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**AN ANALYSIS ON IMPROVEMENTS AND
RUNNING UP PRIMARY EDUCATION WORK IN
RURAL INDIA**

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An Analysis on Improvements and Running up Primary Education Work in Rural India

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Abstract – In terms of developments and state-wide scaling up of services in the rural area of primary education, what will it cost financially and in terms of human resources to scale-up these services in all the rural areas of India what policy, institutional and governance reforms may be necessary so as to ensure proper service delivery? As is well known, merely setting up more schools, for instance, is not going to be enough; higher public investments in these areas needs to be accompanied by systemic reforms that will help overhaul the present service delivery system, including issues of control and oversight.

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of independence, India's primary education was characterized by the historical inequities. Though Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy was committed to ensuring free and compulsory education for all, this did not significantly translate into action and school enrolments and participation remained dismally low for decades after independence. However, the picture of elementary education in rural India began to change rapidly due to the new thrusts given by the government's New National Policy of Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1992), which aimed at improving access, reducing dropouts and improving learning achievements for all children between 6-14 years of age. A

host of major initiatives by the government, and the mobilization of external resources for primary education, had a deep impact on the status of primary education, in India. Some of the important initiatives have been the Operation Blackboard (1986), Non formal Education Scheme (1986), the Shiksha Karmi Project (1987), Mahila Samakya (1989), Lok Jumbish (1992), the District Primary Education Programme (1994), the Mid Day Meal scheme (1995) and the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001), which aimed at completion of eight years of schooling by all children between 6-14 years, by 2010. Elementary education being made a fundamental right by the 83rd Constitutional Amendment, and the Supreme Court's insistence on States to provide hot cooked meals in schools, are improving enrolments, especially among girls.

India is home to the largest number of illiterate people in the world. Although it is claimed that literacy rates in the country are rapidly increasing, vast numbers of

Indians who are officially counted as literate are hardly so in the true sense of the term. The paper discusses how the Indian educational system, especially sectors that cater to the rural poor, continues to be overwhelmed with a host of enormous problems.

A plethora of government initiatives to provide access to primary education may be underway, but issues of equity, quality, and access remain areas of concern — particularly in rural schools. Children in rural areas continue to be deprived of worth education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of textbooks or teaching-learning materials, and so on. Childhood is a time of development – mentally, socially, physically, morally, and intellectually. Education should include all aspects of development that are extremely important for proper and adequate development in each child. Along with it, development of curiosity is vital as an answer to the brainwashing that is all too common in education. The paper also discusses the Annual Status of Education Report or ASER, which means impact in Hindi.

India lives in its villages –this statement of Mahatma Gandhi is valid today literally and from the social, economic and political perspectives. In India, around 65% of the State's population live in rural areas. As such, people in rural areas should have the same quality of life as is enjoyed by people living in sub urban and urban areas. Further there are cascading effects of poverty, unemployment, poor and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas on urban centres causing slums and consequential social and economic tensions manifesting in economic deprivation and urban poverty. Hence, Rural Development, which is concerned with economic

growth and social justice, improvement in the living standard of the rural people by providing adequate and quality social services and minimum basic needs, becomes essential.

Teachers are the backbone of the educational system in India. Government has set up a permanent body for the selection of the teachers known as N.C.T. i.e. National Council of Teachers Education. It conducts the training and selection of the teachers and provides certificate/degree for the teachers that are an essential qualification for the teachers who seek the employment in teaching schools known as B.Ed, or Shastri education.

State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) are set up in all the states to look after the training and research work on the lines of NCERT which is at all India level. Its refresher courses, even modifies the curriculum of the schools and textbooks are written for the secondary level standard in the state. It also arranges seminars, discusses and refresher courses for the teaching staff.

Right to Education is the primary right of every citizen of India, whether a child resides in a high profile society or in a faraway not so developed secluded village. Schools in rural areas are promoted to raise the level of education and literacy in rural India. The main aim of running these types of schools in India is to increase the rates of literacy in rural areas. More than 40 percent of India's population is illiterate and cannot read or write. Moreover, schools in rural areas are inadequate and often equivalent to being non-existent.

