

EDUCATION FOR ALL – MID DECADE ASSESSMENT

**TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN
EDUCATION**

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Preface

The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal approved a comprehensive vision of Education for All (EFA) to be achieved by 2015 based on the six goals. The six goals relate to the areas of early childhood care and education, universalising primary education, gender, youth and adolescents, adult education and quality of education. The main focus is on 'reaching the unreached' for ensuring complete coverage of education. With this background the *Mid- Decade Assessment of Education for All* was initiated to take stock of the progress made with respect to EFA Goals. Corresponding to this exercise, a comprehensive review of the progress made with respect to Education for All in India was conducted jointly by Government of India and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA).

The present work which is a sequel to the National Report consists of a series of thematic and state review papers. There are nine thematic review papers covering all the six goals including three additional papers on three other themes, namely, Teacher and Teacher Education, Management Strategies for EFA and Financing of EFA in India. These thematic review papers are further followed by a series of analytical papers covering progress of EFA in twenty seven states of India. State reviews attempt to present a quick picture of the current level of progress in each state of India assessing the magnitude of the task involved in achieving EFA goals and projecting a realistic time frame as well as strategies needed to reach the goals. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review paper has been prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments.

The review papers along with the National Report present a comprehensive and disaggregated picture of the progress made towards EFA goals in the country. The papers are coming out at a very opportune time when the Parliament is engaged in debating the legislation to make education for all children a Fundamental Right. While the thematic papers highlight state of development of education with respect to different goals of EFA, the State papers present the diversity of the situation across the country. The whole series would serve as an invaluable independent documentation on various aspects of EFA ranging from early childhood care and education to universal elementary education and adult literacy programmes using authentic data sources accompanied by a review of relevant empirical research.

The whole Project involving the National Report along with the series of thematic and state analytical review papers were conceived and executed by Prof. R.

Govinda, NUEPA who led the entire exercise and would like to thank him profusely for his leadership. Dr. Mona Sedwal who as a part of the Project Team at NUEPA contributed immensely to the whole exercise also deserves appreciation. The Team immensely benefited by the advice given by the Technical Advisory Group set up under the Chairmanship of Professor A.K. Sharma for guiding the entire exercise. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Prof. A. K. Sharma for his invaluable guidance. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by UNICEF and UNESCO.

Ved Prakash
Vice Chancellor
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Editorial Note

Indian Constitution directs the State to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14. This goal has been pursued by the country for nearly six decades through successive development plans. The last two decades have witnessed significant improvements in children's participation in schooling, accompanied by substantial increase in investments. The recent effort to raise resources for the sector through imposition of an education cess is major effort in that direction. Even though school education has traditionally remained a subject for action by State Governments, Government of India has, during the last two decades following the National Policy on Education – 1986, begun to play a leading role. This culminated in the launching of the national programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001. Despite all these efforts, the final goal of providing quality education for all has eluded the country.

Urgency of reaching the goal has been heightened in recent years due to several national and international developments, including commitments made under the Dakar Framework for Action for providing quality Education for All by 2015, which not only covers primary education but also focus on literacy goals, gender equality and quality concerns. The Dakar Framework of Action listed the following six specific goals to be achieved by all countries.

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The National Plan of Action for Education for All (2002) in India reflects this sense of urgency felt within the country by proposing to reach the targets much ahead of the international dateline. At the national level, the Constitutional Amendment in 2002 declaring education in the age group 6-14 which corresponds to the elementary

education stage of schooling a fundamental right has brought the issue of universal elementary education (UEE) to the centre stage of public discourse. The country is in the process of drawing up the legislation for effective implementation of the right for translating the constitutional provision into reality. With the progress made in recent years the goal seems to be achievable by the international time frame of 2015. But this requires systematic assessment of the various goals the present exercise is one such effort.

UNESCO has been bringing out annual review of the progress made in moving towards the goal of EFA through the Global Monitoring Report. These assessments do not reflect an encouraging picture of the Indian scene. This is an issue of serious concern for the national leadership as one sixth of the world population lives in India. With around 65% adult literacy rate, there are more around 350 million adult illiterates in the country. This should not be taken to imply that no efforts are being made to meet the challenge of EFA. Besides, the national averages do not fully reflect the diverse reality characterizing educational progress in India. In fact, it is paradoxical that while certain pockets of the country are emerging as the international hub for creating a knowledge society, certain other regions and sections of the population continue to be deprived of even basic education. It is clear that in pursuing EFA goals, not all states and regions of the country are in the same league. The variety is too wide to draw any generalization. While some states have made remarkable progress in education, practically eradicating illiteracy and achieving near universal participation of children in elementary education, several other states continue to remain far from the final goal. What is needed to progress faster in moving towards the 2015 EFA deadline in all parts of the country? This obviously demands an analytical exercise - goalwise as well as statewise.

It is with this objective in view that the present exercise was taken up to make an independent assessment of the progress achieved in different states and with respect to different EFA goals. The present series of papers constitute the outcome of such a comprehensive exercise carried out by independent experts, in collaboration with Central and State Governments. The main purpose of the exercise is to place before policy makers, planners and the civil society as a whole an analytical picture of the progress made towards EFA goals and the challenges ahead for reaching the goals in a realistic fashion.

The exercise consisted of three parts. The first part consisted of presenting an overview of progress in the country with respect to six goals highlighted in the Dakar Declaration. This was largely based on the technical guidelines for assessment prepared by UNESCO. A national report entitled "Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment: Reaching the Unreached" has been prepared and published jointly by NUEPA and Government of India.

The Second Part consists of a series of nine thematic review papers dealing with different dimensions of 'Education for All' keeping in view the Indian context and priorities. These include: (i) Early Childhood Care and Education; (ii) Universal Elementary Education; (iii) Adult Education; (iv) Towards Gender Equality in

Education; (v) Education of Adolescents and Young Adults; (vi) Quality of Education; (vii) teacher and teacher education; (viii) Management Strategies for EFA and (ix) Financing of EFA. Each of these papers has been prepared by an expert or experts in the respective area. The papers were reviewed by another independent expert and revised based on the observations.

The third part consists of analytical papers covering all states of India. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review was prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments. The state level reviews are prepared on lines similar to what was followed for preparing the national review. Each of them deals with comprehensively on all six goals of EFA specified in the Dakar Declaration.

Many consider that the problem of universal elementary education in India is essentially a problem of girls' education. The National Policy on Education-1986 pointed out that the problem of girls' education couldn't be dealt with in isolation from the broader questions of women's status. Thus UEE goal has also to be seen along with the goal of achieving gender equality in educational participation. The Dakar Framework recognizes that such equality in education has to be viewed in a broader framework covering not only the elementary education stage but also other levels of education. The goal of gender equality also finds place in the list of MDGs. Is Indian education progressing adequately to achieve this goal by 2015? This is the main concern of the present review paper by Vimala Ramachandran on 'Towards Gender Equality in Education'.

This elaborate exercise of assessing the progress in EFA should be viewed in the context of repeated assertions by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on EFA that Indian is at the risk of not making the global targets with respect to several EFA goals. The findings of the review clearly points out that the situation across the country is very diverse. While some States have registered fast progress on all fronts, some others continue to lag behind. Also in general, access to schooling has improved every where even though much remains to be done with respect to other goals of EFA. It is hoped that the various volumes brought out through the exercise would together present a realistic analysis and a disaggregated picture of the Education for All process and achievements in the country.

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This comprehensive exercise of reviewing the progress of EFA has been done through active involvement and support of a large team of experts and officials from Government of India as well as various State Governments. The exercise was carried out under the constant guidance of the members of the Technical Advisory Group under the leadership of Professor A. K. Sharma. The task could not have been completed without the commitment and support of Professor Ved Prakash, Vice Chancellor, NUEPA. Special thanks are due to Smt. Anita Kaul, Joint Secretary, MHRD, Government of India who played a central role in conceiving and implementing the whole exercise. Financial support for the exercise came from UNICEF and UNESCO; in particular, thanks are due to Mr. Samphe Lhalungpa who took personal interest in ensuring that the Project is completed smoothly. We would like to record our appreciation for the technical support and cooperation given by the NUEPA Publication Unit and for printing and publishing the volumes.

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INTRODUCTION

Progress on the gender equality in education front has been assessed periodically in the last two decades, especially since the run up to the Jomtien meeting in 1990 and subsequent national and international events march towards gender equality. This assessment once again provides an opportunity to introspect and focus on the good news and the not so good news emanating from the ground.

Assessment of Education for All (EFA), in the years 2000ⁱ and 2003ⁱⁱ started with appreciating the enormous progress made in access. While this was important and is indeed a heartening trend, the big question that is worrying administrators and the larger education community is the persistence

of high dropout rates, low transition from primary to upper primary and to high school. Poor learning outcomes have now been brought on the front burner. This mid-term assessment takes off from where earlier assessment left off – with a hope to build on and strengthen the march towards gender equality in education.

It is now well established that gender equality in education and enhancing the access of girls to basic education are influenced by three inter-locking sets of issues – systemic; content and process of education and economy, society and culture (see Table 1.1). This issue need not be reiterated now as this approach has now become an integral part of mainstream analysis.

Table 1.1: Girls Education - Overview of Issuesⁱⁱⁱ

Systemic Issues	Content and Process of Education	Economy, Society and Culture
Problem of access Dysfunctional schools Quality of schools Motivation of teachers Existence of multiple delivery systems - formal, non-formal, condensed, satellite and residential. Calendar and timings	Gender stereotyping Perpetuation of gender-bias Relevance of curriculum Language Joyful learning Ready access to books, magazines, papers and so on Appropriate reading material for the newly literate	Poverty / powerlessness Status of women Cost to family Child labour / domestic chores Farm / non-farm work Caught up in survival battles Perception of herself Post puberty practices Child marriage

Source: Adapted and updated from Ramachandran, (2003), Background Paper for 2004 EFA Global Monitoring Report.

