

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING GIRLS' EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Since the prevailing situation of poor or less enrolment of girls in schools closes the doors for development and prosperity of future generation of women, concerted efforts must be initiated jointly by the government, parents and civil society to achieve universal enrolment for girls without any compromise. The enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girl by the government in the realm of compulsory education. . The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas with the serious involvement of voluntary organizations in every locality to realize zero drop-out among girls. The poverty stricken families can be identified through proper research and necessary poverty alleviation services can be provided to strengthen the income thereby to enable the families to send their children to schools and colleges without much financial difficulties.

Upswing In Girls' Enrolment

Growth in access to schooling has been matched by a steady increase in enrolment with the most dramatic upswing since 1990s in girls participation levels. From 13.8 million boys and 5.4 million girls enrolled at the primary level in 1950-51, the number rose to 69.7 million boys and 61.1 million girls in 2004-05. At the upper primary level, the enrolment increased from 2.6 million boys and 0.5 million girls to 28.5 million boys and 22.7 million girls.

The proportion of girls in the total enrolment has also been growing. Girls' enrolment at the primary stage increased from 28.1% in 1950-51 to 46.7% in 2004-05. At the upper primary stage, girls' enrolment rose from 16.1% in 1950-51 to 44.4% in 2004-05. The overall improvement in girls' enrolment with respect to total population of girls clearly shows that there is a near universal enrolment at primary level. The gap and challenge exists now at upper primary stage, but there too the gap is narrowing steadily.

Enrolment of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girls poses a greater challenge to India's education administrators. Survey data, however, revealed that the participation of these disadvantaged girls in basic education, has grown steadily over the years. G.E.R. for SC girls at primary level have climbed up from 64.8% in 1986-87 to 106.6% in 2004-05 and at upper primary stage, from as low as 26.6% in 1986-87 to 61.5% in 2004-05. In the case of ST girls, the GER at primary level have gone up from 68% in 1986-87 to 115.5% by 2004-05 and from 21.9% in 1986-87 to 59.5% in 2004-05 for upper primary level.

The overall gender gap in enrolment at the primary stage has dropped to 4.6 percentage points and that at the upper primary level has reduced to 8.0 percentage points in 2005. There are only 48 districts out of a total of 600 districts in India, with a gender gap above 10 percentage points at the primary stage. Focused attention is being targeted to these districts by education policy planners, in order to address the barriers in specific terms.

Declining Drop Out Rates And Out Of School Girls

Providing access and enrolment to schooling facilities are only a part of the story. Our aim is also to help the students to continue their studies. Although the phenomenon of drop outs continue to be a serious problem in India's education scenario, the drop out rates in elementary

education have been on the decline, more sharply so for girls. Girls drop out rate in 2004-05 was lower than for boys, at primary level *i.e* 25.42% compared to 31.81% for boys. Since 2000, girls drop out rates have fallen by 16.5% points in just four years, compared to a reduction of only 4.1% points over the entire last decade (1990-2000).

Education has unrivalled power to reduce extreme poverty and boost wider development goals, according to highlights pre-released from Unesco's next Education for All Global Monitoring Report. The highlights provide fresh [proof](#) that investing in education, especially for girls, alleviates extreme poverty through securing substantial benefits for health and productivity, as well as democratic participation and women's empowerment.

Pauline Rose, director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, [Unesco](#), said: "It is a crime that there are over a million girls still out of school in India. On October 11, more than any other day, I hope the government recognises the importance of investing in education for these children. Not only is investing in girls' education a moral obligation, but it is also essential if the country wants to break free of its high child and maternal mortality rates and find true prosperity in the future."

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With respect to the situation inside the school it is found that the repetition rates have been fast declining for girls. Two clear messages that underlie this trend are: one, that girls who enter the school system do not leave easily and two, school efficiency is gradually improving with girls completing the elementary cycle of education in lesser time.

The number of out of school children has also been declining rapidly, from 32 million in 2001-02 to 7.5 million in 2006-07. Of the total age cohort of girls in the 6-14 years age group, 3.9% are reportedly out of school. In the 6-11 years age group, out of school girls are 3.34 percent and in the 11-14 years age group they are 5.3 percent. The inclusion of these 'hard to reach' and older girls, who have remained excluded from the education net is being addressed through context specific strategies and interventions presently.

