About Asia South Pacific
Education Watch Initiative

The critical state and ailing condition of education in many countries in Asia-South Pacific region compels serious and urgent attention from all education stakeholders.

Centuries of neglect, underinvestment in education, corruption, and inefficiency by successive governments in the countries of the region have left a grim toll in poor education performance marked by low school attendance and survival rates, high dropout and illiteracy rates, and substandard education quality.

Moreover, there are glaring disparities in access to education and learning opportunities: hundreds of millions of impoverished and disadvantaged groups which include out-of-school children and youth, child workers, children in conflict areas, women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, dalit caste and other socially discriminated sectors, remain largely unreached and excluded by the education system.

Hence they are denied their fundamental human right to education and hindered from availing of the empowering and transformative tool of quality, life-long learning that could have equipped them to realize their full human potential, uplift their living conditions, and participate meaningfully in governance and in decisions that affect their lives.

At Midway: Failing Grade in EFA

In the year 2000, governments and the international community affirmed their commitment to quality Education for All (EFA) and Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). Midway to target year 2015, government assessments of EFA progress reveal that education gaps and disparities persist, and education conditions may even be worsening as indicated by shortfalls and reversals in EFA achievement.

The landmark year 2007 therefore presents a timely opportunity for civil society networks to engage governments in addressing the unmet EFA goals and MDG education targets, especially for disadvantaged groups.

Real World Strategies

Spurred by the challenge of pushing for accelerated progress towards EFA, the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) launched the Real World Strategies (RWS) programme to undertake realistic and practical initiatives based on the actual conditions, experiences, and aspirations of people in communities.

(Continued on inside back cover)
India: Summary Report

Rhetoric Vs Reality:
The State of Elementary Education in India
The Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilizing and supporting community and people’s organizations, national education coalitions, teachers unions, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding.

ASPBAE publications form an integral part of ASPBAE’s information, education, and advocacy activities and efforts, and seek to support sharing and learning among education stakeholders, advocates, practitioners, analysts, and policy-makers. The reader is therefore encouraged to use the material contained herein for reproduction, adaptation, and translation worldwide for use in nonprofit education and information activities and publications, with due acknowledgement to ASPBAE, and to provide feedback that could help in further improving these publications.

Asia-South Pacific Education Watch Initiative and Publications
These publications are the result of education watch processes initiated and pursued since 2006 by the RWS programme of ASPBAE and GCE, in partnership with national education coalitions from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

Building on the successful Education Watch model implemented by CAMPE in Bangladesh, the Asia-South Pacific Education Watch (EdWatch) was designed and coordinated by the RWS Steering Committee composed of ASPBAE, Education International, and Global March Against Child Labor, and the RWS Asia Pacific staff.

EdWatch has emerged as an independent, citizen-based monitoring mechanism for assessing the status of education at the regional, national, and local levels, providing well-founded bases for advocacy and education campaign work and strengthening CSO capacities for policy engagement in education. It is designed to track governments’ progress in achieving quality education for all, with focus on addressing the education deficit for disadvantaged sectors.
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All Edwatch reports are independent reports and do not necessarily reflect the views of all the members of the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).
Preface

The architects of socio-political planning have been visioning and promising to universalize elementary education since the inception of modern India. Perhaps Article 45 of the Directive Principle of the Constitution was an effort in this direction. The commitment of the governments failed to realise this vision within 10 years of the implementation of the Constitution and even after 58 years the dialogue continues around the same issue. Still 45.2 million children i.e. 7.9 per cent of the children in the age group of 6-14 as of the 2004-5 National Sample Survey 61st round were found out of school.

The Right to Education as advocated in the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 (Article 21 A of the Constitution) is stated to be free and compulsory education of all children in the age group six to fourteen years as a fundamental right, in such a manner as the state may by law determine. This is still rhetoric for 45.2 million children going without education in India.

Edwatch Study is an attempt to look into the state of elementary education in Hindi speaking states i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh in comparison to Himachal Pradesh (a better performing state in northern India). This study was conducted by the National Coalition for Education with its stakeholders i.e. teachers’ unions, parliamentary forum and Bachpan Bachao Andolan partners and non-governmental organisation members. An attempt was made to include civil society players i.e. Village Education Committees, Panchayat members, parents and community members. The study has also gone into mapping various policies, programme structures and budgetary commitments, and showing trend utilisation and its impact on the quality of education.

We are thankful to Ms Maria Khan and Ms Raquel D Castillo of the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) for their unflagging support and inputs. Further, we duly acknowledge the role of Dr Praveen Jha who acted like a lighthouse guiding the preparation of the report.

We hope to get critique, feedback and comments from social activists, academicians, media persons and all those who are committed to advocating the right to quality education for all the children of India.

Rama Kant Rai and Debdulal Thakur
If the promises, commitments and claims made by leaders and lawmakers to our children were true in reality then the childhood of millions on the streets, fields, mines, factories and in their own homes would not be ruined and one third of our population would not remain illiterate.

In spite of sustained economic growth in India, free and compulsory education of good quality for all children still remains a distant dream. This establishes ironic evidence that economic growth and social development are not necessarily one and the same.

Education is not only a key fundamental right that opens the doors of the rest of the rights of human beings but also a prerequisite to attaining individual share in economic growth, development and social justice. However, it seems that a stereotyped mind-set around the caste system and patriarchy is clearly reflected in the denial of knowledge and learning for those are traditionally excluded.

In this context, the “Edwatch Study”; “Rhetoric Vs. Reality: The State of Elementary Education in India” is another proof of this irony. Lack of political will, inadequate mass mobilisation, concerns and morality still remain as the biggest challenges. The study clearly highlights the lack of sufficient allocation for public spending, dangers of privatisation and commercialisation, gender bias, social exclusion and, more importantly, the lack of accountability.

I hope that this Edwatch Study will not just gather dust on the shelves of libraries or be a mere academic reference. I hope it will be used as a tool for critical policy advocacy and a weapon for mass movements to achieve education for all.

The incredible efforts made by Dr Rama Kant Rai, the national convener of the National Coalition for Education (NCE) and his team to collect and analyse relevant information and data and bringing it in a voluminous book form are highly commendable. Despite all the odds, he and his team did not give up. I will also congratulate my friends in the teacher’s union, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save the children movement), Real World Strategies team, Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and other Global Campaign for Education (GCE) supporters.

Your feedback and comments are welcome.

Kailash Satyarthy
Chairperson
Global Campaign for Education
Message

I am happy to note that the Edwatch Study titled, “Rhetoric Vs, Reality; The State of Elementary Education in India” has been completed. This report has taken the stock of primary education in Hindi speaking states in comparison to Himachal Pradesh, a well-performing state in Northern India. Though a bit delayed, the report highlights the areas of budget allocations, utilisation, quality in education and the role of civil society organisations.

I am sure this will prove to be a good tool for advocacy in coming days for social advocates working in favour of children’s education.

I congratulate the National Coalition for Education team, particularly my colleague Dr Rama Kant Rai, Mr. Debdulal Thakur and other team members for their painstaking efforts in completing this uphill task.

My best wishes for the success of advocacy efforts on the recommendations made in the report.

Ram Pal Singh
President
All India Primary Teachers’ Federation (AIPTF)

Message

I am happy to note that the National Coalition for Education (NCE) has conducted a study on Elementary Education in five states of India.

