

MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITIES IN INDIA: EDUCATION

Equal access to education entitlements is one of the basic human rights. Ensuring equal opportunity of education through an egalitarian approach, especially in developing countries, has the potential for acquiring growth, inclusive of development.

Education as a policy objective, has been assigned high priority in the national objectives of India. The provision of free and compulsory education to all children in the age group 6-14 years is also a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India (Article 21A). The National Policy on education (1986) was an important landmark towards this Constitutional commitment. The national goals received a renewed impetus with the adoption of Millennium Development Goals in 2000. The journey towards universalisation of elementary education was finally endorsed with the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009.

Despite this, India failed to produce an appreciable progress report. Although in last ten years, there has been a visible progress in India's education sector as school enrolment has increased and more adults have been declared (functionally) literate than ever before; however, more than one third of the population continues to remain deprived of education. The age-old disparities stemming from class, caste and gender also manifest themselves in the educational attainments. Thus ensuring equality in educational opportunities emerge as one of the important question.

PUBLIC PROVISIONING FOR EDUCATION: AN INSTRUMENT TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY:

Provisioning for education, both for its coverage as well as quality, requires significant amount of financial resources. Given the crucial importance that education plays in the development of a society and a country's economy, public provisioning for education has been recognised as an effective strategy towards ensuring inclusive education. The Kothari Commission report was probably the first of its kind to review policies recognising the significance of higher public

investment in education and made an attempt to quantify the level of investment that would achieve the target of universalisation of education way back in 1966.

The total public expenditure (Centre and States combined) on Education as a proportion of GDP in India was around 3 percent in the year 2004-05. It has increased over the last decade, but the pace of increase has been very modest. The present level of total public spending on education (including the expenditure of all Education departments at the Centre and the States and also the other departments that spend on education) works out to 4 percent of GDP (in 2012-13 BE) (see Figures 1a and 1b). This proportion of 4 percent of GDP falls much short of the 6 percent of GDP recommended by the Kothari Commission.

Figure 1a: Public Expenditure on Education as % of GDP in BRICSAM countries (2011)

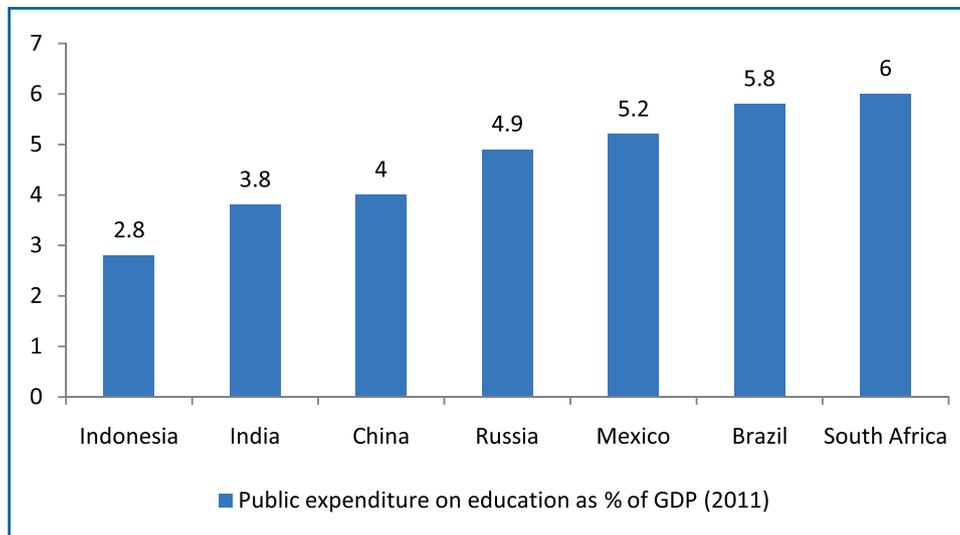
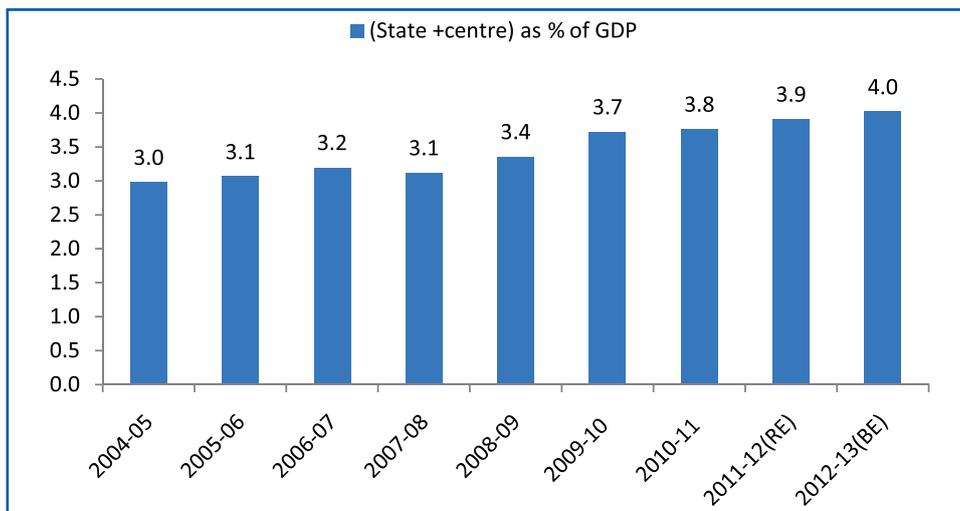