There is almost unanimous acceptance of the fact that gender – as a category – needs to be seen within the larger social, regional and locational context. India is a land of rich diversity and it is also a country of sharp disparities. The interplay of socio-economic inequalities and gender relations creates a complex web that either promotes or impedes girls' ability to go through schooling^{iv}. While economic disparities and social inequalities are certainly important, a number of researchers argue that cultural beliefs and practices and regional characteristics play an important role (Colclough et al, 2000^v). As Shireen Jeejibhoy and Zeba Sathar point out "the cultures of South Asia are largely gender stratified, characterised by patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, inheritance and succession practices that exclude women, and

hierarchical relations in which the patriarch or his relatives have authority over family members. Levels and patterns of female autonomy vary considerably within the region... region plays the major conditioning role..."^{vi} The social and educational status of Muslim girls in Kerala and Tamil Nadu is appreciably better than that of the majority community in Rajasthan or Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, the social relationships and status of Dalits vary with region, state and even within districts. The position of women in different communities and their access to education also differs as we move from region to region, social group to social group and between urban and rural areas.

In India it is therefore important to understand the intermeshing of poverty,

social inequalities and gender relations. The three intersect in different ways in different regions of the country – with one reinforcing the other in some and offsetting in others. Understanding and unravelling this is the biggest challenge today^{vii}. In this context there is a need to acknowledge the following:

- Rural-urban differences in enrolment, attendance and completion are greater than male-female differences;
- Backward–forward areas / regional differences are greater than gender and social group differences;
- Disparities between very poor households (below poverty line) and the top quartile is much higher than gender, social and regional differences;
- Differences between social groups – especially between tribal communities, Muslims and specific sub-groups among the SC on the one hand and the forward castes / Christians and other religions are high.
- Inter-community differences are often as severe as intra-community differences. For example the literacy status of some tribes is better than others and some Dalit groups better than others.

In the early years after Jomtien (1990), most of the analysis on gender gap in education started with mapping the

provision of schooling (access / supply) and the “demand” – meaning readiness of families to send their children, especially girls to school. However, with the march of years, there was a realisation that one cannot separate supply and demand for education – where ever there are schools within access and where ever these schools were regular and functioning well – demand increased (Rekha Wazir, 2000)^{viii}. Conversely, where schools were dysfunctional / indifferent, where not much teaching was happening and where communities did not have confidence in the school as a safe place for their daughters, demand fell sharply. There was recognition that the availability of well functioning schools is indeed an important variable that influences household decisions [Ramachandran et al, 2004; Subramanian, 2002; PROBE, 1999^{ix}]. Research on what happens inside the school and the push out factors highlighted by the attitudes and practices of teachers and of children from relatively forward social groups affects the readiness of children from socially disadvantaged social groups remaining in school (Nambissan, Geetha 1996, 2000 and 2001^x. Experience of NGOs, like MV Foundation highlighted the push out factors and over the years there has been a recognition of the need to question classroom practices, teacher / administrator attitudes and prejudices

and the curriculum that may reinforce social biases / discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes [NCERT, 2006, Ramachandran et al, 2004]. Seventeen years after Jomtien, it is now recognised that the prevailing gender gap in educational achievement is more than just a combined effect of both supply and demand factors. Greater social awareness in the community, proactive campaigns to promote girls education beyond primary, improved schooling facilities as well as well functioning school system, appropriate interventions to address educational needs of specific groups of girls and most importantly more gender sensitive interventions inside the classroom / in specific incentives make a big difference. In a

recent national level evaluation of the NPEGEL scheme of GOI (November 2007 to February 2008), revealed that targeted provision of cycles to girls living more than 2 km away from upper primary schools can enhance girls access to schooling beyond primary and also improve attendance, retention and learning.

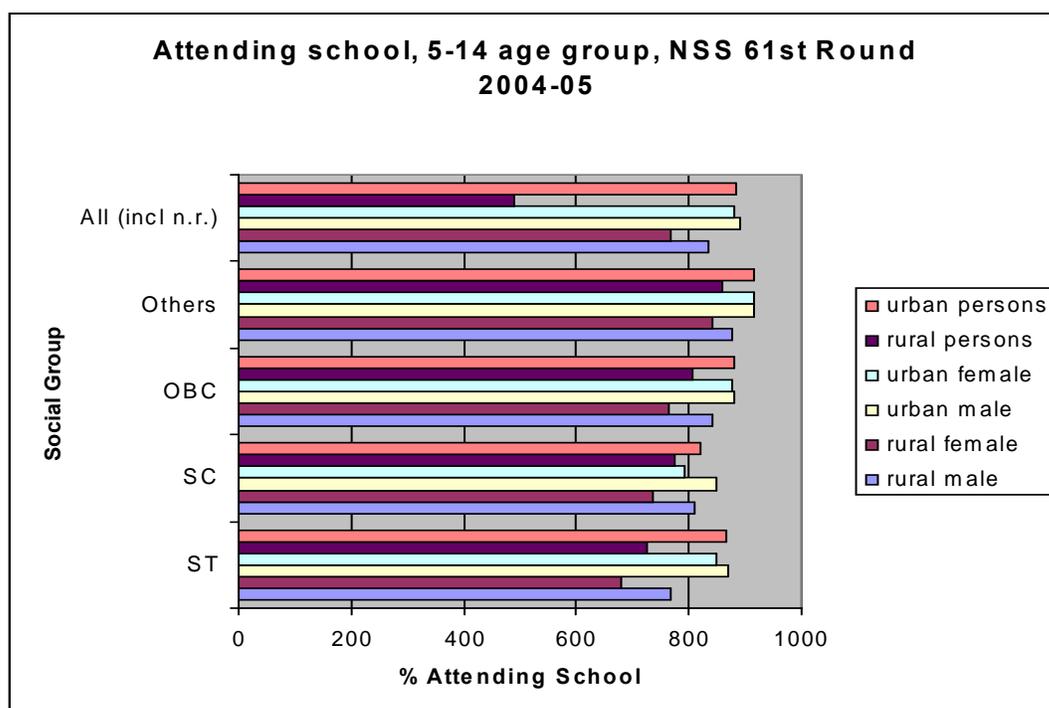
This paper reviews the progress – crisscrossing between hard quantitative data and qualitative insights – drawing upon District Information System for Education (DISE) data, household survey data [(NFHS-3 2005-06, IIPS,2007; NSSO recent (55 and 61) rounds, MICS 2000)] and other smaller sample surveys / studies.

WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

Physical Access Improved

Physical access to primary schools improved considerably with 1,52,304 new primary schools and 1,10,830 new upper primary schools having been opened since 1990 (Select Educational Statistics, GoI, 2006a). The decade of the 1990s saw a sharp increase in the rate of improvement in girls' education and women's literacy^{xi}. There has been a sharp increase in enrolment rates across the country and the percentage of never enrolled children has been steadily decreasing. Gross enrolment

ratio (GER) in the primary stage exceeds 100 per cent, yet gaps between girls and boys and between different social groups persist – with the gap being quite significant at the upper primary level. Educational progress among Muslims remains an area of concern.^{xii} Recent studies indicate that it is the Muslim child, more specifically the Muslim girl child, who still lags far behind when it comes to enrolment and staying in school^{xiii}.

Figure 2.1: Attending School 5-14 Age, 2004-05

Source: NSS 61st Round, Gol, 2007c.

As evident from the Figure 2.1 above, only 67.8 per cent of rural ST girls and 73.7 per cent of rural SC girls in the 5-14 age bracket are attending school. The 55th and the 61st Rounds of NSS data reveal that there has been some improvement in the current attendance rates in the age group 5 to 14. Notwithstanding a secular increase across all social groups, the proportion of rural women from SC and ST social groups attending any educational institution in 2004-05 is 678 per 1000 for ST and 737 per 1000 for SC. There is at least a 10 percentage point difference between boys and girls of the same social groups and location. Social group and location emerges as the two important markers – with the situation of both SC and ST men and women in

rural areas being much lower than other social groups in both rural and urban areas. (See Tables 2.1 and 2.2)

Clubbing the 5-14 age groups could also be misleading. While enrolment and attendance rates in the primary section have certainly improved, the situation in the upper primary stage is extremely worrisome. The ratio of primary to upper primary schools and sections is 2.57 for India as a whole – with the worst situation being in West Bengal where there is one upper primary school section for 5.28 primary schools / sections. The best ratio is in Gujarat 1.47^{xiv}. Given that – even within a state the ratio is far higher in rural areas – the chances are that rural girls are at a disadvantage in accessing

upper primary schools. Therefore, while physical access has improved since the 1990s we still have a long way to go before every child who enters class one can be reasonably confident of moving from primary up to class eight in an uninterrupted manner.

There is considerable evidence in existing DISE data as well as a range of sample surveys that show the presence of over-age and under-age children in school thereby inflating the enrolment rates. It may be useful to separate over-age children from each class – to enable us to get a better handle of the

real enrolment rates. Equally, analysis of the grade distribution of over-age children (11+ in primary school) could also help us come to grips with what is actually happening in the school. As of now, the data on over-age and under-age children is not gender disaggregated. It is estimated that 15 per cent children are over-age or under-age at the primary level and close to 20% at the upper primary levels. This hides inter-state differences ranging from 8.93 in Bihar and 8.88 in UP to 27 per cent in Rajasthan and 33 per cent in Sikkim (primary) (Mehta, 2007).

Box 2.1: What Gender Parity Index Reveals and Does not Reveal

Gender Parity Index is the female to male ratio in enrolment / participation in schools. It is a measure that tells us about the number of boys and girls who are enrolled / attending recognised schools (in the case of DISE government schools) at a particular point of time.

This does not include qualitative indicators like learning or transition from one grade to the next. It is a snap shot at a particular time in a particular kind of school. It, therefore, does not capture the difference in enrolment ratios of boys and girls in private schools and government schools.

