survey the state discovered that the learning level – particularly in maths, showed decline from 46% in Class II to 28.6% in class VIII. Besides, shockingly 58%-80% of class VII students failed to do any mathematics operation. Realizing the problem of poor quality of learning, it is now all set to become the first state to notify 'learning standards' set under the education program which would help improve learning among students in government schools. The notification is likely to come in March 2014.

In its analysis it has realized that currently teachers assess the students and promote them to the next level. But once when there is a system, teachers will be accountable to maintain the learning level against those standards. This is also in accordance with the Section 29 of the RTE Act which demands quality of education in addition to the right to education for every child.

Challenges and The Way Forward

Quality is the biggest challenge for the SSA. Although the PTR is not yet idea across India, but apart from appointing appropriate number of teachers the quality of their training is an important issue. Himachal Pradesh's initiative for "learning standards" is worth notice which should inspire other states.

For Rajasthan the biggest challenge is to put girls in schools. It clearly is an issue of gender bias which demands action on the societal plane. The state might think of promoting more and more Kasturba Gandhi girls schools which has proven to retain girls.

Indian government has to clarify its policy vis-à-vis the PPP in elementary schooling, particularly because of the trend of parents choosing to send children to private schools because of the perception of better quality of teaching. Popularity of private tuitions is another disturbing trend that clearly points out that the quality of education in schools is not up to the mark. This defeats the very purpose of investing in school infrastructure across the country. The infrastructural requirements will be mostly satisfied within next 2 years so the issue of quality becomes vital in the long run.

Finally, it must not be forgotten that education is much more than arithmetic and reading skills. It is meant to groom children in a holistic manner.

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