Thus, government's initiative to set up schools in rural areas came into picture. The conditions of rural education in India, is improving steadily and the government is providing full support and providing with many initiatives. The fee structure in these schools is also very low so that every child can study and afford it.

Though there are very few schools in rural areas, children and their parents are showing interest and availing school facilities in these remote locations. Children have to walk miles to reach their school. Rural schools pay special attention to children in these locations so that each child gets an equal and important opportunity. They promote reading, writing, and enhanced basic education. These schools also provide study material to every student apart from, meals during school hours, uniforms etc. Rural village schools also have implemented library system, which provide books, newspapers and magazine to children. They not only provide science kits and equipment for hands-on-learning, but also notebooks, textbooks and pencils to poor children. Apart from that, they also give scholarships to deserving students regularly, who wish to study ahead. They create community awareness, about the need for education and world literacy. Many indirect benefits of a basic rural education include

poverty reduction, disease control, enhanced employment opportunities and increasing rate of literacy. The curriculum includes English, Mathematics, General Knowledge and Drawing. Apart from that, they also provide Value Education and Computer Education. With the help of rural education, every family and child has access to basic primary education. Individual's special talents are recognized. The teaching methodology ensures that every student is exposed to educational experience in an active and dynamic learning environment, so that they can achieve excellence. Teachers also encourage every student to express their views, observations and experiences.

The main objective of rural school's is to ensure that every child in rural India receives quality education, which prepares them to compete in the competitive global environment. Primary education cannot be considered to be a public good because it does not meet the theoretical criteria of non-rivalry in consumption, non-excludability and externality. However, in most of the developing societies it is considered as a merit good because its universal consumption has a high intrinsic value determining the physical quality of life in the society. The Planning Commission in India (2006), moreover, considers it as an important equaliser and a determinant of future growth. There is a strong case for its public provisioning or budgetary support for its provisioning. In this context, the present paper attempts to estimate the efforts needed to scale up primary education services in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Karnataka both in financial and physical resources required and changes in policies, institutions and practices needed. According to the data published by the Directorate of Adult Education, nearly 70 percent of the illiterate population in the country are in eight states of UP, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. Thirteen states including Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar have literacy rates below the national average of 64.8 percent.

IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Realizing the importance and the critical state of primary education in India today, many organizations on many levels are focusing on this issue. International agencies, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, are deeply involved. UNESCO has pledged to work with national governments and development partners to achieve universal free primary education by 2015, as was agreed upon at the World Education Forum in Dakar. UNICEF also has primary education as part of its mission. Both are supporting the Government of India in its task with funds and expertise.

The Government of India began a program for improving the status of primary education in 2001, with the following areas of focus:

- Increase in teacher appointments and training
- Improvement in elementary education content and techniques
- Provision of teaching materials
- Improvements in infrastructure
- Education for disadvantaged groups: girls, disadvantaged castes, and the disabled

The Indian national government is hoping to achieve universal primary education by 2010, five years earlier than the goal set in Dakar. This is an ambitious goal, and much depends on the will to make it happen at the national and international level, and on the thousands of NGOs involved in education.

Many NGOs in India run schools for poor children. Some organizations, such as Katha, Pratham, and Prayas, have made universal primary education their focus and operate education centers for children in slum areas. Others NGOs are niche players that target particular segments of the child population with innovative programs. For example, Ruchika School Social Service runs 20 schools in the eastern state of Orissa on train platforms so that the many homeless children who live in the train stations, begging and working, can learn something as well. Hole-in-the-Wall Education has set up computers in slums and rural areas throughout India. These computers are easily accessible to children and are loaded with simple children's education software. There is little supervision or intervention and the children learn at their own speed and in their own way. The program has been so successful that there are plans to try it in Cambodia and some African countries.