Gender parity is different from gender equality and parity does not measure progress towards gender equality – it only tells us the ratio of girls to boys in a specific educational setting. Gender equity encompasses both parity and equality. The two need to be taken together to measure progress towards social equity and justice goals.

There is considerable evidence – with government programmes like *Mahila Samakhya* – that movement from gender parity to gender equality in education involves a proactive intervention to not only ensure access but try to remove the barriers that impede successful completion of the elementary cycle and facilitate transition to the secondary stage.

This unique government programme launched in 1989 addressed the constraints that prevent women and girls from accessing education and developing the wherewithal to negotiate their immediate environment and the local government system.

Source: Ramachandran, Vimala (2007) (forthcoming). UNICEF/IPPF – UNGEI Girls Education Series.

Another dimension of the access issue has to do with enrolment in different kinds of schools. Studies done under the aegis of the DPEP programme of GOI and subsequent sample surveys / small studies have confirmed that many more girls are enrolled in government schools and that over 60 per cent of children in private fee-paying schools are boys. ASER 2005 reveals that the proportion of boys in private schools is 65 per cent in Rajasthan and 51 per cent in Kerala – with boys and girls almost even in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra^{xv}. This trend was confirmed in ASER 2006^{xvi}.

While access related indicators have certainly improved in the last ten to fifteen years, there has not been an appreciable decline in the gender gap in real terms as parents make a choice between fee paying schools and free

schools. As a result, the ratio of boys to girls or the decreasing gap in enrolment to government schools (as captured in DISE data) does not tell us very much about gender disparities per se.

Another often neglected aspect of access and retention is that parents are motivated to retain children in elementary school if they are relatively confident about forward linkages – meaning ready access to higher levels of schooling and vocational / employment oriented courses. As discussed in Box 2, availability of meaningful educational opportunities after the elementary stage act as a powerful suction pump that pulls children through. Conversely, absence of meaningful educational opportunities after elementary education could demotivate parents and children alike.

Box 2.2: Forward linkages

A Suction Pump that Pulls Children Through the Elementary Cycle

It is globally acknowledged that “no country has reached even 90 per cent primary enrolment without attaining secondary enrolment of about 45%” [Clemens 2004 quoted in M Lewis and M Lockheed, 2007a:24]. In India the GER at secondary school (Classes IX and XII) is 38.89 per cent (girls 34.28 per cent). Demand for and ability to transit from elementary to secondary depends on four inter-related factors:

- Successful completion of the elementary level – Class VIII;
- Attaining grade-specific competency in all subjects – especially math and language;
- Availability of secondary school within reasonable distance or availability of hostel facilities;
- Availability and accessibility to professional / vocational or livelihood related education that enhances capability to be self-employed or seek employment.

When young girls and boys see a light at the end of the long educational tunnel, their motivation to go through is enhanced. There is considerable evidence to show that women

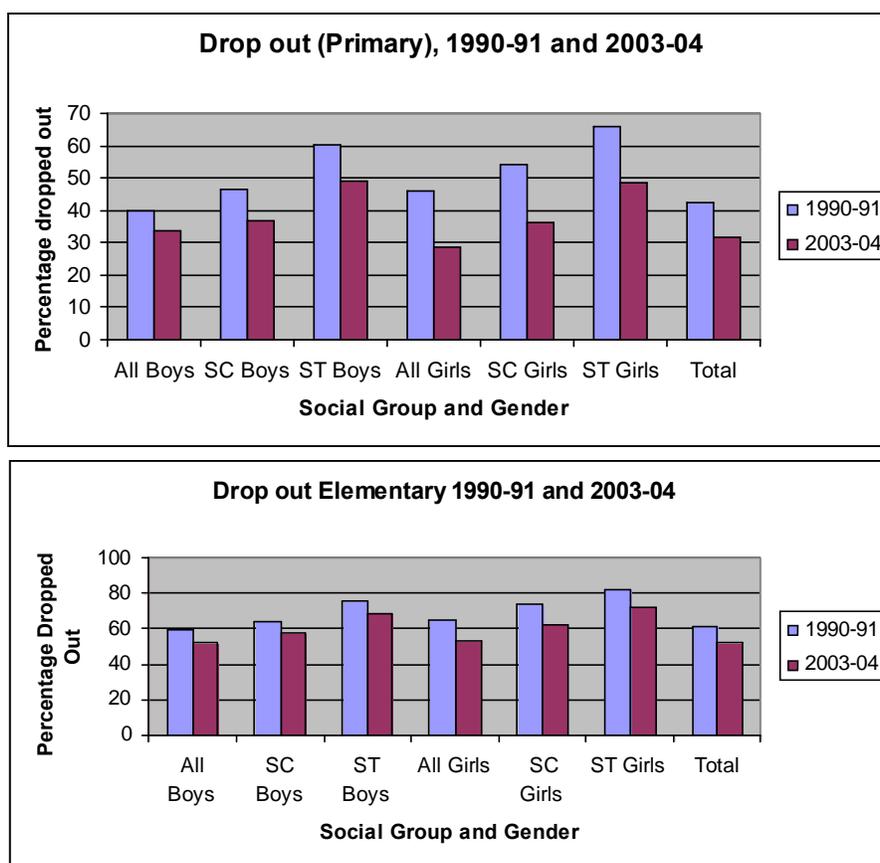
who have got at least 10 years of basic education are more likely to enter the formal labour market and women with secondary education bring considerable social as well as economic returns to the family. Educated women farmers raise productivity (Lockheed, Jamison and Lau, 1980, quoted in Lewis, M and Lockheed, M., 2007a:25). Educated women marry later and most importantly, educating one generation up to secondary level can effectively break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and low educational achievement. Global evidence also shows (including our neighbour Bangladesh) that if secondary schooling is made accessible to girls and if the quality of education at the elementary level is up to the mark, then girls' enrolment at the secondary stage will quickly outstrip boys (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, quoted in Lewis and Lockheed, 2007).

This transition cannot be feasible unless issues of quality, meaning tangible learning outcomes, are tackled urgently. Quality is the heart of the struggle for equality and justice. Mere enrolment in school for 5 or eight years is meaningless unless it leads to tangible learning outcomes and intangible outcomes in terms of enhancing their self-esteem and confidence.

Dropout and Retention – The Continuing Challenge

Enrolment rates do not really illustrate what is happening. Girls continue to drop out in large numbers, 28.57% girls drop out before they complete the primary cycle, 52.32 % drop out before they complete the elementary level and 62.69% leave school before completing the secondary level. More girls drop out in the post-primary stage. The situation of socially marginalised groups is grim; 62.2% of SC girls and 71.4% of ST girls do not complete the elementary cycle, and 75.5% of SC girls and 81.2% of ST girls do not go up to Class X. (SES, Gol,

2006a). Rural-urban differences are also significant (as noted in GER at primary and middle school levels). Another important issue is that while gender gap in enrolment may be coming down, the gap persists in dropout rates, especially at the elementary and secondary cycle, as evident from Figure 2.2. The intermeshing of gender relations, location (rural/urban, remote areas) poverty, social disadvantage / discrimination and poor quality schooling loads the dice against girls.

Figure 2.2: Dropout Rates by Social Group and Gender 1990-91 and 2003-04

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2003-04, Gol, 2006a.

Poverty, Hunger and Work

The recent state of the world's children report (Unicef, 2007) has highlighted the nutritional status of children in the country as a whole. The NFHS-3 data reveals that 38 per cent of children under 3 are stunted (too short for age), 19 per cent are wasted (too thin for height) and 46 per cent are underweight (too thin for age). Notwithstanding the ICDS programme and the mid-day meal scheme, the evidence highlights the alarming nutritional status of Indian children. Given the prevailing gender

relations, attitudes and practices towards girl children the chances are that girls account for a larger proportion of malnourished children^{xvii}.

Micro studies show that four to five years of severe drought in many parts of the country, and the resultant short term and persistent hunger among children were flagged as important issues in recent qualitative studies. Equally, poor health and frequent illness impedes regular attendance in school. The link between health and education is yet to be addressed, especially in the case of children from the poorest quartile of the

population. The workload of children from very poor households before and after school hours comes in their way in revising, reading after school hours. This problem is particularly severe with first generation school goers and among the girls, especially when they are the older of the children in the family^{xviii}.

Responding to the grim nutritional status of children the Supreme Court of India order dated 28 November 2001 decreed the provision of a universal cooked mid-day meal programme. This was introduced in twenty-three of the thirty-five states and UTs who have reported universal coverage. The more educational by backward states with high gender disparities are the ones who are “defaulters”, namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The irony is that the areas which have some of the worst nutritional status are among the states where the mid-day meal programme is also not being implemented.