I appreciate your commendable work in the field of education. Such studies not only enhance people’s participation but also help governments in policy decisions.

I am not aware as to what extent you have stressed sports but sports play an important role in national integration.

My best wishes for the success of and positive awareness on the recommendations made in the study

3rd September 2008
Bhairon Singh Shekhawat
Former Vice President of India
Message

It is my privilege to dedicate the Edwatch study “Rhetoric Vs Reality: The State of Elementary Education in India” to your hands. We have all been advocating for the rights of quality education for every child. Our social activists have long been working to analyse the magnitude of the problem by conducting studies in tracking budget and taking stock of schools in Hindi-speaking states. The present study is an effort in this direction.

I firmly believe that social advocacy has to take its mandate from the facts and to be substantiated with academic and scientific research and studies, not only for us to understand the complexities of these issues but to influence the planners and policymakers.

India has already missed the Millennium Development Goals of gender parity and covering all children aged 6-14 years in schools by year 2005. Now we all should push hard to mount pressure on government to do what is left to be done to make quality education a reality for every child.

I am happy to notice that the United Progress Alliance Government has made many positive declarations and interventions to keep up to promises made in international covenants in favour of children.

We all know that India is the abode of 19 per cent of the world's children. Our children comprise 42% of country's total population. A substantial number of children from our country do not go to school and are subjected to much abusive treatment out of the schools.

We must not ignore that we are also a nation where the world's biggest number of out of school are found. We have the highest number of child labour, a significant number of children sexually abused, malnourished children, an adverse sex ratio. India is also home to the world's largest number of illiterates. Perhaps we have the dubious distinction of ranking on the top on many other such horrifying indicators.

The Edwatch study is a noble effort by our colleagues in the National Coalition for Education (NCE). I hope this voluminous report which highlights the grey area in elementary education and the scope for advocating with the policymakers to make the right to education a reality, will prove to be a good tool of reference to our activists, social workers, media persons and academicians.

I hope this study will be taken for comments, critiques and further discussion at various levels and the outcome could help in shaping governmental and nongovernmental policies. I congratulate the NCE team of researchers comprising of Dr. Rama Kant Rai, Mr. Debdulal Thakur and others for their Herculean effort in completing this study.

I am thankful to all the field partners for cooperating in data collection, giving feedback and helping our research team from time to time.

I am also thankful to Ms Maria Khan and Ms Raquel D Castillo of ASPBAE for their continuous support and inputs.

Ravi Prakash Verma, M.P.
Chairperson
Parliamentary Forum on Education
Rhetoric Vs Reality: The State of Elementary Education in India

I. Introduction on the National Coalition for Education (NCE)

The National Coalition for Education (NCE) was formed as a product of the prolonged struggle of like-minded and committed organisations, groups and individuals on education issues. It was in 1998 that a joint declaration was made by the All India Primary Teachers’ Federation (AIPTF), All India Federation of Teachers’ Organization (AIFTO) and South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) when they decided to work together in demanding for the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Bill making the Right to Education a Fundamental Right. Keeping such a momentum of collective vision to the larger social concerns, the NCE emerged out of a nationwide 15000 km Shiksha Yatra or Education March covering 20 Indian States in 2001.

Today, NCE is a conglomeration of India’s five largest networks:

- Parliamentary Forum, 168 members of parliament from all major political parties;
- Teachers federations/associations: All Primary Teachers’ Federation (AIPTF), a network of 3 million primary school teachers; All India Federation of Teachers’ Organization (AIFTO); All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE), a network of principals and teachers of 300 colleges and 20,000 schools across the country;
- Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA)/SACCS: A network of 760 nongovernmental organisations, trade unions, human rights and civil society groups across South Asia.
NCE strives to restore the fundamental rights of every child, without exception, to receive free and quality education up to the age of 18, on the basis of equal opportunity and without discrimination on the basis of gender, class, caste, ethnicity or religion, etc.

NCE calls attention to the need to build a national movement towards an educated India— A Second Freedom Struggle. Some specific objectives for this are the following:

- To assess the ground reality with the support of local communities, teachers, functionaries of the education sector and other stakeholders;
- To ensure mass participation through systematic and planned research and campaign modes and intervention;
- To influence development planning and budget allocations in favour of education;
- To sensitise parliamentarians and the legislature through advocacy for planned budget allocations especially for the Dalits, tribals, girl children and marginalised communities;
- To assess the income-expenditure pattern and fund flow mechanism for education in terms of allocation, actual expenditure, variance and fund flow system;
- To work in tandem with partner organisations in a democratic relationship; and,
- To ensure education for all through a sustainable campaign.

Some Major Milestones

- The Parliamentary Forum on Education convened by the NCE has been instrumental in making voices of people speaking out on the deteriorating education system in India heard in the National Parliament of India. The 168-member Parliamentary Forum is the epitome of political lobbying towards the formation of child-friendly policies.
- Large-scale lobbying and advocacy efforts through marches, signature campaigns, and public hearings by the NCE paved the way for the 93rd Constitutional Amendment making education free and compulsory for children between 6 and 14 years.
- Incessant pressure building and networking with like-minded organisations all over India triggered responses from political circles and the United Progressive Alliance government levied 2% education cess( a surcharge levied by government for education) and passed the allocation of 6% of the GDP for the education.
Incessant pressure building by the NCE resulted in the United Progress Alliance UPA government’s decision to levy 2% education cess (a surcharge levied by government for education) on the corporate sector for the basic education.

NCE contributed in getting government to agree in principle to increase the public expenditure on education to 6% of the gross domestic product or GDP.

NCE has played a significant role in the formation of Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) forums in many states of India. The MLA forums have since been playing a commendable role in representing education issues.

Large-scale campaigning and advocacy through marches, signature campaigns, public hearings by the NCE contributed significantly in paving the way for the most sought after 93rd Constitutional Amendment which has made education a fundamental right, free and compulsory for children between 6 to 14 years.

NCE held a meeting with the Prime Minster and meetings with other dignitaries of the Government of India. It has been submitting a memorandum of demands.

At grass roots level, NCE played an instrumental role in the formation of Vigilance Committees on Education. Such committees, which are comprised of the peoples’ representatives, teachers and local government, take into account the nature of policies on education.

Research projects with a major focus on the state of education were initiated. NCE conducted major surveys in many states. New research projects include budget tracking.

Advocating the right to education through a Global Action Week (GAW) with partners and a network
every year. As a part of GAW in 2005 it was “Send My Friend to School” and in 2006 “Every Child Needs a Teacher”. The GAW chapter in India was organised in 13 states in 2005 and nine states in 2006. Around 25,000 people including students, teachers, parliamentarians, lawyers and activists participated in mobilisations in 2006.

II. Elementary Education in India

Historically, India is credited for having an organised education system dating back many centuries though the traditional education systems were primarily patronised by feudal states and conducted by Gurukuls. The education system was oral and information was passed from one generation to the next. ‘Gurukuls’ were traditional Hindu residential places of learning usually located in a monastery or the teacher’s house. Education systems based around Buddhism and Islam also flourished.