Figure 1b: Public Expenditure on Education in India (as % of GDP)



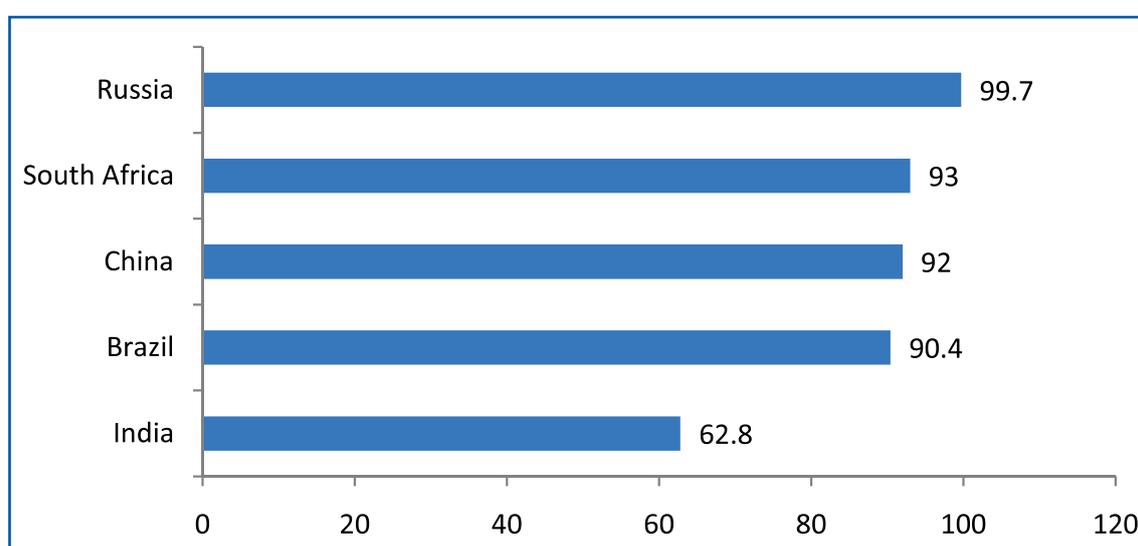
Source: UNDP open data portal (<https://data.undp.org>) and Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education 2010-11 to 2012-13, Planning and Monitoring Unit, Department of Higher Education, MHRD (2013); GDP figures are from National Account Statistics, 2015, CSO

The picture looks more dismal, if the figures are compared with the rest of the BRICSAM¹ countries. Except Indonesia, all other BRICSAM countries spend much higher amount on education. Brazil, one of the examples of achieving universal education, spend 6 percent of GDP in education, whereas India spends less than 4 percent of GDP on education (see Figure 1a).