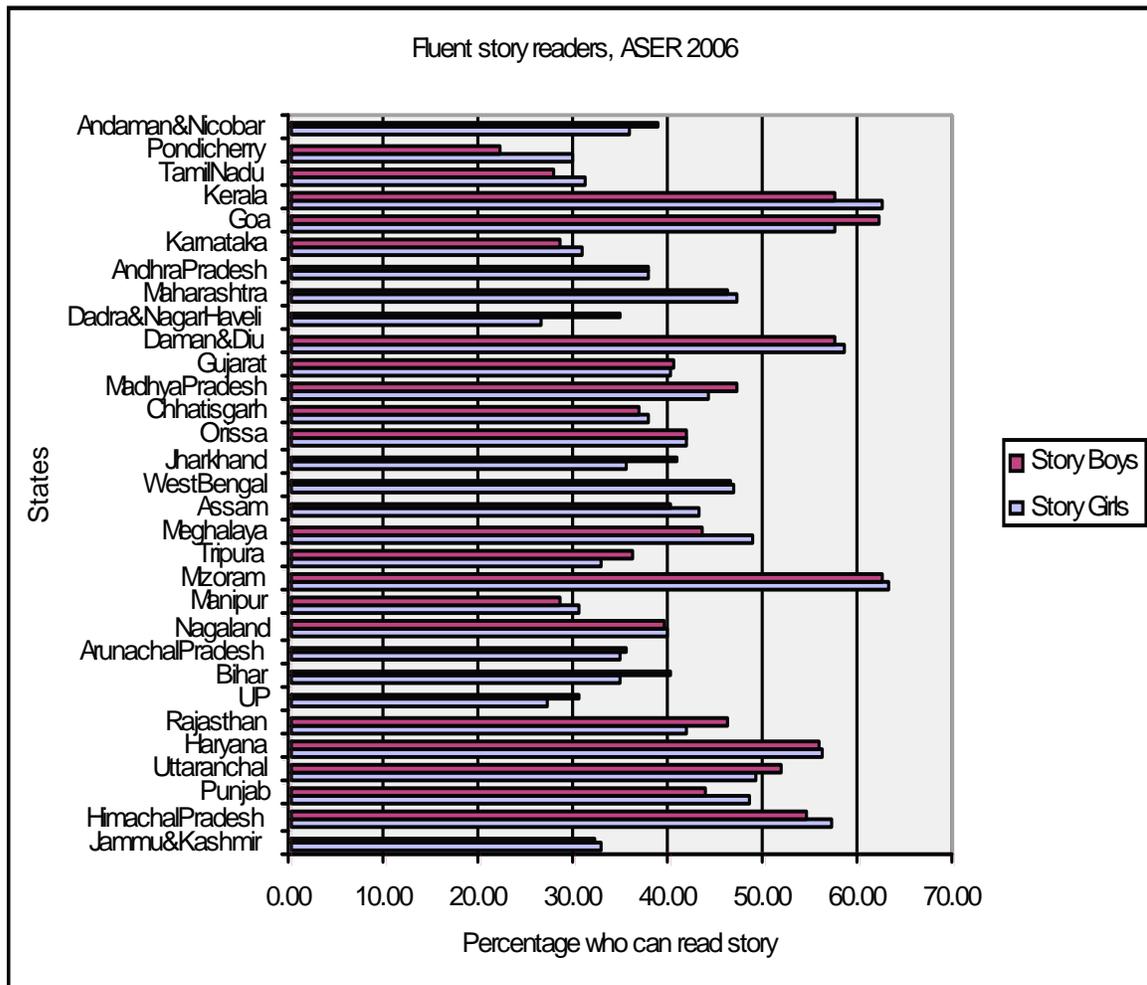
The Issue of Learning

The most recent DISE statistics reveal that 47.83 per cent boys and 48.50 per cent girls passed grade IV/V with 60 per cent and more marks – signalling that there may not be significant gender difference in one of the key quality indicators of the government. NCERT

sponsored study on learning outcomes also does not reveal any significant gender differences in learning outcomes^{xix}. However, this kind of data is not available for the full elementary cycle (Classes VII/VIII). The issue is not that there are no gender differences but that learning levels across the country are low – 35% of all children in the 7-14 age group could not read Level 1 text and close to 52% could not read a short story; 44% children studying in classes II to V in government schools could not read an easy level 1 paragraph. As a popular saying goes, When a person is drowning it really does not matter if it is 35 feet of water or 50 feet of water! The hard reality is that learning levels are low across the board – among boys and girls.

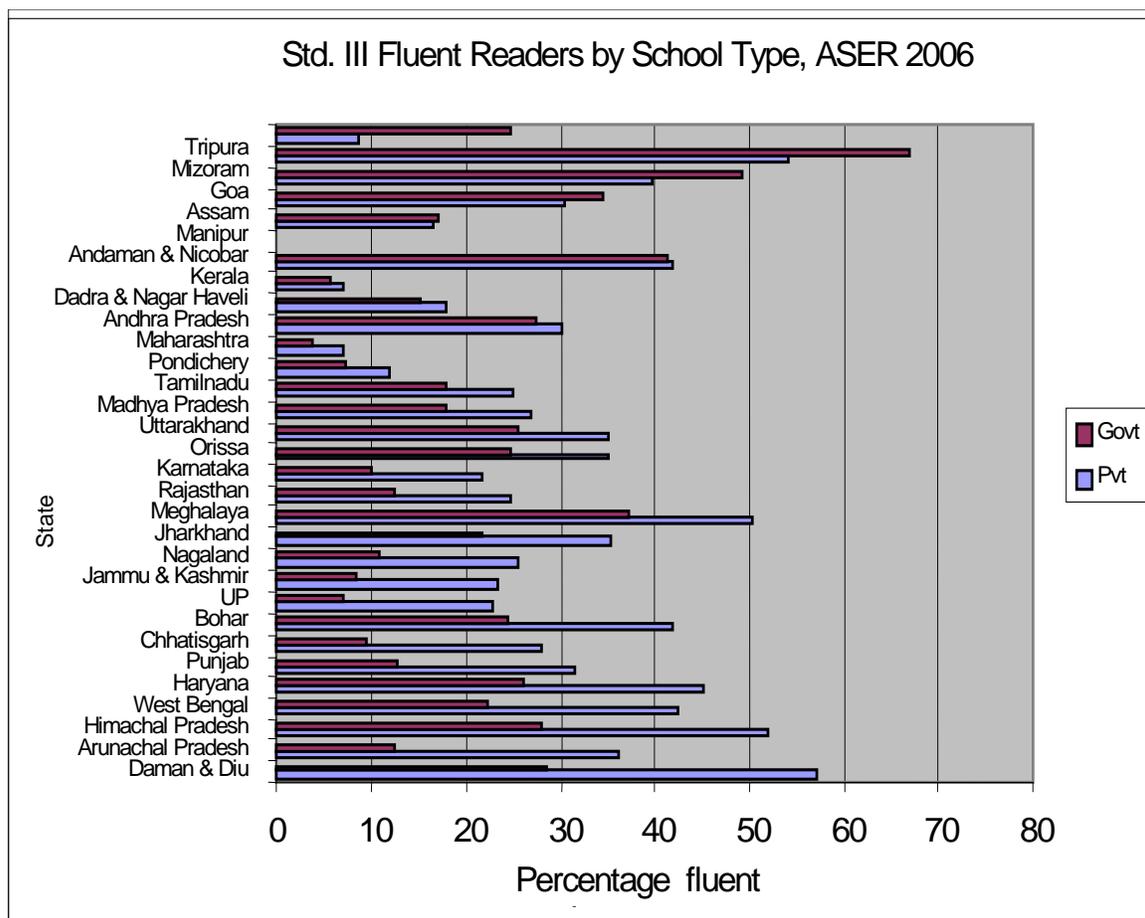
A recent independent sample survey of learning levels – ASER 2006 – reveals a rather disturbing trend. As evident in Figures 2.3 and 2.4, the ability of children in Class III to read a story (pitched at Class II level) shows that reading abilities in private schools are better than in government schools, and there are no significant gender differences across different states in India. The important issue with respect to gender and education is that once girls are able to enrol in school and attend regularly, there is little difference in the learning outcomes.

Figure 2.3: Fluent Readers by Gender ASER 2006



Source: ASER, Pratham, 2006.

Figure 2.4: Fluent Readers by School Type, ASER 2006



Source: Data compiled by Suman Bhattacharjea (April 2007), ASER, Pratham, 2006.

What is noteworthy is that many more boys attend private schools and the gender differences by type of school attended by girls and boys continue to be significant. Also, it is noteworthy that states with adverse sex ratio have

higher levels of gender discrimination when it comes to choice of private schools. These states also have high proportion of girls in the 11-14 ages who are out of school (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Gender Inequalities: Sex Ratio, Schooling and Out-of-School Children

States Ranked on Juvenile Sex Ratio	Girls to 1000 Boys in 0-6 Age Group (Census 2001, Gol)	Boys: Girls in Private Schools ASER 2005 (Pratham)	% Girls Sut-of-School, 11-14 Age ASER 2005 (Pratham)
Punjab	793	58:42	44
Haryana	820	64:36	56
Gujarat	878	61:39	60
Himachal Pradesh	897	58:42	50
Uttarakhand	906	66:34	57
Rajasthan	909	67:33	65
Uttar Pradesh	916	62:38	56
Maharashtra	917	52:48	52
INDIA	927	60:40	55

Source: Census of India, Gol, 2001; ASER-2005, Pratham, 2006.

Left Out – Persistent Problem of Access at Post Primary Level

While the issue of access has been addressed in many areas of the country through District Primary Education Programmes (DPEP) and then *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), the hard reality is that social and physical access continues to be a problem for children living in relatively inaccessible locations, especially at the upper primary level. Notwithstanding initiatives undertaken by the government to enhance access, general household characteristics like income, caste, occupation and educational level of parents, continue to determine access, attendance, completion and learning achievements. Children from rural families with substantial land, non-agricultural

occupations and a higher educational level, have greater access than children from landless, agricultural wage-earning families and migratory groups. Their invisibility in macro data has contributed to their alienation from the educational processes. Those most affected are:

- Severely disadvantaged communities and those residing in tribal, hilly, desert and remote habitations that continue to have limited access;
- New migrants / seasonal migrants into cities;
- Children living in places where there is social strife and conflict;
- Children of families displaced due to natural as well as man-made disasters;

- Children of sex workers, people affected with HIV/AIDS and single women (widows, deserted / separated women, unwed mothers);
- Among all of them – the situation of girl children is more worrisome than that of boys.

Even where formal access has been provided, quality of education remains a big challenge, especially in the more deprived rural and urban areas, leading to poor learning achievements. While overall issues of access, infrastructure, functionality, quality and attitudes affect all children, given the prevailing social inequalities and hierarchies, these factors affect poor children and among them girls much more than they do the privileged sections of society. It is also significant that the relatively privileged groups are increasingly opting out of government schools and moving to private aided and unaided schools. Even when they access government schools, they have access to superior quality institutions (like Nayodaya

Vidyalaya, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Model Schools, special residential schools). Moreover, the better offs have resources to supplement the teaching provided by way of private tutoring, with boys having easier access to family resources for tuitions, additional books and educational material.