The modern formal educational system began its development during the British colonial period in India. The universalisation of elementary education (UEE) was a mainstream agenda during the formation of the free India constitution in 1950. The last two decades, beginning with the launch of the National Policy in Education in 1986, witnessed a large number of national initiatives to achieve the goals of universal elementary education and total literacy. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 made education a fundamental right for children by providing that, “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.”

There are broadly four stages of school education in India, namely, primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary. In pursuance of the National Policy on Education of 1968 and of 1986, there have been attempts to evolve a uniform pattern of school education with 12 years of schooling, commonly known as the 10+2 pattern. The ‘plus two’ stage refers to Classes XI and XII which constitute the higher secondary stage in all 35 states and union territories (UTs).

Pursuant to fulfill commitments made at the Jomtien Conference in 1990, major programmes for improving the coverage and quality of school education in the country were undertaken. Simultaneously the Total Literacy Campaign under the auspices of the National Literacy Mission orchestrated massive mobilisations of people across the
country in favour of education. These and several other efforts that continued in the post-Dakar period culminated in the launch of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, the national programme to ensure free and compulsory education for all children as a fundamental right.

**The Fundamental Right of Elementary Education**

As a result of the long struggle by social movements and consistent advocacy, the “Right to Education” was passed in the Indian Parliament in December 2002. The 93rd Amendment Bill (amended to 86th) guarantees free and compulsory elementary education as a fundamental right of all children ages 6-14 years. The successful implementation of this Act requires adequate financial allocation. It was therefore expected that the Union Budget 2008-09 would provide for the financial requirements of universalising elementary education.

In 1997, when the 93rd Amendment Bill was first introduced in Parliament, the financial memorandum of the Bill projected Indian Rs. 8000 crore as the additional annual expenditure for elementary education. By the time this Bill was passed as the Constitution (Eighty-Sixth) Amendment Act, 2002 this estimate increased to Rs. 9800 crore (1 crore=10 million) per annum. In the meanwhile, the Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999) had estimated an additional requirement of Rs.14000 crore per annum for a period of 10 years (at least till 2010) as the requirement to achieve quality universalisation of the elementary education.
Mandate, Goals and Policy Framework of Elementary Education

*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) or Education for All (EFA) was launched in 2001-02 as an umbrella programme with the avowed objective to universalise elementary education. SSA continues to support and build upon other primary and elementary education projects of the Government of India. It covers all districts of the country to ensure access, retention and quality improvement in elementary education.

The goals of SSA are the following:

- All the children in age group 6-14 in schools/EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) centre/bridge course by 2005
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at the primary stage by 2007 and at the elementary education level by 2010
- Universal retention of all children in schools by 2010
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for all

Elementary education comprises two flagship programmes i.e. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The budget provision for both these schemes accounts for 21100.00 Crore i.e. 78.73% of the Plan Budget 2008-9 of the Department of School Education and Literacy. Of the amount, a provision of Rs 12817.00 Crore was made from Prarambik Shiksha Kosh. A new scheme for support for one year pre-primary in government local body schools has been introduced with a budget provision of 100.00 Crores. An Education Cess @ 2% on all major Central Taxes has been levied for this purpose and the proceeds of this Cess are transferred to Prarambik Shiksha Kosh that is supposed to be utilised exclusively for the implementation of these two programmes. The proceeds from the Cess are estimated to be around Rs 12817.00 Crores during 2008-9.
A brief introduction of these two flagship programmes is given below:

i) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: The SSA is the national flagship programme of the Government of India in partnership with the State/Union Territory Governments and seeks to operationalise the strategy for universal elementary education in the country. The programme of SSA was assisted on a basis of 85:15 sharing between centre and state during IXth plan. The programme had a sharing pattern of 75:25 between the centre and the States/UTs in the Tenth Five Year Plan. In the XIth plan period, the funding pattern was revised to 65:35 for the first two years, 60:40 on the third year, 55:45 on the fourth year and tempered down to 50:50 in the last year of the plan. The funding pattern is 90:10 (Net Enrollment Ratio or NER in eight states.

The programme covers the entire country and addresses the need of 19.5 crore children in 12 lakh (1 lakh=100,000) habitations. Covered under the scheme are 11.24 lakh existing primary and upper primary schools and 46.90 lakh existing teachers. The programme seeks to open new schools in uncovered habitations and augment school infrastructure through the provision of additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant, school grant, etc. For 2007-2008, the Project Approval Board of SSA approved opening 41,272 schools, appointing 122,625 additional teachers, constructing 32,945 school buildings and 133,468 additional classrooms, 48,820 toilets and drinking water facilities.

SSA is partially funded by external funding agencies like the World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom and the European Commission. The allocation for 2008-09 for SSA includes external funding of Rs. 1534 crores.

Allocations approved by the Ministry of Finance and the planning Commission for the Department of School Education & Literacy in the current budget are as follows:

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The budget provision during 2007-2008 was same as Budget
Estimate, Revised Estimate Stage under plan. However there was an increase of Rs. 49.13 crore at RE stage under Non-plan. As compared to the 2007-2008 Budget provision of the Department, the budget provision for 2008-09 has shown overall increase of Rs 4707.78 crore taken Plan and Non-Plan as a whole.

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**ii) Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** The National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in School covered children studying at primary stage in government, government-aided, local body schools, and centres run under Education Guarantee Scheme/Alternative and Innovative Education. In 2007-2008, about 9.70 crore children studying in primary stage and 1.70 crore children at upper primary stage were covered under the scheme. The programme has been extended to cover all children up to upper primary stage in all areas across the country in 2008-2009.

Though the Union Budget outlay on education has increased by 20 per cent over the previous year's budget, it is less in comparison to the increase in Union Budget outlay on education between the year 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The Central government’s promise of 6% GDP as public resources for education remains unfulfilled with the combined outlay for the education departments of centre and states remaining at a meager 2.84% of GDP in 2007-2008. Mid-Day Meal scheme extended to upper primary in government and government-aided in all blocks, which is a welcome step in education. Outlay for *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (excluding the provision for North eastern region) decreased from Rs 12020 crore in 2007-2008 (RE) to Rs 11940 crore in 2008-09 (BE). The share of contribution of common people of India through the education cess to universalise the elementary education has reached to the extent of 60% of the total union budget spending on education during 2008-09.

The centre’s spending on education as a proportion of GDP is less than what was promised. This reveals the truth behind the smokescreen of promised allocations. Though the UPA government came to power in 2004-2005, in 2008-09 one can see that over the years the overall increase in the share of education has just been 0.3 percentage points. In 2007-2008 (BE) the percentage share of education to GDP is just 2.84; leave apart the promised 6%. The breakdown of the total allocations
reveals that the outlay for elementary education accounts for more than half of the total budget of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Moreover, it is surprising that over the years the expenditure on education as a percentage of social sector expenditure has decreased. In 2002-2003, education expenditure was almost 50.3%, while in 2007-2008 (BE) it declined to 45.3% of the social sector expenditure. Furthermore, the percentage of education to the total expenditure from Union budget fell from 10.03% in 2002-2003 to 10.2% in 2007-2008 (BE).