ESTIMATING REQUIRED SCALING-UP EFFORTS

The millennium development goal relating to literacy is to make primary education universal. The net enrolment rate in the population 6-11 years should be made 100 percent. For our purpose, this is an effective target for the scaling up effort. Besides, the quality of teaching should vastly improve. As a second step, we consider the crucial 4 parameters (ratios), viz., enrolment per classroom (E/CR); classrooms per school (CR/S); teachers per classroom (T/CR); and enrolment per teacher (E/T). For physical quantity of infrastructure and quality of primary education, these four parameters are very important.

Major trust of envisaged action on improving the physical learning environment in primary school is to increase enrolment per classroom, classrooms per school and enrolment per teacher and to increase enrolment per classroom and teachers per classroom. A school must have at least 3 effective classrooms and 5 effectively available teachers to run grades/standards 1 to 5.

We now estimate the financial resources required to scale up primary education services in rural India. We have considered only one regular teacher per new school proposed, the rest being para-teachers. We also take note of the major repairs, minor repairs and toilets needed in the existing schools in the two states and provide for the same. A helper per school is also provided for cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc.

INDIA LAGS BEHIND IN PRIMARY EDUCATION-WHY?

It has been widely acknowledged that the socio-economic conditions in rural India have constrained the process of primary education and the social inequalities of caste, class and gender have been identified as the major causes of educational deprivation among children in India. To quote Jean Dreze, "educational disparities, which contribute a great deal to the persistence of massive inequalities in Indian society, also largely derive from more fundamental inequalities such as those of class, caste and gender" (Dreze 2003). A large proportion of children from the economically poor and socially disadvantaged groups and girls, especially in rural areas, are either denied access or are failing to complete even five years of basic education. The goal of universal elementary education remains a challenge to achieve even after five decades of independence.

In this context it may be worthwhile taking note of a few developments:

- As explained earlier, the focus has now shifted from enrolments to primary school completion, but gains in enrolment do not show as gains in grade completion. The NFHSII survey brought out that only 56% boys and 43% girls in the 15-19 years age group had completed elementary education.
- It is disturbing to note that despite improvements in enrolment rates, dropouts continue to remain high.
- The Tapas Majumdar Committee Report has estimated the size of out of school children to be about 60-70 million (Jha and Jhingran 2002). NSSO data on out of school children aged between 5-14 years,

reveals that while the percentage of those who never attended is small, the percentage of those who dropped out is alarmingly high (Ramachandran Vimala 2002).

- Vast variations exist between states in their efforts to provide eight years of elementary schooling. While in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Maharashtra, nearly all children have reached school and are remaining there, in other states like Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, a very significant number continue to be out school (Sinha Amarjeet 2003). Observation shows that the school attendance of children aged 6-17 years is more than 90% in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, and 85-90% in Goa, Delhi, Manipur, Mizoram and Punjab. Overall school attendance at 60% is the lowest in Bihar and is also 70% or lower in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

The spread of education has been uneven not only in terms of interstate variations, but also between rural and urban areas, with urban areas being at an advantage compared to the rural areas.

Social inequalities of caste, class and gender have manifested themselves in primary school participation and completion, as a result of which, certain segments of society, such as the SCs, STs, and girls in rural areas, have continued to lag behind the general population. We now see how these three gaps manifest themselves in the sphere of primary education.

THE FUTURE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

The importance of universal primary education has now been widely recognized by everyone involved. Policies and pledges are easy to make but implementation can be difficult and goals hard to achieve, especially in a vast and populous country such as India. International agencies, the government of India, and the numerous NGOs will have to work together with will, wisdom and tremendous energy to make their desire for universal primary education by 2015 a reality in India.

CONCLUSION

The access of primary schooling facilities within a walkable distance of one/three km had not been achieved for all rural habitations in India. It requires a planned and systematic intervention from the public agencies involved in catering the school education facilities, particularly, in hilly areas - thereby it had been requiring an extensive review on distance criterion. The expansion in number of rural schools was quite slow and disparities among and within States/UTs were prevailing. The increase in number of primary schools was less than 10 percent in majority of

States/UTs. The increase in number of upper primary, schools might have appeared due to the up gradation of existing schools. Efforts were required to create the pucca/partly pucca school building infrastructure in the country.

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