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIA: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

One of the reasons for low educational achievement in India is its weak foundation. Figure 2 shows that the position of India in BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in terms of adult literacy rate² is not very impressive.

Figure 2: Adult Literacy Rate for BRICS Countries



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012)

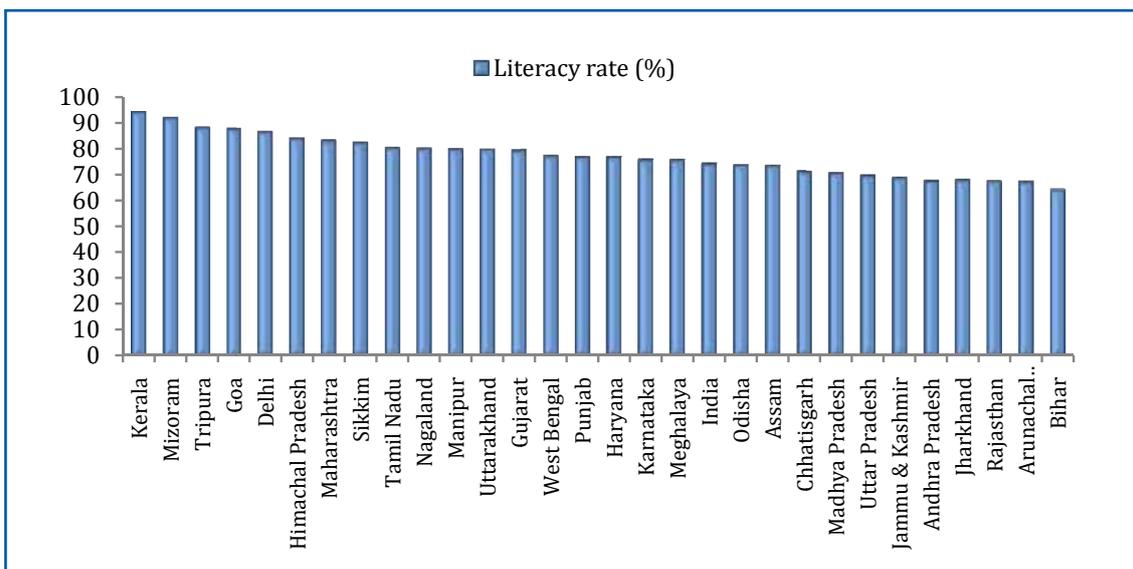
The Figure above clearly shows that Russia has achieved universal adult literacy rate. China with the largest population has adult literacy rate over 92 percent; whereas India ranks last in the literacy ladder. Further the literacy gap between India and rest of the BRICS countries is 30 percent and above.

Aggregated literacy figures at the national level give us a partial picture. It does not reveal the information for different levels and types of disparities that are inherent in this vast country. The disparity is stark at the State levels where the gap between lowest (Bihar) and highest (Kerala) literacy state is 32 percentage points (See Figure 3).

¹ BRICSAM Countries include Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Mexico