The current allocation of the education budget is not properly meeting the needs of the larger society and even less of disadvantaged groups. The challenge is to push for an increase in budgetary allocations proportionate to the population and needs of Dalits in the states. Along with this, Dalits / Adivasi / Minorities and girls need to be at the centre of the planning process. There should be an integrated approach at every stage of planning including the resource allocation stage. The State Component Plan for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes needs to be monitored for strengthening and effective implementation. The approach towards Dalits / Adivasi needs to evolve from fringe allocation on a charitable principle to mainstreamed rights-based allocations.

Now, the eleventh Five Year Plan apportions 21% of the total plan outlay on education. Since 2008-2009 also marks the second year into the eleventh Plan and with all its efforts for inclusive growth, there is enough room for concern. The Eleventh Plan has as an inherent tendency to support privatisation in all spheres of education, including elementary education.

The promises made by the United Progress Alliance government on education seem to have been given low priority. As per the 61st National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) for the year 2004-2005, 45.2 million i.e. 17.9 per cent children in the age group 5-14 were out of school. The promises notwithstanding, the government’s commitment give a pitiable picture. Its level of spending on education is dismal. Resources
committed towards education throughout the past years have been much below the required amount. As early as 1966, the Kothari Commission had called for a significant enhancement, around six per cent of GDP, to public spending on education, something that still remains elusive today.

Due to many international covenants and declarations of which it is a signatory, India is bound to show its commitment towards education. India during recent years has tended to emphasize the importance of education, more than ever before, and pledged to achieve several goals in national and international fora. Simultaneously, the government of India has opted for, or has been compelled to undergo, deflationary and structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) often leading to the curtailment of public expenditures on social sector like education.

The situation of education has not improved much despite the 1990s being adopted as the decade for Education for All (EFA). As is well known, the issue of education has been adequately mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). One of the goals entail achieving universal primary education by 2015. The MDGs also intend to promote ‘gender equality’ by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education by no later than 2015. Further the Tenth Plan had set a target of sending all children to school by the year 2003 and seeing all the children complete five years of schooling by 2007. It is also aimed at reducing the gender gap in literacy by at least 50 per cent by 2007. Likewise the current government at the Centre, the United Progressive Alliance headed by the Congress Party, in its Common Minimum Programme (CMP) pledged to raise public spending on education to at least 6 per cent of GDP by 2009, with at least half of this amount being spent on primary and secondary schools.
Despite so much being promised, one need not go too far in the past to realise the government’s insensitivity, apathy and superficial approach to elementary education. This can be gauged from the way government has handled the Right to Education Bill (86\textsuperscript{th} Amendment Act, Constitution of India, 2002). In principle, education was accorded the status of a fundamental right by parliament in 2002, but India still does not have the appropriate Act in place.

The Edwatch Findings suggest that the total magnitude of expenditure on elementary education in country over the last decade has been substantially lower than the projected resources required for the universalization of elementary education as estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee in 1999, and reveals significant departure from stated goals. However, the achievements, as per the standard indicators such as enrolment and infrastructure, seem to be significant.

The Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) report also presents a pitiable situation on spending and utilisation of education funds in the states. The Edwatch study states that in most of the states of northern India a substantial amount of available funds was unspent, diverted or misused by the authorities. This shows poor state of monitoring and accountability of public funds.

Recently, the government of India intended to promote Public Private Partnership (PPP) and open the space for investment by the private sector in elementary education. This seems nothing but a state-driven privatization in elementary education.

Though the overall achievement in elementary education has shown some positive indicators in terms of increasing enrolment rates for boys and girls as well as increasing literacy rates the qualitative aspect seems to have been ignored. The limited achievement has been the result of both increases, albeit reluctant, in resources allocated to education and programmes and schemes focused on some of the
specific lacunae in the educational infrastructure and the educational system. One, however, cannot remain contented by number achievements. Average statistics hide the unevenness of the achievements. Higher quantitative achievements by no means imply quality adequacy. NCE’s concern is that the issue of quality issue has been ignored in the era of economic reforms. It still remains to be seen how the succeeding governments and policy makers address the challenges of implementing and organising many of the ‘well–meaning’ and ‘normative’ initiatives to promote the three key principles of equity, quantity and quality in making India literate.

The passage of 93rd Constitutional Amendment now is a milestone victory of the 45 million illiterate children of India and the civil society organisations and concerned citizens who played a pivotal role in mobilising and channeling mass pressure over government and political leadership to take a proactive stand on education.

Mere laws cannot ensure free, compulsory and quality education for all children. Without vigilant and committed civil society initiatives to monitor and support programmes on education and allied issues, vested interests will devise various measures and techniques that will kill the very purpose and spirit of the education amendment.

III. Background, Objectives, Scope and Methodology of Edwatch

Study Target, Purpose, Objectives

This research envisaged studying the budget allocations of centre and states for elementary education for the last five years — 2000-2001 to 2005-2006 — in five states to initiate a people-centred advocacy to monitor resources and resource utilisation at ground level.

The purpose of doing the study is to

1. Examine the government’s commitment in terms of allocating the budget for elementary education of centre and states;
2. Trace how the allocations are being utilised for quality elementary education in states; and,
3. Explore possibilities and opportunities to advocate for proportionate resource allocation and utilisation to make it child-friendly where civil society understands its role in monitoring the resource utilisation.
With special reference to child education, particularly for children of vulnerable groups and girl children, this study aims to

- Investigate the current trend of budget allocation through different heads/scheme of elementary education;
- Analyse the share of actual spending on each scheme, programme against budgetary allocation in the states; and,
- Come up with policy and programme recommendations to enhance civil society understanding and monitoring on budget allocation and spending.

In specific terms, the study is intended to demystify the budget language, process and operational modalities for social activists, civil society organisations and community leaders to understand, monitor and advocate an effective budget that addresses the issue of children missing quality education.

The study was conducted in five northern states which includes four Economically Active Group (a categorisation made by the government of India) states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh—with comparison to Himachal Pradesh in northern states. The inclusion of a relatively advanced state like Himachal Pradesh in the project is to give a better representative research and co-relate the findings in a comparative analytical framework. One of the main markers of education in Himachal Pradesh is the high rate of girls’ enrolment and good sex ratio. The spectacular transition towards universal elementary education in the state has contributed to the impressive reduction of poverty, mortality, illness, undernutrition, and related deprivations as the literacy rate revolves around 75 per cent. The rate is much higher than the national average of 65%.

Originally the sample respondents was approximately 5000 but due to time constraints and other unavoidable circumstances the sample was reduced to 1344 interviews. The sampling used was purposive. Respondents were teachers and headmasters; members of VEC, Panchayat members, parents and community members from each village; and, children.

The time allotted for the study was six months with two months for the preparatory phase, two months for field work and two months for data analysis and report writing. Due to certain administrative problems, the analysis and report writing could not be completed within the stipulated period. It was completed a year after the fieldwork was done.
Process of Study

The process of study may be divided into the following three phases: preparatory, field work, and analysis and report preparation phases.

The preparatory phase included outlining the objectives and scope of the study through interaction with academic personnel, research scholars, and NCE partners, and studying relevant documents and reports. Interviews with policymakers and programme authorities responsible for the implementation of elementary education and SSA were conducted to prepare the background.

During the field work phase, districts in five states were selected and partners identified through state level consultations and meetings with representatives of teachers’ unions, NGOs and socially active groups.