There has been a repeated call to take a more area and context - specific approach to educational planning, with greater investments being channelled into more difficult areas and to the most deprived social groups. All-India strategies have helped the government up to this point, where the Net Enrolment Ratio at the primary level has inched up to 84.53. It would not be possible to cover the remaining 15% without context / location specific strategies and with greater financial autonomy. (Could be put as a positive statement?) The recently introduced Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) programme of the Government is a case in point.

Box 2.3: Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

A Unique Scheme to Reach Out to Girls in Educationally Backward Areas

A recent national evaluation revealed that the access related objectives have been met in most areas. A large proportion of girls studying in the KGBVs are from disadvantaged social groups, most of them having dropped out at various stages of primary education or do not have ready access to upper primary schools. It was found that some of the KGBVs are also catering to younger girls, who have dropped out at the primary level as well as never enrolled girls.

Background of Girls Enrolled in the KGBVs

<i>State</i>	<i>Create Access for Disadvantaged</i>	<i>Dropout or Out of School (Older Girls)</i>	<i>Dropout of Younger Age Group</i>	<i>Never Enrolled</i>
Andhra Pradesh	Yes	Yes	No	No
Arunachal Pradesh	Yes	Yes	Proportionately high	Yes *
Bihar	Yes	Yes	Proportionately high	Yes (50%)
Gujarat	Yes	Yes	Proportionately low	Yes (69%)
Himachal Pradesh	Yes	Yes	No	No
Jharkhand	Yes	Yes	No	No
Karnataka	Yes	Yes	Relatively low	No
Madhya Pradesh	Yes	Yes	No	No
Orissa	Yes	Yes	Proportionately low	No
Rajasthan	Yes	Yes	Proportionately low	Yes (11%)
Tamil Nadu	Yes	Yes	Proportionately low	No
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	Yes	Proportionately high	Yes

* Even at age 6, girls are enrolled in Class 1 in the state KGBVs .

The scheme has been able to create access to schooling facilities among the most disadvantaged. Though there is a mix of different age-groups of the girls enrolled, most of the states have many older girls who are dropouts. The only exception in this respect has been made in Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh where the proportions of younger dropout girls enrolled is relatively higher. There are states like Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where never enrolled girls have also been welcomed in the KGBVs – as high as 69 per cent in Gujarat and as low as 11 per cent in Rajasthan.

A positive feedback that we received from the 12 states visited pertains to the participation of girls from socially disadvantaged social groups - 26.36 per cent of the enrolled students in the 12 states were SC, 31.43 per cent ST, 26.45 per cent OBC, 8.75 per cent BPL and 4.31 per cent from the Muslim community. With the exception

of the Muslim community, all other socially disadvantaged groups are fairly wellrepresented. This evaluation concluded that the scheme is reaching out to girls from the most deprived sections in rural areas. Greater effort is required to reach out to girls from minority communities and other extremely disadvantaged social groups. Given the location of minority communities, this issue may be addressed more effectively when the KGBV programme is extended (in XI Plan) to urban and peri-urban areas.

- In Rajasthan, 8 KGBVs are located in minority dominated blocks and only 5% of the girls are from this community. On the other hand, in the minority dominated block of Virangham (Gujarat), 100% of the girls enrolled in the KGBV are Muslim.
- Careful tracking of the socially disadvantaged groups in the KGBV blocks was evident in AP.
- In HP, the KGBV in Pangji Block of Chamba district needs a lot more effort to reach out to Gaddi and Gujjars because of the difficult terrain.

Even in a short period of time, in every state, the KGBV has become an important component in the elementary education landscape of the educationally backward blocks. Seeing the pace at which the KGBV scheme has taken off, this evaluation recommends that the government look at it more closely and start a thinking process on where the KGBV should proceed in the XI Plan. At present the KGBVs are popular; with new buildings and facilities and with successful academic records of the girls, the KGBVs will increasingly be in greater demand. What, therefore, is the vision for the KGBV in the future? Is it a transition measure or will it be a regular feature of the block?

Although the fundamental right to education extends to age 14, in every KGBV, girls and parents pointed out the need for not only completing elementary education but reaching up to Class 10 successfully. If upper primary schools in rural areas are in short supply in most parts of the country, secondary schooling opportunities are even scarcer. Greater thought needs to go into forward planning for the girls who come to KGBVs. This needs to be done both at the GOI level and in the states. The girls coming to KGBVs are the most deprived girls and this may be their only opportunity to break out of the cycle of poverty / low educational attainment. Since GOI has already spent so much and expended so much energy on the girls, forward planning will add great value to the scheme.

Source: National Evaluation of KGBV Scheme, February-March, GoI, 2007a.

HETEROGENEOUS GENDERED REALITIES AND MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGES^{xx}

Quantitative data used to measure gender gap / progress towards gender equality in education reveals little about the texture of inequalities inherent in the society and reinforced by the prevailing education system. Coming to grips with gender and social equity issues in education requires a framework that can capture heterogeneous gendered realities and multiple disadvantages. Gender is embedded within a complex social and institutional structure in India. Therefore, it is necessary to look at gender inequalities in education within the broader framework of social, economic and location specific inequalities on the one hand, and the prevailing school system on the other. A global study on girls education summarised the issues: “Already excluded because of their gender, many girls face multiple barriers, making it more difficult for them to enrol in and

complete primary school and continue on to secondary school... reaching excluded girls generally means higher costs and alternative policies and strategies because their needs differ from those of majority population...” (Lewis and Lockheed, 2007b:19-20).

Feminist scholars and those working on social exclusion have tried to tease out the texture of exclusion by identifying the levels, the sources and also the forms of exclusion^{xxi}. While the government has provided schools in most areas, discrimination or non-inclusion takes different forms for people from different social groups / locations.

The Table 3.1 captures the interplay between socio-economic factors and the prevailing schooling system.

Table 3.1: Heterogeneous Gendered Realities that Frame Educational Participation of Girls in India

Prevailing School System ►		Access	Teachers and Teaching	Learning	Monitoring and Supervision	Accountability	Transition to Next Level
Socio-Economic Factors ▼							
Poverty	In abject poverty	No access to schools or school not within reach (walking or bus)	Teacher attitude / prejudice towards girls	No support for girls at home, no money for tuition	Data collected periodically, does not capture or correlate with incidence of girl child labour / work and implications for education	Women / girls have no voice in community / in the school	School not within reach affecting girls more
	Above poverty line						
Location	Rural	Teacher absent, irregular, take turns	High teacher-pupil ratio leading to low teaching time	School not visited	Village level committees not as effective	Lack of upper primary / high schools	Teacher absent, irregular, take turns
	Urban						
	Tribal						
Community	Tribal	Formal access yes, social distance may prevent	Teacher unfamiliar with tribal language	Social/cultural language barriers	Not a priority	No voice in village or in school	No girls, only high schools
	SC		Culture/caste/class biases				
	Muslim						
	Others						

Towards Gender Equality in Education

Occupation	Indoors	Work burden on children	Attitude/ prejudice	Irregular in school	Not factored in as an area to track	Long hours and no time to participate in meetings	Dropout
	Outdoors			Seasonal work			
Migration	Seasonal	Long absence	Teacher indifferent, not equipped to handle children joining mid stream	Irregular in school	Not factored in as an area to track	No voice in community	No hostel facilities/ other alternatives
Displacement	Permanent	Move to new location	Teacher indifferent	Irregular in school and language can also be a barrier	Not factored in as an area to track	No voice	No hostel facilities/ other alternatives
	Periodic						
Conflict	Communal	Poor access due to insecurity, fear	Teacher attitudes/ prejudice	Low learning due to fear, insecurity and frequent absence / schools shut	No monitoring	No voice in the administration	Fear of movement
	Insurgency						
Violence	Home	Poor access due to fear, low self image	Corporal punishment, verbal abuse	Low learning due to fear, insecurity	Not part of monitoring protocol	Not accountable to children or parents	Lead to dropping out
	School						
	Society						
Gender Relations / Attitude	Eldest/ older children	Burden of work, eldest at risk	Teacher attitudes	No time to study at home, work burden	No specific monitoring done through	Gender issues not taken on board	Leading to dropping out

Towards Gender Equality in Education

	Girl child	Reaching of menarche				data / information disaggregated by gender as well as social group	
Disability	Mental	Identification and assessment of requirement	Ignored, not equipped to handle special requirements	No support	No specific monitoring	IED programme not gender sensitive	Drop out
	Physical	Identification and assessment of requirement. No physical access					
Health	Health problems including HIV/AIDS	Prejudice in school / community	Teacher attitudes	No support	Not specifically monitored	Not part of monitoring protocol	Drop out

NATIONAL STRATEGIES TO BRIDGE GENDER AND SOCIAL GAPS

The decade of 1990s was an important marker in Indian education. There was renewed effort to refocus national efforts on basic education. A wide range of national / regional strategies were introduced to bridge gender and social gaps in elementary education. Table 4.1

captures the main initiatives in the last sixteen years. (Please see Annexure for a table on “recurring recommendations to promote gender equality in education” adapted / updated from the EFA Review done in 2000.