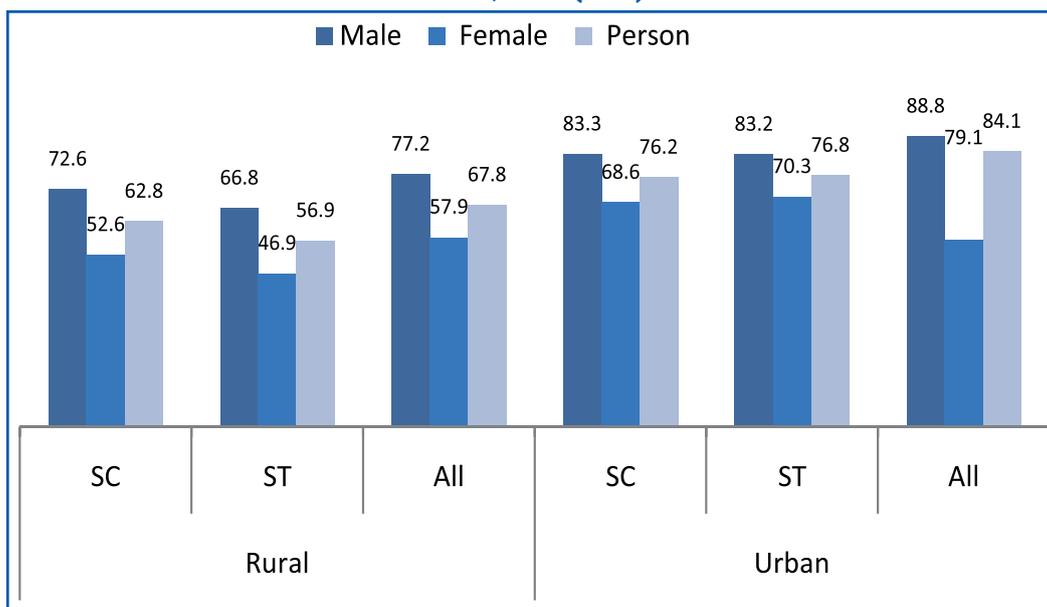
² In India, as per the Census definition, a person aged 7 years and above, who can read and write with an understanding is considered as literate. The percentage of literates to the total population aged 7 years and above is defined as the literacy rate. Census 2011 provides the most recent data on literacy rates. However, information on adult literacy rate (same definition but for person aged 15 and above) is yet to appear in public domain.

Figure 3: Literacy Rate in India by States, 2011 (in %)



Source: Census of India, 2011

Figure 4: Literacy Rate by Social Group, Gender and Place of Residence in India, 2011 (in %)



Source: Census of India, 2011

Gaps in literacy rate across gender and social group over time has declined substantially. Yet a 20 percentage point gender gap still persist in rural India and about 10 percentage points in urban India (see Figure 4). Again, the literacy rate for urban female is 20 percentage point higher than rural female. The disparities are wider for girls belonging to SC/ST communities. Clearly, the literacy statistics portray various dimension of inequality - rural-urban, male-female, SC-ST. However, it also reveals that differences in literacy growth rates across these categories of the population is reducing at a decreasing rate.

Education: Progress Report

India has made notable improvement in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER). It has achieved universal enrolment in primary (I-V) education (116 percent) and near universal enrolment (85.5 percent) in upper primary education (VI-VIII) both for boys and girls. While these are significant, the anomaly is that GER starts falling with increase in the level of education. It is evident from the fact that at the secondary level (IX-X) the GER is 65 percent, and at higher secondary (XI-XII) level it is only 39 percent (MHRD, 2013). The figures for access, attendance, retention and school completion rate are much lower than enrolment and it significantly varies between a range of sub groups like girls and boys, upper caste and lower caste, urban poor and urban rich, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes etc. Despite the arguments that returns to education increase with rising education levels, there exists a puzzle in India where participation at the secondary and higher level of education keeps declining.

Out of every 100 children who enroll in grade I, about 30 percent drop out before reaching grade V and more than 40 percent before reaching grade VIII. Interestingly, the rate of dropout is less among girls in primary education but at the upper primary level, it is higher compared to the dropout rates for boys. Nearly 45 percent of SC children and 55 percent of ST children drop out from school before completing grade VIII and this proportion increases to 60 percent for SC children and 70 percent for ST children before reaching Grade X (Fig 5).

Why Do Children Drop out From School?

An analysis of the determinants of participation (or non-participation) in schooling reveals three sets of influencing factors: (a) household economic factors (b) school environment (including quality of physical & human infrastructure and quality of instruction) and (c) social and cultural/traditional factors (Tilak, 2002).