For capacity building and the development of the plan of action, a central level capacity building workshop was organised in Delhi with the participation of teacher’s union and NGO representatives and parliamentarians working on the right to education campaign. This was followed by state level capacity building workshops in the selected five states. The participants were briefed on the budget, its processes and centre-state relationship in budget allocation. The participants were also updated on recent government moves i.e. constitutional amendment making the elementary education a fundamental right and introducing the “Model Right to Education Bill 2006”.

The capacity building exercise included the collection of primary data collection in the selected districts, blocks and schools. The field work included interviews with headmasters in the schools and observing and documenting how the schools functioned; focus group discussions with members of village education committees, Panchayat members, parents, villagers and students; and, community level transect walk/observation and focus group discussion during school hours to see whether children were visible outside the school as working children.

The questionnaire, observation, focus group discussion (FGD) and transect walk was a triangulated mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology to take stock of the system in government schools.
Methodology

The research applied the tool and methodology of participatory research. The project was carried out in direct partnership with partner organisations so that the process of the study itself can generate discussion and awareness among the affected population. The support of local mass-based organisations was ensured in this initiative to strengthen their efforts towards realising their rights within the existing legal and policy frameworks of the state and accessing quality elementary education for every child. Partner organisations contributed the time of one person at coordinator level and one field staff for the duration of the study.

A method-mix strategy was adopted for data/information collection which comprised of conventional research techniques and participatory research methodology. The study team directly consulted and interacted with different stakeholders at various levels.

The project team developed a set of questionnaires to collect information. The team of investigators also interacted with representatives of government agencies, academicians and political representatives to incorporate their viewpoints in the report.

The methodology was both qualitative and quantitative and included the following: a detailed literature review including the last five years allocations of centre and states based on the audit report of Comptroller Auditor General and various other reports; a series of focus group discussions with the parents, students in school and out of school, teachers, the Education Committee in Panchayats and other members of the communities; interviews with the headmasters of schools; interviews with the representatives of teachers, union, parliamentarians and academicians as well as social activists at different levels; focus group discussions with the members of Village Education Committees; and transect walk and FGD with school age children found working or doing chores in the community. The FGDs with children aimed to know the reasons why the children were out of school.

Instruments for each level were field tested. Control cases were made a part of the study to avoid biases that may be caused by location or caste or educational status.
The Findings

1. State-wise and component wise expenditure: An appraisal

The delay in the release of funds has often been cited as one of the major causes of under performance. The chart below reveals the expenditure status as of 31st December 2006 for the states in the study. It is evident from the table/chart that percentage expenditures with respect to outlays are not up to the desired level. What needs to be examined is the proper utilisation of the public funds.

Now the percentage of expenditure with respect to funds available for primary education shows that already short allocation, in comparison to the Annual Work Plan and Budget or AWP & B, is again less utilised. The nature of spending also seems problematic when it is compared with the percentage of expenditure between 31 December 2006 and 31 March 2007 (refer to chart above). It is amply clear that in the months of January-March the Education Departments heavily spend money without bothering about the quality of spending. This kind of spending also confirms that schools receive sanctioned money quite late in their academic year and in turn they are, sometimes, bound to spend the money in a very short span of time. This affects the quality of expenditures at the school level.

In almost all the States studied a substantial amount of funds, be it in terms of funds available or in terms of outlays, was unspent. However, in Uttar Pradesh almost 92.77% of funds available was recorded spent, with 67.86% of expenditure going to outlays. Uttar Pradesh can be said as the best performer in this regard among the States studied. Bihar, which only spent 61.70% and 33.23% w.r.t. funds available and outlays respectively, stands as the worst performer.
among the States. Here, one has to keep in mind that performance largely depend on the magnitude of the flow of stipulated funds. For all the five States, the Government of India as well as the State's release of agreed funds were not at par with the AWP & B amount.

Perhaps one can find some answers to such anomalies in terms of outlays and outcomes both physical and financial when one confronts with the financial irregularities that are very evident in the audit report (Report No. 15 of 2006) compiled by the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) of India. The Edwatch survey findings in this regard are similar to that of the CAG and includes the following:

- Diversion of SSA funds
- Lack of proper household survey and non-involvement of the local people, particularly the disadvantaged groups
- Gross violations of SSA norms in the disbursement of grants to schools

### 2. The Status of Enrolment in the Five States

The study clearly indicates that in four poorly performing states a big number of boys drop out as classes progress. In Bihar, the official trend is from a 28% enrolment in class I lowering to 13.6% enrolment in class V. Similarly, in the states of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh it is found that there is a declining ratio of boys’ enrolment.

The data available is significant. The survey found that schools did not have data on the current year’s drop out of students. School registration simply copies the names of
students and generally promoted or retained even those who were not attending school for a long spell of one year or even more.

The nature of decreasing enrolment among girls was also widely noted. Taking into account national level data, enrolment in absolute number is highest in primary (I–V) stage and falls as students climb from primary to higher secondary or pre degree (IX–XII) stage. Boy’s enrolment dominates in every stage. The gap between the number of enroled students and school attendance was evident. Further, this gap is a regular phenomenon.

3. The Issue of Gender Bias

There is clear gender bias in enrolment by stages in India. In studying the gender receptiveness of the education sector, the research found that the percentage distribution of the girls’ enrolment to the total enrolment over the years from 1990-1991 to 2003-2004, based on latest data available, (The gender gap remains very negative not only in primary but in upper primary) shows more or less, negative trends for the stages from primary education to higher education. The entire phenomenon, if disaggregated in terms of scheduled castes and/or scheduled tribe students follows quite similar trends, if not worse compared to others.

4. The Excluded Section

The primary objective of SSA was to enroll all children in the age group of 6-14 years in schools, education guarantee centres (EGC), alternative schools and Back to School Camps (BSC) by 2003. The target for achieving this goal was modified on 23 March 2005 by the National Commission from 2003 to 2005. Both targets were not met. The number of out-of-school children in the age group at the commencement of the scheme on 1 April 2001 was 3.40 crore children. On 31 March 2005,
after four years of implementation of the scheme and after Ministry and State governments’ expenditure of Rs. 11133.57 crore, 1.36 crore or approximately 40 percent of children still remained out of school. Out-of-school boys and girls in the age group 6-10 years were 5.51 per cent and 6.87 per cent respectively. For the age group 11-13 years, the percentage of out-of-school children was relatively higher among girls at 10.03 per cent than boys (6.46 per cent).

Amongst social groups, 9.97 per cent Muslim, 9.54 per cent of Scheduled Tribe, 8.17 per cent Scheduled Caste and 6.9 per cent of Other Backward Communities children were out of school in 2005. Across all social groups, the estimated percentage of out-of-school children was higher in rural than in urban areas.

5. The Issue of Gender in Teacher’s Recruitment

The issue of gender in terms of teachers’ recruitment seemed to be a vital issue in regard to elementary education in India. In the highly performing state of Himachal Pradesh (HP), the percentage of Female Headmasters stands as high as 62% which in turn had a positive impact upon girl’s enrolment and in reducing dropout rate to 5%.

The non-performing States showed low level parity. In Bihar, the percentage of female headmasters stands at a mere 9.1% against a thumping 90.1% of males. Jharkhand had 28.6 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 12.4% and Uttar Pradesh 16.6 % female headmasters. The national ratio of gender distribution in terms of male-female headmasters, Edwatch found, is 72.1% to 17.3%. Understanding the gender question, clearly constitutes a crucial concern.