Table 4.1: National Strategies to Bridge gender and Social Gaps in Elementary Education (1990 to 2006)	
Objective	Strategy
Universal Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative schools / Education Guarantee Scheme Schools to augment access in un-served habitations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilisation of community for enrolment of girls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formation of village / habitation committees with 30 to 50% women members to supervise, ensure retention and provide support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mother-Teacher Associations: Encourage girls' participation and monitor schools
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing escorts to girls from scattered habitation so that they can reach school safely
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special schools to enable child workers to access education in a residential and fully funded structure (NCLP)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linkages and additional support for Early Childhood Care through the ICDS programme and also (where essential) create ECC centres attached to primary school – albeit through the innovation fund^{xxii}
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More female teachers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for out-of-school girls to get back to schools through short term residential and non-residential bridge courses

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cluster based approaches to improve quality and also make system responsive to girls (NPEGEL) • Residential upper-primary schooling programme - Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya - to enable girls who may have dropped out to complete the upper primary cycle in a residential school
Retention:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives in the form of mid-day meals, free textbooks, uniforms, dry rations (rice or wheat), etc. • Provision of cycles (under NPEGEL) to girls in Classes 6-8 to enable them to continue schooling after primary • Awards and recognition for VEC/MTA as well as girls • Gender sensitisation of teachers and educational administrators to make them more responsive to constraints faced by girls (work burden, sibling care, etc) • No detention policy – meant to improve retention but has lead to children being promoted right through the elementary cycle without ensuring basic minimum learning
Making the System Responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of Village Education Committees, SDMC, SEC etc • Establishment of gender unit for training and ongoing support • Disaggregating education data by gender • Regular monitoring of girls' attendance • Regular monitoring by district, state, national and joint donor committees/missions
Encouragement and Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-day meal – hot cooked meal for all children up to the elementary level • Scholarships and merit-linked awards for girls and children from SC and ST communities • Free uniforms, textbooks, stationery etc for girls and for children from SC and ST communities
Reaching Out to Special Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential schools for tribal / Dalit – through Ministry of Social Welfare • Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya for upper primary education of out of school girls • INDUS programme for child workers • <i>Mahila Samakhya Programme</i> – women's education for equality and empowerment, Mahila Shikshan Kendra • Target programme for Muslim girls (under consideration in XI Plan)

As it is evident from the above matrix, a wide range of strategies have been introduced, many of them have been re-discovered at different points of time in

the last 60 years.^{xxiii} Some strategies have been the mainstay of the government's efforts to bridge gender and social gaps. Yet, we seem to have hit a plateau. There is a lot of evidence to show that bridging gender gaps in education is critical for the country, most importantly to enable us as a society to move forward with confidence. Right through the 1980s and 1990s, girls' and women's education, and educational status of socially deprived groups were seen as the magic bullet that could bring down population growth rates, enhance productivity and improve maternal and child health^{xxiv}. At the policy level and at the level of rhetoric – almost no one contests the importance of girls' education in India's march towards rapid economic growth and improved development.

Nevertheless, when policies and programmes are made, the entire country is taken as one uniform canvas. The most notable in recent times is the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA). While the official position is that this programme is expected to promote bottom-up and context specific planning, the reality is that the planning process does not provide scope for nuanced region / community and location-specific strategies. Uniform strategies, including VEC, BRC, CRC etc, have been provided across all states / regions. While these institutions are formed at local levels – the budgetary allocations

for activities / programmes and scope for evolving alternative strategies remain severely limited. As a result the SSA programme easily lends itself to additional investment for the most deprived.

When extending meaningful education to the most deprived or those facing multiple disadvantages, there is no formal / official recognition of the need for additional investment / move away from standard unit costs / per child costs. For example, teachers working in backward / inaccessible areas need more training (very specific to their circumstances and not generic training), more social and administrative support to work in difficult areas, a more sensitive selection process which enables the government to appoint people who are more likely to stay and work there and greater inputs by way of bilingual books and teaching material.

The most notable example in recent times is the Mukangan programme that was started in Lok Jumbish to reach out to girls and boys of the Sahariya tribes in Rajasthan. Unfortunately, this unique initiative could not be sustained after 2004, when Lok Jumbish got merged with SSA in Rajasthan. This programme tried to specifically reach out to the most educationally deprived social groups. However, this programme was merged with SSA and the specific characteristics that enabled it to bring

Sahariya tribal groups into schools was discontinued. What are the implications – are the tribes excluded from EFA efforts after 2004?

Box 4.1: *Muktangan* – A Promising Strategy, Withdrawn in 2004

Our Whose? school mapping exercise revealed that out of 24 villages, 14 had been provided with government schools, while the remaining 10 had no educational facility. Of these 14 schools, 10 were non-functional due to teacher absenteeism. Children of well-off parents went to schools in Kishanganj (block headquarters), Baran or Kota (district headquarters). However, Sahariya (a tribal community) children had to work in the fields. We thought of starting *Shiksha Karmi* Schools (SKS) in the villages where these children lived, but we could not do this for two reasons — there were hardly any men or women who met the required educational qualifications to become *shiksha karmis* and SKS could not be opened in villages where a government school facility was available. Non-formal (*Sahaj Shiksha Kendra*) centres were also not possible because the LJ project specified that there should be at least 25 children not enrolled in school in any particular Dhani/Maja/village to justify a centre. Also, it was difficult to find men who had passed Class VIII and women who had completed Class V to staff the centres. There were already 25 centres operating in eleven villages. When the *Muktangan* project was conceived, 12 Anudeshaks were working in these centres — each being in charge of two centres. Eight of these were not natives of the particular villages but lived close by.

This experience formed the basis of *Muktangan*, which imported instructors from outside the village to come in and handle the educational challenge. The idea was to incorporate the existing human resources into the *Muktangan* project if they fulfilled the necessary educational qualifications to become *Muktaks*. *Muktangans* were expected take into account the life and struggles of the people. They were to serve as places that children could come to at a time that suited them, ask whatever questions they wanted, and learn at their own pace without feeling marginalised or neglected. The need was thus to design education that would bring coherence into children's lives and be in harmony with the concerns of the community. It had to be an open school.

The children fell into three groups:

Totally illiterate children already engaged in manual labour.

Minimally educated children, who had to fulfil certain daily responsibilities towards their guardians (e.g., accompany parents in search of manual labour).

Children, who were able to attend full-time school, but were disinterested because the teachers were not regular.

Muktangan was conceptualised for the convenience of all these categories: children could both attend school as well as meet their family responsibilities. As a system, *Muktangan* is more open, transparent and tailored to meet different

sets of needs. It is based on the belief that all children possess a natural curiosity and have the ability to learn and understand. They can blossom given the right opportunity, regardless of the strata of society that they come from.

Source: Jain, Sharada et al., 2003.

Recent evidence on the status of Muslims most importantly the Sachar Committee Report^{xxv} (Gol, 2006b) reiterates the need for region / location-specific strategies that will enable Muslim children, especially girls, to access formal elementary education. An analysis of the trends between the 1991 Census and Census 2001 (done for the Sachar Committee) reveals a disturbing pattern. The Muslim girl child is amongst the most vulnerable group for future education policy planners^{xxvi}. The enrolment rates of Muslim girls have steeply fallen relative to the all-India average, especially during and after the decades of the 1990s (Shariff and Razzack, 2006). Shariff and Razzack point out that the difference in literacy rates amongst Muslim men and women and their non-Muslim counterparts was greater in urban areas. Also, while literacy levels were more even amongst Muslim and Hindu women in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and even the 1980s, the differences have widened substantially among the younger age women around the year 2001. (As per Census 2001, 55 per cent Muslim men are literate compared to 64.5 per cent non-Muslim men, and 41 per cent Muslim women are literate compared to 46 per cent non-Muslim women.)

Given the high dropout rate among Muslim girls at the upper primary level, there may be a case for encouraging girls schools at the upper primary and high school levels in areas where it is a big issue. It is important to note that Muslim girls in Kerala or Tamil Nadu do not face the same barriers as their sisters in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. The situation in Kashmir is altogether different and may merit an entirely different strategy. As a first step – administrators need to recognise that the parameters for Muslims vary with region and state.

Similarly, being Dalit is not an undifferentiated category either. The situation of Dalits in different parts of the country varies enormously. Equally, there is a lot of variation within the Dalit community – the situation of sub-groups engaged in manual scavenging, working with dead animals or in the sanitary sector is quite dismal in terms of social exclusion and discrimination. On the other hand Dalit communities that are not in these occupations may enjoy a higher social status and greater acceptability among the forward communities. In each of these – the situation of girls and boys are different.

The focus needs to shift to the doubly disadvantaged girls in the above sub-categories. Unfortunately, existing mechanisms to compile and collate

such educational data does not lend itself to such region specific / social group specific analysis.

SOME UNCOMFORTABLE HOME TRUTHS

Notwithstanding good policies, imaginative programme and promising initiatives (although this has not been well-covered in the paper), the fact is that they are not sustained and there is little social and political pressure to gear the system to eliminate gender and social differences and ensure all children have access to good quality education.

For over a hundred years, social reformers, educational planners and administrators committed to girls education have argued that the only way to enhance the pool of women teachers in rural and remote areas is by lowering qualifications for entry, posting women near their homes and providing them with intensive and ongoing educational support and training. Another strategy is to make a conscious effort to create a pool of educated and trained women in rural and remote areas and in socially disadvantaged groups, who could be supported / nurtured to become school teachers. Introducing condensed educational programme for school dropouts in order to give such women / girls an

opportunity to complete 10 years of schooling followed by intensive teacher training can create a cadre of rural women teachers, is a doable strategy. Yet, given the departmental boundaries, those in-charge of elementary do not plan for secondary and those dealing with schools do not take proactive interest in post-secondary training and education.

We today have a golden opportunity. The KGBV programme of GOI is already attracting girls from socially disadvantaged communities and regions. It would take a little more effort to make sure these girls complete secondary schooling and given intensive academic support to enter teacher training colleges. This would expand the pool of educated women in the most deprived communities and also create much-needed role models in society.

Since Independence, various commissions and committees have recommended the introduction of flexible timings, and context-specific school calendars. Teachers unions have

resisted this. Ensuring a more rural-friendly school calendar could make a huge difference to girls and boys from agricultural communities. Similarly, providing temporary hostels and facilities for children of seasonal migrants has been discussed for several decades. With the exception of a few NGO-government programmes in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, existing financial guidelines do not make space for such strategies that may require more flexible rules.