Low Opportunity Cost of Schooling:

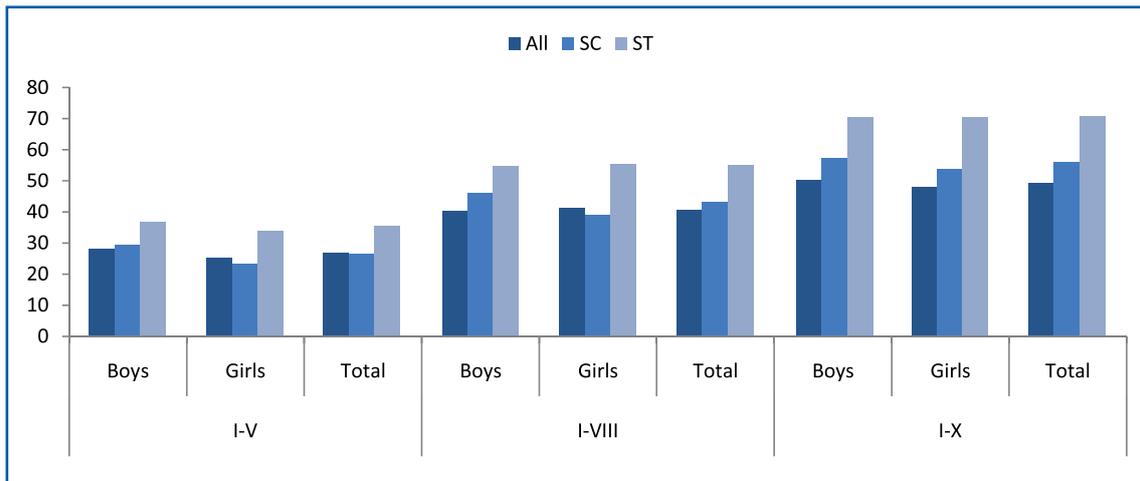
Economic factors constitute the single most important reason for children not attending or dropping out of school. The need to spend on education necessarily constraints poor families in sending their children to schools. Further even when the government offers free education, children are kept out of school to supplement household income. Boys, in particular, are withdrawn from school for wage work and for participation in other economic activities, whereas girls are withdrawn to attend and perform domestic activities (NSSO, 2010).

Continuing Quality Gap in Physical Infrastructure of Government Schools:

In spite of significant expansion of schooling facilities, some basic deficiencies continue to affect Indian schooling system. A number of government schools do not have some of the basic infrastructural facilities like school buildings, additional

classrooms, drinking water, toilets, ramps, electricity and so on. Sometimes, even when the infrastructures are in place they are not functional. Only, eight percent schools comply with all the infrastructure norms mentioned under RTE Act. The infrastructure bottlenecks, especially, inadequate number of upper primary and secondary schools in the vicinity and absence of girls’ toilets are the two major reasons for school drop outs especially among girls. There are also concerns relating to the absence of trained teachers, quality of curriculum, assessment of learning achievements and the efficacy of school management.

Figure 5: Dropout Rates in School Education, 2010-11 (in %)



Source: Statistics of School Education, 2010-11, MHRD

Quality Gap in Learning Achievement:

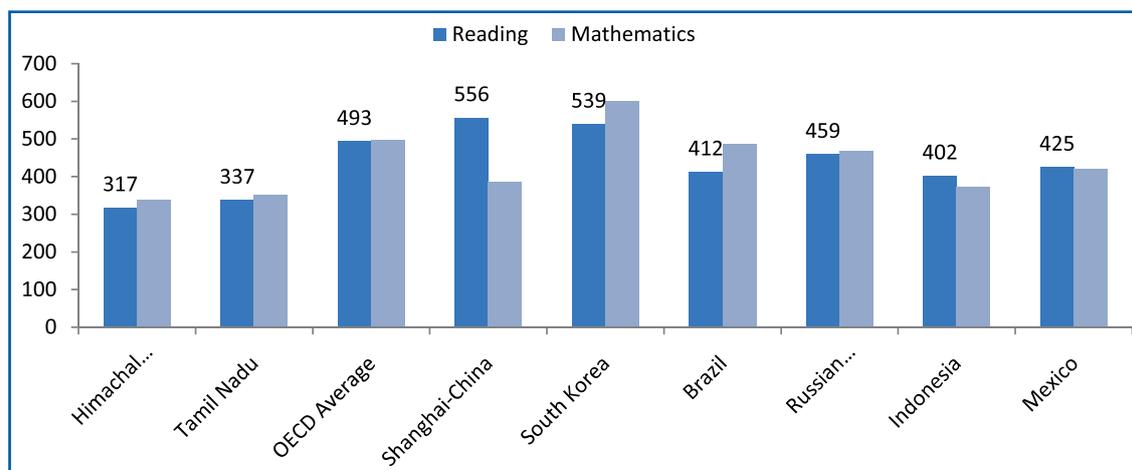
Attending classes and being promoted in the educational ladder do not necessarily translate into equal participation in the education process in their part. After three years of implementation of RTE Act, children are still dropping out of school, not for labour, but because they are not learning anything in schools (UNICEF report)³.

Learning outcomes in India is dismal both in global comparisons as well as when compared across years. PISA result (Figure 6) shows the two most educationally advanced states Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu ranked lowest in both reading and mathematical ability among the BRICSAM countries (and 72nd and 73rd out of a total of 74 tested entities for which results were reported).

According to ASER (2013) data, only 41 percent of the children in standard V of government schools can read the texts of standard II. This situation is also worsening.

³ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/out-of-school-children-and-dropout-a-national-emergency-unicef/article4611287.ece>

Figure 6: Performance of BRICSAM Countries + Indonesia in Learning Ability (Score in Mean value)-2009



Source: OECD PISA survey, Note: South Africa not participated in this survey

Bias towards Private School:

The deteriorating quality of learning in government schools is currently one of the most discussed issues in the realm of public provisioning for education sector. This has also created a bias towards the private schooling with the perception that quality of learning would be better in private schools. However, as per the ASER data, the quality of learning in private schools are also deteriorating. In spite of this parents' continue to send their children to private schools that charges fees instead of public schools which is free of cost (Muralidharan, 2012)

As a result, thousands of private schools have sprung up across rural India in every state in the last decade and the share of children going to private elementary schools has also increased from 19 percent in 2006 to 31 percent in 2014 (ASER, 2014).

Average expenditure on education in private aided schools is almost 5 times higher than expenditure in government schools or schools run by the local bodies. This disparity becomes 7 times higher in case of private unaided schools (NSS, 2010). The existence of pre-primary classes- a distinctive feature of private schools- is another factor that draw parents to private school (PROBE Revisited Report, 2006). However, due to unsustainable financial implications, children are often pulled out of the school within a short period. Considering such high cost of schooling, private school education is often provided to the male child rather than the female child in which the boys are enrolled in private schools and girls in government schools (PROBE Revisited Report, 2006). Thus, the surge in private schooling suggests not only aggravating inequality in terms of quality of education but also severe socio-economic inequalities.

Further, the government itself promotes inequity among its own set of schools. The inbuilt differences in the *Model schools* and *Kendriya Vidyalaya*, *Sarvodaya schools* and *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya*, has ingrained a hierarchy of high

and low achieving schools although the government spends substantially higher amount in these special category schools as compared to normal government run schools.

It is thus imperative to identify the nature of inequities that emerge in this society, especially when the resources are not adequate. Against this backdrop of inequality in education outcomes, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) can play greater role by undertaking targeted policy advocacy in support of universal, free, compulsory, quality schooling and extending opportunities for lifelong learning. At the same time, CSOs can also play a role in promoting transparency and accountability measures in schools. It could also help in increasing the participation of the marginalized communities to enable them to enter decision making spaces.

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