6. The Issue of Para-Teachers

The recruitment of para-teachers as a response to the current state of quality teaching and alleged absenteeism of regular teachers in India is a much debated issue. One school of thought sees the appointment of para-teachers as a way to ensure quality teaching and to fix accountability. Another camp strongly disapproves such a claim and argues that hiring para-teachers would lead to privatisation, the recruitment of untrained teachers and poor service conditions in teaching. It was against this concerns that the conditions of para-teachers was scrutinized. Leaving aside the polarized debate, the working of conditions of the para-teachers was found to be very poor. The average salary of a para-teacher is a measly Rs. 2400 per month.
Payments were generally delayed for many months. The workload of para-teachers was heavy as they do fill up most of the teaching activities left out by the regular teachers when regular teachers were tasked to do non-academic activities like government surveys, census, election, polio vaccinations, etc.

Para-teachers suffer poor job security. The appointment of para-teachers is done mainly at the local level and involves community and local panchayats. Community political equations come to play when it comes to contract renewal or the regularisation of qualified para-teachers. Considering their working conditions, it can be argued that the appointment of para-teachers is a conscious attempt by the government to gradually encourage privatisation and to turn away from its responsibility to uphold the right to education.

As for gender parity, it was found that female para-teachers only constitute 36% of the teaching post whereas males make up 64%.

The growing number of para-teachers has resulted in negative growth in the appointment of regular teachers. Under the 10th Five year plan, the trend in teacher appointments as of 15 June 2007 was clear as 216,594 teaching posts were still to be filled to complete the sanctioned 1,012,103 posts.

NCE is against the appointment of para-teachers as an alternative to trained regular teachers. In Himachal Pradesh, para-teachers constitute less than 2%, a small percentage in comparison to all India findings. HP makes constant effort to maintain a low Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) which means reasonable appointment of regular trained teachers. However, such positive trends have not emerged in the four underperforming states studied.

7. Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)

According to the Edwatch findings, the national average PTR stands at 62:1 whereas in Bihar, PTR is at 71:1, in Jharkhand 68:1, in Madhya Pradesh 69:1 and Uttar Pradesh 72:1. The PTR was even found to be reaching 300:1 in some cases. The PTR would go even higher if the out-of-school children in the vicinity of the local schools were made to attend.

In contrast, PTR is well within the range of government’s norm of 40:1 in Himachal Pradesh. PTR has to be discussed in close linkage with the rising school drop out, underperformance of teachers, low learning level of students, and the growing apathy of local people to educate
their children. The apathy of communities to the education of children is also due to the general experience of a large chunk of educated youths who remain unemployed and have been reduced to an unproductive generation. High PTR is directly linked to affecting quality learning and is a stumbling block to the universal enrolment of children and their retention.

8. Infrastructure

One basic continuing problem is the lack of proper infrastructure for the existing schools. This is aggravated by the poor maintenance and insufficient and untimely allocation of resources. To imagine quality education in the absence of proper classrooms, benches, desk, blackboards, toilets or water is impossible. Majority of the schools in India continue to suffer from the absence such basic facilities. According to the findings, in 80% of the primary schools (class I-V) there were no sufficient separate classrooms for each class. For instance, only 20% of the surveyed schools were found have classrooms for each class.

This means that in 80% of the surveyed schools there were multiple classes held in single rooms. In some instances classes were held under trees and in open spaces. In this regard, even the Himachal Pradesh has poor showing. This utter lack of infrastructure is well found in the narratives shared by the communities during the focused group discussions. When asked about the quality of blackboards, 80% of the schools did not have sufficient and quality blackboards.

Indian schools have also been found to be not having sufficient teaching and learning materials (TLM) as only Rs. 500 is allotted yearly for each teacher. The TLM allotment is not in consonance with the number of students. Teaching aids require immediate attention. Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand both lack adequate teaching aids in 12 per cent of schools surveyed.

A grim picture of basic amenities in the schools of the states studied emerged. The condition of toilet facilities screams for immediate attention. According to the findings, 89% of responding schools reported that they had no sufficient toilet facilities and 62% said that existing toilets were in bad and hardly usable conditions. According to District Information System for Education report, only 27.75 schools have separate girls’ toilet. Jharkhand tops the list with the minimum available basic infrastructural facility followed by Bihar.

The findings of the study reveal that the fund allocation to schools
in India is subject to the whims and fancies of the state as the allotments are not made on the basis of demand. For example, at all India level 585 (43.53%) schools were allocated money for construction. On the utilisation part, 53 schools could not utilise the money at the time of survey because of delayed fund receipt.

Regarding the allocation for school maintenance, the grant money in the range of Rs.2000-6000 is based on the size of enrolment and school. However, it was found that 23.7% schools were not in receipt of this money when the survey was conducted in December 2006, and 62.70% of schools were not able to utilise the allocated money due to late receipt. Likewise, the infrastructure funds, not an annual grant to all the schools, were unutilised in 34.8% schools.

A substantial number of schools are still without play ground facility. Jharkhand again tops the underperforming states with 52 per cent of the schools lacking play ground facilities followed by Bihar with 37%.

Sports facilities in schools is another area which is a must for the entertainment and physical health of children in elementary schools. The situation is good in Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, with 92 % and 79 % respectively of schools having sports facilities. In Uttar Pradesh it is at 78%, followed by Jharkhand at 70 % and Bihar 68%.

First Aid Facility is an integral component of school health programme and should be compulsorily available at each school and to all the teachers as they are supposed to be trained in imparting First Aid to the students. Himachal Pradesh was found to be fully equipped with the first aid facility in almost all the schools surveyed under the project, 95 per cent to be exact. Uttar Pradesh (62) Jharkhand (27) and Bihar (67) states show a negative state of availability of first aid facility.

9. The Issue of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM)

India’s run up to the EFA has been encouraging as it has initiated programmes like the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme for children in primary schools. To briefly introduce MDM, the National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education, i.e. the national “mid-day meal scheme,” was initiated in 1995. By 2001, a few more states had started providing cooked meals, but most were only giving monthly “dry rations” of food grains to school children. The number of states providing cooked meals rose sharply from early 2002 onwards after a Supreme Court order issued in November 2001 directed all State Governments to introduce cooked mid-day meals in primary schools.
MDM has been rated as a progressive policy towards encouraging basic education among disadvantaged communities and overall retention. Nevertheless, education campaigners have been critical of its success due to its schematic nature, poor quality and insufficient spending. The estimated drop out earlier cited point to the inadequacy of MDM as a medium to bring students back to schools. National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) surveys in 2000 indicate that about 70% of children are undernourished, about 30% deficit in energy consumption and over 75% of the children have dietary micronutrient deficiency.

10. The Allocation and Utilisation of Funds for Construction

Grants to schools for construction is an annual grant for purposes like constructing additional classrooms or new buildings and hence not compulsorily allocated to all the schools. However, it cannot be guaranteed that all primary schools with demands for construction funds in their budget will get it. The allocation for construction is subjected to allocation from the state for construction purposes at district level. According to the survey, at the all India level 43.53% schools are allocated money for construction. On the utilisation part, 36.3% of schools could not utilize the money at the time of the survey because of delayed receipt at school level.