Another important issue is that poor health and nutrition affects the ability of children to enter schools and participate effectively. Given gender relations in India, girls are specially disadvantaged. There is a need to recognise the **bi-directionality** of the relationship between health and education. Families that are economically better off can mitigate the negative consequences of poor health while this may not be so for those living in poverty. Being a girl is a handicap in the first instance. The chances of her receiving additional support from the family or parental investment in this girl child, reduce if she is malnourished, ill or disabled. The relationship between health and education is not one to one, but needs to be located in the larger social and economic context of the family and community. Unfortunately, this has not received the attention that it merits. Nutrition programmes, like mid-day

meal, are necessary, but not sufficient to mitigate the negative consequences of poor health, repeated illness and the additional expenditure it involves. There is an urgent need to introduce a school health programme, one that looks at nutrition, communicable diseases as well as nutrition related health issues of girls and boys.

Another reality of girls in India pertains to the prevalence of different forms of gender-based violence at home, in school and in society. A recent study commissioned by Government of India reveals that violence at home, in school and in the larger community is a major public health issue. Gender-based violence is not only confined to home or to intimate spaces with intimate partners, it includes all forms of violence that are linked to gender roles traditionally assigned to sex – from using language that undermines the self-esteem of girls to more horrific situations of rape and sexual harassment – perpetrated by teachers or other students in case of school. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBR) can occur in school or on the way to school / after-school hours by persons who are teaching or studying with the victim. Girls and boys are victims of SRGBR. A very recent report brought out by the Government of India has for the first time highlighted the prevalence of violence in schools (GoI, 2007b). Given the cultural and social

fabric of India, it is tough for the victim to talk about this violence. But even if she decides to talk about it, it is, more often than not, brushed aside. The pernicious impact of gender violence in school does not affect enrolment and retention alone. It affects her learning, and, often,

her whole life. If the victim continues to be in school, she may not be able to learn or may develop a very low self-image. Most importantly, the school ends up reinforcing gender stereotypes, thereby negating the potential empowering impact of education.

Box 5.1: Government of India Report on Child Abuse, 2006

The recent report brought out by the Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development, has, for the first time, documented the prevalence of child abuse, including violence in schools. The report has come out with startling findings:

- Two out of every three children physically abused
- Out of the 69 per cent physically abused in 13 sample states, 54.68 per cent were boys
- Over 50 per cent of children in all the 13 sample states were being subject to one or the other form of physical abuse; 88.6 per cent were physically abused by parents
- 65 per cent of school-going children reported facing corporal punishment; two out of three children were victims of corporal punishment, a majority of them in government and municipal schools
- 53.22 per cent children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse – 5.69 per cent were sexually assaulted
- Every second child reported facing emotional abuse, both boys and girls
- 50.2 per cent of children reported they worked seven days a week – this includes children formally enrolled in school
- Most children did not report the matter to anyone

This study interviewed 3163 children who were enrolled and attending school. In all age groups, an overwhelming majority reported being beaten up at school. Out of those reporting corporal punishment in schools, 54.28 per cent were boys and 45.72 per cent were girls.

Source: Gol, 2007b:iv.

Early marriage is also a big issue in India. An overwhelming number of girls

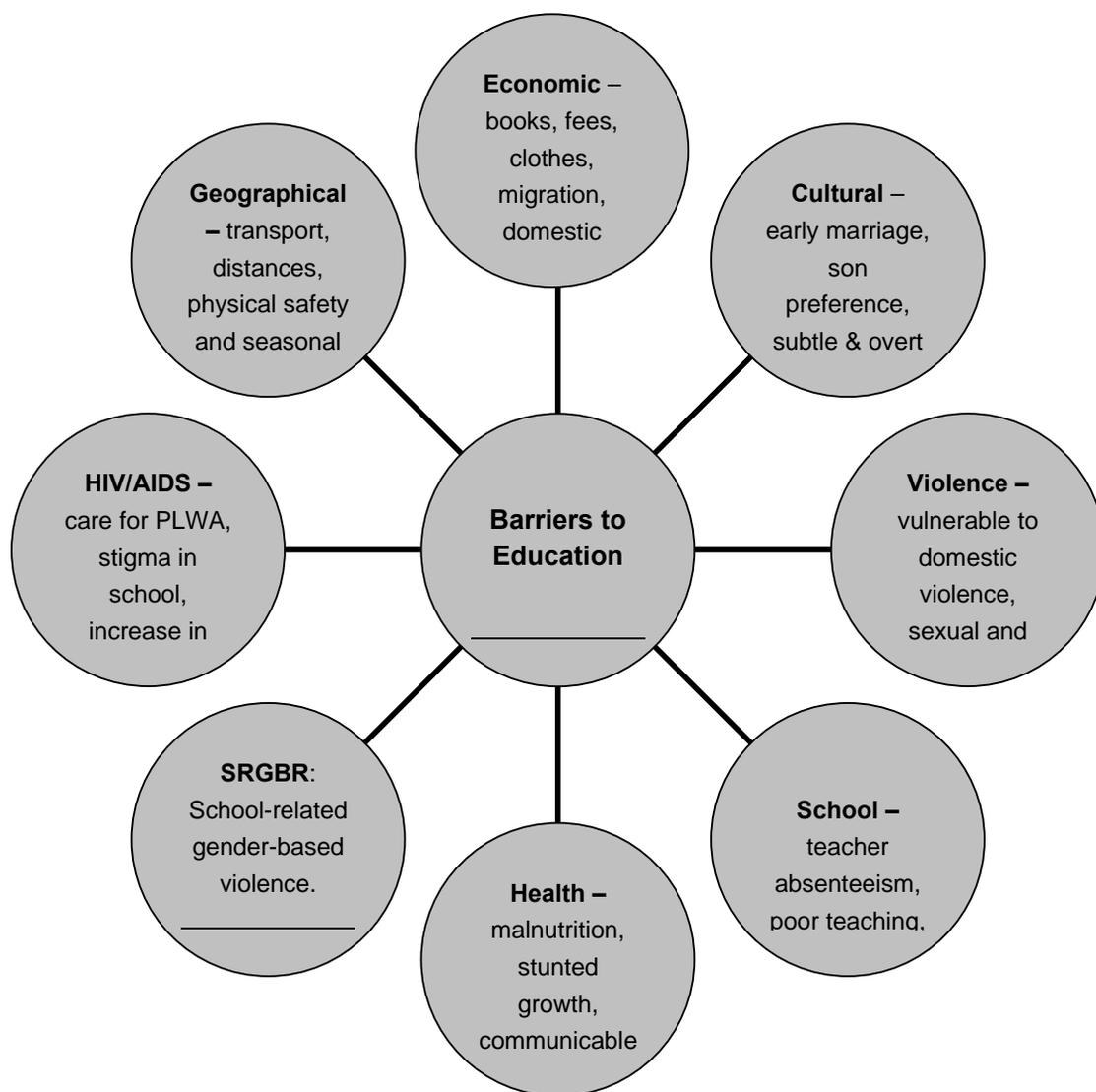
are married before the age of 18, and many of them even before they are 15. A qualitative study done in poverty households of India reveals that the age of marriage is much lower among the very poor (Ramachandran, Vimala et al. (2004)).

HIV/AIDS has introduced another dimension to the health risks of girls across the world. A recent study in India showed that nearly 90 per cent of women got the infection from their husbands, with many of them infected at a very young age (ILO, 2003). Notwithstanding the commendable work done in this region on HIV/AIDS in the last decade, gender relations put girls and women at greater risk. Education has the potential to empower them to not only make informed decisions but also give them the confidence to say

'no'. Yet, the manner in which education is transacted and the resistance to reproductive and sexual health education in the region, governments and civil society groups are compelled to address the issue indirectly.

In short, there are a range of barriers to education in India, as depicted in Figure 5.1. We, therefore, need to adopt a more holistic approach by addressing health, nutrition, violence, cultural / social practices, HIV/AIDS and economic issues that frame educational participation of girls and boys. Most of these issues affect girls in many ways and also affect boys from specific social and economic groups in many ways. There are differences and recognising them is the first step towards finding a realistic and workable solution.

Figure 5.1: Barriers to Education^{xxvii}



WAY FORWARD

We need to create a nurturing environment for people in government as well as in civil society, empower them and provide them support to make universal education a reality. There are no short cuts and a long-term strategy is necessary to “neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past” (NPE, Gol, 1986). Indian education is a matrix of time-bound projects and programmes, especially since Jomtien (1990). Lasting social change takes time to take root and bring about sustained change. It is, therefore, necessary to take long-term view, devise strategies that go beyond project cycles and bring

about systemic changes that can turn around difficult situation.

Eliminating gender and social gaps have to go side by side, we cannot afford to look at the two separately / independently. Equally, quality is the heart of equity. Access and quality have to be addressed together – as one continuum..

One does not need rocket science to initiate a virtuous momentum of change. What is needed is sustained and long-term strategy and with honest feedback from the ground.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Ramachandran, Vimala (1998): *The Indian Experience, in Bridging the Gap Between Intention and Action – Girls and Women’s Education in South Asia*. Bangkok and New Delhi: UNESCO-PROAP and ASPBAE.

^{iv} “There are well-known substantial differences in well-being across social groups in India. Average per capita income of SC/ST at all-India level is about one-third lower than among other groups. Headcount poverty among other (non-deprived groups in 1999/2000) was 16%, 30% for minorities (Muslims), 36% for SC and 44% for ST... Deprived groups also have lower literacy than other groups... Ranking on neonatal, post-natal, infant, child and under-5 mortality indicators for socially-excluded groups are similar to those of other indicators (e.g. IMR for SC and ST are about 84 and 62 for non-deprived groups). de Haan, Arjan (2004): Disparities within India’s Poorest Regions- Why Do the Same Institutions Work Differently in Different Places? *Background paper for World Development Report, 2006*. Equity and Development. Washington DC: World Bank.