Socialization of the girl child in India seems to have followed a set pattern where she has-been trapped and moulded by deep-rooted combined cultures of patriarchy and hierarchy. Women as such can be dubbed as a population at risk because of their limited access to resources and

opportunities and their systematic exclusion from the position of decision-making. What is more important is that the process of exclusion tends to start at the grass root, the family level. Herein a girl child is subjected to kind of languages and practices, which patronize exclusion of various natures at variety of levels. What could be more heinous than killing female fetus and infants? The female foeticide and infanticides, the most horrendous of gender crimes, increasing steeply. It is the violation of the most basic human rights, the right to be born. Women with higher social status are likely to be more sensitive to female child's need and aspiration. Therefore, education brings economic liberation, which in turn facilitates social liberation. Further, women's economic rights in terms of land ownership and inheritance may be important. The positive aspect is that a good mix of public policy can influence all these. Meaning thereby, there are chances that the missing women can be rescued.

Policy Perspectives

The policy framework, provision of educational opportunities for women and girls has been an important part of the national endeavor in the field of education since Independence. Though these endeavors did yield significant results, gender disparities persist, more so in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 was landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognized that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem. It recognized that "the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre condition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process". The programme of Action (POA, 1992), in the section "Education for Women's Equality" (Chapter-XII, pages. 105-107), focuses on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process. The POA states that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, ensuring equal participation in developmental processes; The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan stresses on improving access to secondary schooling to all young person according to norms through proximate location (say, Secondary Schools within 5 kms, and Higher Secondary Schools within 7-10 kms) / efficient and safe transport arrangements/residential facilities, depending on local circumstances including open schooling and ensures that no child is deprived

of secondary education of satisfactory quality due to gender, socio-economic, disability and other barriers.

Gender Inequality in Access to Education

Education seems to be the key factor, which only can initiate a chain of advantages to females. However, the access to education is differently perceived for male and female. Key indicators such as literacy, enrollment and years spent in school explain the situation in the access to education and each of these indicators reveal that the level of female education in India is still low and lagging far behind their male counterpart. The low adult literacy rates for women are a reflection of past underinvestment in the education of women and thus do not necessarily capture the recent progress. The problem is not only confined to low enrollments, the girl's school attendance has also been found incredibly low. Rural girls belong to disadvantaged groups as if SC and ST present the worst scenario. As per the data, girl dropout ratio has tended to increase with the enhancement in the level of education. This clearly outlines the pattern of gender inequality in access to education, which seems to be deepening as we move from lower to higher educational attainment and from urban to rural and to disadvantaged group in the society.

Why Women Remain Undereducated?

What explains the gender differentials in educational attainment? What makes women to remain outside the preview of change? Studies have tried to answer these questions on various planes. Economic benefits of education and the costs involved in undertaking such educational attainment have been perceived differently for men and women. Parents who bear the private costs of investing in schooling for girls and women fail to receive the full benefits of their investment. This is largely true because much of the payoff in educating women is broadly social in nature rather than economic. This endures the gender differentials.

Parent's perception of current costs of education and future benefits there from influences the decision whether girl child should continue taking education or not. Costs are often measured in terms of distance to school and other direct costs involved such as fee paid, books bought, dress made etc. At times, the favor to son is made not only in education but also in allocation of food

at mealtime, distribution of inheritance and even the language used. Apart from economic costs and benefits, there are costs involved at psychological planes well. The differential access based on the psychological perceptions is more firm and real threat. The factors herein include all such motives, which tend to make a parent reluctant to send daughters to school. One of the glaring factors is the concern for the physical and moral safety of a girl child which makes parents unwilling to let them travel distances to school each day. Religion and socio-cultural factors influence parents' choice they may tend to search for a school where only girls are admitted and the one where women teachers are employed. The concern arises when girls reach puberty even education beyond the level of literacy for girls may be perceived as threat for their possibilities for marriage. Studies suggest that in Indian household's seven-to-nine year old girls work as many as 120-150 per cent more hours than boys do do. Naturally, girls who would work more than their brothers at home will have less probability of attending school. In a joint family, the possibility of increased opportunity costs in these terms will be more. Does this mean when opportunity costs of educating girls and boys are identical, both will have equal chances of going to school? The answer, unfortunately, is no. Parents still keep girls at home to work and send their sons to school.