The allocation for school maintenance is provisioned to grant money to all the schools as per the size of enrolment and school in the amount-range of Rs. 2000-6000 per year. In some cases this can be up to 50,000 and above. However, it was found that 23.7 % schools were not in receipt of this money as late as November-December 2006 when the surveys were conducted. On the utilisation part, it was again found that because of delayed receipt 62.70% of schools responded that the fund was still unutilized. .

Like the construction grant, the infrastructure fund is also not an annual grant. It is primarily allocated to newly constructed schools and to old schools that urgently need upgrading. The survey revealed that 34.80% of schools had not utilised their allocation because of late receipt of the money.
Sports related activities are best when it comes to channeling the raw energy of children and also necessary for physical and mental development. However, in the survey it was found that schools virtually, 93.80 % of schools to be exact, do not get money for sports. In addition, play items, if available, are short in quantity and not proportional to the number of school children.

11. How Many School Days Last Year?

The inadequate number of teachers and deployment of teachers for other tasks lead to reductions in the number of school days. In most states a fairly large number of schools were operational for less than 200 days. This affects the teaching days and ultimately the quality of education and confidence of parents and students in the school system. Immediate attention should be focused to see that teachers are not deployed for non-academic purposes for long periods.

12. Deployment of Headmasters/Other Teachers for Non-Academic Work by Government

The deployment of teachers for non-academic purposes is common practice in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. The study found that head teachers in Uttar Pradesh were deployed for non-academic purposes for a total of 108 days, Himachal Pradesh showed a different story with no deployment of teachers for non-academic purposes for the same year.

The schools in almost all the states are managed by another teacher or a para-teacher in the absence of head teachers or regular teachers deployed for non-academic purposes. This ultimately adds to the burden of teachers who are already over burdened due to the negative PTR. This ultimately affects the quality of teaching.
13. The Findings of Focus Group Discussions

One of the very important methodologies of Edwatch was the employment of focus group discussions to track the state of education. While the government claims 93% enrolment, the community FGDs revealed that in 76% of villages covered in the study, one-third of the children were not going to school. Bihar is the worst case with children in 99.61% of villages not attending school. In contrast, 97.44% of villages in Himachal Pradesh nodded for full enrolment. The causal explanations for the students who are out of school were found to be belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste and backward classes.

It was found that 76% of surveyed villages witnessed out-of-school children either working or doing domestic chores in the same vicinity of the same school where FGDs were conducted. The discussion on the background of the children who have left school revealed that around 61% of the children belonged to disadvantaged communities with fragile economic situations and 27% were girls and other children facing gender and social discrimination at family and society level. Around 12% of the children left school after a year or two years of attendance.

A participative inquiry confirmed that nearly 78% children left school because their families cannot support their attendance in even the free primary education. Families also find that their children could support their economic activities and augment their meager income. Around 12% links it to gender discrimination and social stigmatization and poor consciousness prevailing in the society. However, almost all the states showed significant gender discrimination being a factor for girls who leave schools. A marginal section of children, nearly 8%, leave because of the school and education delivery factors such as no regular teaching, no joyful learning, no scope to continue studies after primary level, etc.

Above-mentioned findings amply make clear that majority of children who are out of school belong to disadvantaged communities and are not able to get their free education supported. Therefore, it was logical to look into the nature of their after school engagements. In Madhya Pradesh, 71.86% of these school dropouts were found to be engaged largely in working activities, assisting family works and agricultural activities followed by UP and Bihar. Around 8% children were working at nearby locations like brick kilns, construction sites, small eateries etc. It was also found that 4% children were becoming dropouts due to family migration necessitated by the search for livelihood.

The FGD reveals that during school hours the children who were not in school were at work. On average 71.8 % of the children were found in agricultural work, 7.7 % on other wage earning work, 4% were migrant workers and 16% were busy with domestic chores. In Madhya Pradesh, most children worked in agriculture.
FGDs have also clearly hinted to the failure of government’s attempt to bring in the communities to create conducive learning conditions through community participation and monitoring. For example, it has been found that in 38.8% of cases Parent Teachers’ Association (PTA) meetings were not held and also around 25% were found to be unaware of the functional aspects of Village Education Committees.

The Village Education Committee

In almost all the states, Village Education Committees (VEC), a body that implements MDM and looks after school management, were in place. However, some FGD respondents were not aware of the roles and responsibilities of VEC. In the total survey area, 77% of the villages had VEC and 10% villages were without VEC. VEC was not known in 12.5% of areas. This is an area of concern that calls for urgent advocacy as it directly affects the proper utilisation of resources, monitoring and ensuring of child rights at the local level.

Another interesting and equally important aspect of FGDs was to generate suggestions for different aspects of quality education management and service delivery. One message was that parents should send their children regularly to schools. Schools were suggested not only to upgrade the infrastructure facilities (35.94%) in proportionate to children but to upgrade the academic performance and ensure the delivery of quality education (38.39%). Nearly 70% of the samples suggested that teachers should improve their academic performance, whereas 16% suggested that they should properly take care of children during school hours and also provide extra time to help and support weaker children. It was suggested that Village Panchayats have regular meetings with school administrations and make others aware of the importance of education.

Parent-Teachers’ Meetings

Himachal Pradesh was on top in conducting the Parent-Teachers’ Meetings on a very regular basis. In Bihar, more than 55% schools do not conduct Parent-Teachers’ Meetings and in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh PTMs were similarly neglected. On an average 57.81% of the schools organised Parent-Teachers’ Meetings in the study area, and 38% do not at all organise such meetings. This is an alarming situation since people’s participation was envisaged to be of paramount importance in the SSA programme.
Suggestions to Parents

The FGD gave ample suggestions in terms of quality education. The first and foremost suggestion indicated in 85% responses was for parents to send their children to schools. Other responses were for spreading awareness about education, 9.6%, and for the communication of knowledge in the community, 3.35%.

Suggestions to Schools Regarding Quality Education

FGDs also suggested taking care of infrastructure in the schools, 35% responses; care and well being of children, 21.7%, and academic improvement, 38%. This was a very positive sign of community concern for indicators of quality in elementary education.

Suggestions for Panchayats

The FGDs made good suggestions on the role of Panchayats in spreading awareness on elementary education, monitoring the function of schools, conducting regular meetings of Village Education Committees, etc. These suggestions will add up quality in elementary education.

The FGDs narrated elaborately on this issue. The findings show encouraging signs of parents wanting to be pro-active in sending children to school. This is a crucial mindset that is gradually seeping into the collective local psyche. Another dimension is the response of the local community (60.1%) stressing the role of teachers in providing child care so as to ensure meaningful learning.
**IV. Transect Walk/Observations**

Transect walk was one of the tools that was methodologically adopted with the objective to reconfirm FGD responses and other data gathered, and to cross-check the results of the research. To cite some of the important reconfirmations, it was found that in almost all the villages children were found to be engaged in some work even when schools were open. The boys-girls ratio of working children comes to approximately 55:45. The children were found to be doing the same work cited in the FGDs. In 67.41% of the surveyed villages, out-of-school children and the overall conditions of girls were found to be in bad condition. 70.38% of out-of-school children in Bihar were found to be engaged in agricultural work followed by 66.82% in Jharkhand, 62.39% in Madhya Pradesh and 34.56% Uttar Pradesh.