^v Colclough, C.; Rose, P. and Tembon, M. (2000): Gender Inequalities in Primary Schooling- The Roles of Poverty and Adverse Cultural Practice. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(1) pp5-27.

^{vi} Jeejibhoy, Shireen and Zeba A Sathar (2001): Women’s Autonomy in India and Pakistan- The Influence of Religion and Region. *Population and Development Review*, December, 27(4) pp. 687-712.

^{vii} Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subramaniam highlighted the “gender intensified disadvantage” wherein “the specific forms of disadvantage faced by girls and not boys that it is also important to acknowledge and that related to roles for girls deriving from gender division of labour, their reproductive cycles and perceptions of risk and vulnerability to sexual violence. These gender-specific forms of disadvantages (Kabeer and Subramaniam, 1999) need to be identified and distinguished from those that are gender intensified in order to facilitate the identification of suitable social policies...” Subramaniam, UNRISD, 2002.

^{viii} Rekha Wazir, 2000

^{ix} Subramaniam, Ramya (2000): *Gender and Education: A Review of Issues for Social Policy*. Geneva: UNRISD.; PROBE, 1999)

^x Nambissan, Geetha B. (1996): Equity in Education? Schooling of Dalit Children in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 20-27, 31(16&19) pp. 1011-24. ; Nambissan, Geetha B. (2000): Dealing with Deprivation. *Seminar*, September, No. 493, pp. 9; and Nambissan, Geetha B. (2001): Social Diversity and Regional Disparities in Schooling- A Study of Rural Rajasthan. In: Vaidyanathan, A. and P.R. Gopinathan Nair (ed.) (2001): *Elementary Education in Rural India- A Grassroots View*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

^{xi} The country’s literacy rate recorded an increase of 13.17 percentage points from 1991 to 2001, the highest increase in any one decade. An encouraging feature is that the growth rate of literacy has been higher in case of females at 14.87 per cent than for males at 11.72 per cent during this decade. The gap in male-female literacy rates has decreased from 24.84 percentage points in 1991 to 21.70 percentage points in 2001. The rate of growth of literacy in the decade ending 2001 has been higher in the rural areas, at 14.75 per cent as compared to the 7.2 per cent in urban areas. Despite these improvements literacy in urban areas was 80.3 per cent and that in rural areas 59.4 per cent. Female literacy went up from 32.17 per cent in 1991 to 45.84 per cent in 2001 – a 13.67 per cent jump in the decade of the 1990s (the percentage increase in previous decades was 7.35 in 1981-91, 6.13 in 1971-81 and 5.74 in 1961-71). The decadal increase in female literacy was an impressive 24.87 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 20.93 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and 23.90% in Rajasthan.

^{xii} The SRI report “the estimates of children out of school is highest among Muslims 9.97per cent, the state and Union Territories that are worst than the national average are Bihar (28.34per cent), Daman Diu (28per cent), Uttar Pradesh (14.37per cent), West Bengal (11.33per cent)... In fact the estimate of out of school Muslim children in rural areas (12.03per cent) was the highest among all social groups.” (SRI, 2005, page 26-27) An analysis of the trends between the 1991 Census and 2001 census reveals a disturbing trend making the Muslim girl child amongst the most vulnerable group for future education policy planners. Basic Literacy figures (Census 2001) show that 55per cent of Muslim men are literate compared to 64.5per cent non-Muslim men, while Muslim women literacy stood at 41per cent in comparison with 46per cent for non-Muslim literate women. However, the most disturbing statistic that emerges from the recent census is that difference in literacy rates amongst Muslim men and women and their non-Muslim counterparts was greater in urban areas. This analysis reveals “while the Muslims in 1999-2000 were only a shade more illiterate than Hindus in rural areas (48 per cent versus 44 per cent of the Hindus), in urban areas the gap is much wider – 30 per cent versus only 19 per cent among the Hindus. What is startling is the increase in illiteracy among the women in younger cohorts. While literacy levels were more even amongst Muslim and Hindu women in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and even the 1980s, the differences have widened substantially among the younger age women around the year 2001. This evidence is further supported by the fact that the enrolment rates of Muslim girls have steeply fallen relative to the all India average, especially during and after the decades of the 1990s.” (Shariff, Abusaleh and Razzack, Azra (2006): Communal relations and social integration. In: India Social Development Report, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

^{xiii} The 2002 household survey by Jha and Jhingran illustrates that Muslim children are much worse off than even those from SC/ST categories. The comparison becomes yet more skewed and unfavourable in case of Muslim girls, particularly those from lower castes. Whereas the aggregate figure for enrolment of Muslim children is 50.7 per cent as compared to 67.3 per cent for SC and ST 59.8 per cent, the enrolment for lower caste Muslim children falls to as low as 36 per cent. The lower caste Muslim children also record the highest percentage (32.6per cent) in the "never enrolled category" (Jha, Jyotsna and Jhingran, Dhir (2005): *Elementary Education for the Poorest and Other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalization*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications .

^{xiv} Mehta, Arun (2007): *Elementary Education in India, Progress towards UEE? Analytical Report 2005-2006*. New Delhi: NUEPA.

^{xv} Pratham (2006): *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural): 2005*. New Delhi: Pratham.

^{xvi} Pratham (2007): *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural): 2006*. New Delhi: Pratham.

^{xvii} Malnutrition continues to be a significant problem for children and adults in India. While there have been some improvements in the nutritional status of young children in several states, nutritional deficiencies are still widespread. Most striking deficiency has been the increase in wasting, or weight for height, among children. NFHS-3 found 19% of children wasted, up from 16% seven years earlier. At the same time, there has been virtually no change in the percentage of children who are underweight (47% in NFHS-2 and 46% in NFHS-3). NFHS-3 also found a remarkably high prevalence of anaemia, 79% in children of age 6-35 months. The prevalence of anaemia is even worse than it was in NFHS-2 (74%). Anaemia in India is primarily linked to poor nutrition. Women and men suffer a dual burden of over-nutrition and under-nutrition. One-third of married women are too thin, while 15% are overweight or obese. In all, nearly half of married women are either underweight or overweight. For married men, 28% are too thin and 12% are overweight. The states with the largest percentage of overweight women and men are Delhi, Kerala, and Punjab, especially among the more educated. Anaemia is also disturbingly common among adults, and among women its prevalence has actually increased over the past seven years. As with children, anaemia increased among women, from 52% to 56% among married women and from 50% to 58% among pregnant women. Even though men are much less likely than women to be anaemic, anaemia levels in men are still unacceptably high (24%). (Source: <http://www.nfhsindia.org/summary.html> , March, IIPS, 2007).

^{xviii} Vimala Ramachandran and team, (2004): *Snakes and Ladders: Factors Influencing Successful Primary School Completion for Children in Poverty Contexts*. South Asian Human Development Sector Report No. 6, New Delhi: World Bank.

^{xix} NCERT administered a written test on 88,271 Grade V students in 4787 schools in 105 districts of 27 states and 3 UTs (excluding Jharkhand and Meghalaya) in 2002 and the results were comparable to that of ASER 2005 and did not find any significant gender differences.

^{xx} This phrase has been taken from the NCERT (2006): Gender Issues in Education. Report 3.2, National Curriculum Framework 2005, Position Paper. New Delhi: NCERT.

^{xxi} Lewis, Maureen and Lockheed, Marlaine (2007): Inexcusable Absence- Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't in School and What to Do About It. Washington CD: Centre for Global Development.

^{xxii} However in 2006, a high level decision was taken to formally transfer all responsibility of early childhood education to the Department of Women and Child Development.

^{xxiii} The 2000 and 2003 assessment included a table titled recurring recommendations – where the key strategic interventions and suggestions for interventions made from 1951 to 2003.

^{xxiv} “On the more economic side, we now have a very large body of literature that has documented empirically that female education has a particularly important role to play in promoting economic development in a broad sense. It does so directly by allowing educated females to become part of the work force, to increase their productivity and contribute to economic growth. There are quite a number of studies that have shown that countries that have a large gender imbalance in their education have ended up growing slower than those countries that have gender balance in education, basically because those countries with a gender imbalance are not drawing on their best talents, but are neglecting one half of their population. Apart from this talent waste, educated women tend to have children who are better educated, children who are healthier, and they tend to have fewer children, all three of which are factors that are important in their own right for reaching other Millennium Development Goals, but also important for economic growth. So in a sense, these are self-reinforcing processes, and countries that are failing to meet those goals are suffering costs in terms of growth, health improvement, nutrition improvement, fertility reduction.” Klasen, Stephan, www.ungei.org/gap/interviewsklasen.php, March 2007.

^{xxv} Gol, (2006b): *Social, Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Community of India – A Report*. November, Cabinet Secretariat, New Delhi: Government of India.

^{xxvi} The 2002 household survey by Jha and Jhingran illustrates that Muslim children are much worse off than even those from SC/ST categories. The comparison becomes yet more skewed and unfavourable in case of Muslim girls, particularly those from lower castes. Whereas the aggregate figure for enrolment of Muslim children is 50.7 per cent as compared to 67.3 per cent for SC and 59.8 per cent for ST, the enrolment for lower caste Muslim children falls to as low as 36 per cent. The lower caste Muslim children also record the highest percentage (32.6 per cent) in the “never enrolled category”. (Jha and Jhingran (2005): *Elementary Education for the Poorest and Other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalization*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.)

^{xxvii} This diagram was originally prepared for Vimala Ramachandran (2007 forthcoming): Education and Health of Girls in South Asia, commissioned by UNGEI / UNICEF ROSA Kathmandu. However, another version of this diagram was used in the paper. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of Jitesh Odedra and **Error! Reference source not found.** in preparing this diagram.