When asked about the re-enrolment of the children who had dropped out, only 74.54% of parents were keen to send their children to school. One possible explanation for this could be the impossibility for parents to afford their children’s education as some of them are landless migratory labourers.

Almost 75% of children who had dropped out and/or are out-of-school children want to go to school again but feel helpless. This situation should be addressed by all means possible to make way and ensure 100 per cent enrolment and retention of all the children. A participative inquiry looking for the reasons for leaving schools confirmed that nearly 80% of the children left school because their families cannot support their attendance in free primary education and they found the children able to support their economic activities and augment the meager family income.

Majority of the out-of-school children belonged to disadvantaged communities and are not able to get their free education supported. Almost all of the school dropouts were found to be engaged largely in unpaid household activities, assisting in family work and agricultural activities. Around 8% children were working at nearby locations like brick kilns, construction sites, small eateries, etc. It was also found that 4% of the children became dropouts due to family migration as a result of their search for livelihood.
The focus group discussion and transact walk exercise were done to triangulate the information gathered from interviews and other sources. It is an irony that most of the Village Education Committees (VEC) have not convened their periodical meetings for more than three years, an exercise that should be done at least twice a year.

- VEC members were not aware of the tenure of their committee.
- Almost 65% of the VEC members were not aware of the budget allotment for their schools and the fund’s utilisation status.
- The VEC members were not at all aware about the SSA goals and their role in monitoring the development and progress of the schools.
- VEC meetings are not regularly convened and records are not regularly maintained.
- VEC members were ignorant about the enrolment and drop out situation of the schools.
- VEC members hardly remember any instance when planning processes conducted by them was firmed up and where they received feedback from the school system or officials.
- VEC members hardly remember any training on how schools should function.
- Not all VEC members attend meetings but those absent sign the register when they become available.
V. The Way Forward: on the ‘Why’ & ‘How’

Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite so much being promised, one need not go too far in the past to realise the insensitivity, apathy, and superficial approach of the government in addressing elementary education issues. This can be gauged from the way government has handled the Right to Education Bill (86th Amendment Act, Constitution of India, 2002). There is still no appropriate Act in place even though in principle education was accorded the status of a fundamental right by Parliament in 2002.

The Edwatch Study findings suggest that the total expenditure on elementary education in the country over the last decade has been substantially lower than projected resources required for the universalization of elementary education as estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee in 1999, and reveals significant departure from stated goals.

It is quite evident that under-provisioning in elementary education by the central as well as state governments over the years, coupled with increased fiscal difficulties for state governments, has led to vital gaps, a point also noted by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee’s Report on Right to Education Bill 2005, submitted to the government of India.

The CAG report presents a pitiable situation on spending and utilisation of education funds in the states. The Edwatch study states that in most of the states of northern India a substantial amount of funds are left unspent, diverted or misused by the authorities. This reflects poor monitoring of and accountability for public funds.

Recently, the government of India intended to promote Public Private Partnership (PPP) and to open the space for investment by the private sector in elementary education. This seems nothing but state-driven privatization in elementary education.

The overall achievement in elementary education has shown some positive indicators in terms of increasing enrolment rates for boys and girls as well as increasing literacy rates. However, the qualitative aspect seems largely ignored. The limited achievement has been the result both of reluctant increases in resources allocated to education and also of programmes and schemes that focus on some of the specific lacunae in the educational infrastructure and the educational system.

One cannot remain content with mere numbers to measure achievement. Average statistics hide the unevenness of the
achievements. Moreover, higher achievements quantitatively by no means imply adequacy of quality. The National Coalition for Education’s concern is that the quality issue has remained ignored in the era of economic reforms, reflecting itself in phenomenon such as growth in number of para-teachers’ recruitment, inviting the private sector in elementary education, etc. It still remains to be seen how the successive governments and policymakers will address the challenges of implementing and organising many of the ‘well-meaning’ and ‘normative’ initiatives to promote the three key principles of equity, quantity and quality in the context of making India literate.

The passage of the 93rd Constitutional Amendment now is a milestone victory of the 45 million illiterate children of India and the civil society organisations and concerned citizens who played a pivotal role in mobilising and channeling mass pressure on the government and political leadership to take a proactive stand on education.

However, it is apparent that laws are not enough to ensure free, compulsory and quality education for all children. There is need for vigilant and committed civil society initiatives to monitor and support programmes related to education and allied issues in place. If not, as has happened with other pro-poor initiatives, vested interests will come out with various measures and devise techniques which could kill the very purpose and spirit of the amendment on education.

What should be the response in such a challenging situation? Should the law be allowed to be reduced to another decorative piece of legislation or should stakeholders engage in igniting its infinite potential to enhance the natural and sustained progress of mankind? The legislation is an opportunity to be seized for the sake of the children.

India cannot shine and develop as a strong nation unless free and compulsory elementary education of an equitable quality is provided to all its children through a Common School System. It is evident in history that almost all countries which are today in the category of developed nations have adopted a Common School System.

This research forwards the following recommendations:

1. For the Central Government to abide by the obligation flowing out of the 86th Amendment and legislate the Right to Education Bill in a manner that elementary education becomes a fundamental right of all the children up to 14 years of age.

2. For the Central Government and the States to accept the commitment to guarantee all the unconditional resources needed for the fulfillment of the
obligations arising out of the 86th Amendment (Normally if states are not able to spend its share, the centre imposes the condition of withholding subsequent year’s grant.)

3. For Government to fulfil the promise in the Common Minimum Programme of earmarking at least 6% of GDP for education and in the legislation to be submitted to the Parliament, the target date for reaching this level of resources should be specified and phases in which it will be achieved spelt out.

4. Just as the Central Government has advised the State Governments that the first charge on the revenue of a State next only to law and order shall be that of matters related to free and compulsory elementary education, the Central Government revenue should also prioritise education and give it the first charge (next only to defense and law and order).

5. Since early childhood care and education (ECCE) is not provided to all the children of the country (it is provided to almost 50%) and half of children are left out to be covered by either NGOs or the private sector, it should be covered by government by including all the children between 0 to 14 years under the act.

6. The anti-child provisions as laid down in the bill should be removed and government should stick to its commitment as laid down in the Dakar Declaration, Millennium Development Goals, Common Minimum Programme and article 21-A of the Constitution.

7. All forms of child labour and slavery should be immediately abolished.

8. There should be a national standard of quality education applicable to all schools with clear indicators that can be monitored.

9. Ensure 220 teaching days in a year without any engagement of teachers in non-academic tasks.

10. Ensure effective participation of community, VEC, parents and Panchayat in monitoring quality of education in schools.

11. Recruitment of qualified teachers with gender parity i.e. equal number of female teachers.

12. National as well as state elementary education commissions should be immediately formed to address the needs of children.

13. Infrastructure facilities and teaching workforce in schools should be augmented to improve learning conditions.

14. To avoid disparity in education, a common school system should be introduced with regulation of private schools at par with government schools.

15. A clear action plan with measurable indicators of implementation should be drawn and implementers be made accountable to the people of India.
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