Strategies for ensuring girls' education:

Since the prevailing situation of poor or less enrolment of girls in schools closes the doors for development and prosperity of future generation of women, concerted efforts must be initiated jointly by the government, parents and civil society to achieve universal enrolment for girls without any compromise. The enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girl by the government in the realm of compulsory education. . The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas with the serious involvement of voluntary organizations in every locality to realize zero drop-out among girls. The poverty stricken families can be identified through proper research and necessary poverty alleviation services can be provided to strengthen the income thereby to enable the families to send their children to schools and colleges without much financial difficulties. Child labour practices must be abolished with strict administrative measures and the relieved children form bondage should be integrated into schools with suitable defence social mechanism. Appropriate steps should be

taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education and development at every level including family and community. The female child in every Indian family irrespective of socio-economic status should be moulded to overcome the challenges of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place sever limitations on her education and development. Every family irrespective of its socio-cultural and economic background can take it as a challenge to bring up their girl children as dignified human being with empowerment in physical, mental, economic and social dimensions of life. The Midday meal scheme and other educational supportive services like free text books, Note books, Free uniforms, Free Bicycles, Free bus, scholarships and so on as done in the state of Tamil Nadu can be provided in all states and union territories to lift up the literacy level among girls. As social evils like dowry, child marriage, caste system and other practices deprive rights of education for children belonging to poor and underprivileged families and communities, they should be eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programmes and social welfare measures with full support of public, political parties, NGOs and government agencies. The electronic and print media can play significant role in building a good and positive image about girls and women in general in the society by giving no focus for such advertisements and news fetching commercial gain at the cost of depicting women as an object. This would help in changing the society's attitudes towards girls and their roles to treat every girl or woman as human being with self-respect and dignity. Government, voluntary sector and philanthropic organizations and individuals should come forward to provide free education for poor girls and provide free hostel facilities for girls studying in schools and colleges in every state of India. This will certainly encourage children of poor families to pursue good and higher education without much impediments. The schools of social work, departments of women studies, Women Universities and other educational institutions in hand with NGOs and social service organizations such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, etc. can work together to improve the educational status of the womenfolk in this country on mutual respect and understanding. The parents of children belonging to poor, underprivileged families must be specially educated with proper social formula to help them to understand the significance of education for their girl children as foundation for empowerment. Government, NGOs and public should work hand in hand to implement the minimum age at marriage (21and above). The law enforcing machinery should be made really effective with efficient monitoring vigilant system to implement the

constitutional and legislative provisions and administrative measures to assure free and compulsory education for all children of this nation without any gender discrimination.

One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a land mark in the approach to women's education of illiterate. The National Literacy Mission is another positive step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. Women' education has assumed special significance in the context of India's planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year plans as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadies and crutches, raising number of schools and colleges of arts , science, and professional for girls, politechniques, girls hostels, multipurpose institutions and adult education programmes are some of the steps being taken by both central and state governments in India to boost-up women's education.

The Government of India had ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women's Empowerment Year' to focus on a vision where women are equal partners like men. The most common explanation of women's empowerment is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. The last decades have witnessed some basic changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches from the concept of 'welfare' in the seventies to 'development' in the eighties and now to 'empowerment' in the nineties. This process has been further accelerated with some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious of their discrimination in several areas of family and public life. They are also in a position to mobilize themselves on issues that can affect their overall position.

Conclusion

Education is one composite single variable, which has the capacity to transform many odds turning in favor of girls more specially so in the rural India. Therefore, an exclusive emphasis on girls' education is necessary. Education for adolescent girls is constraint due to many factors; the most prominent of them is non-availability of infrastructure and schools. Secondly, the travel time taken in reaching school, fear of crime and unknown eventuality would rise therefore provision of public transport exclusively for girl child is necessary. A legal provision would help rescue girls from the early marriages and open doors of development for them. Awareness programme are needed which would on the dynamics of nutrition in physical and mental growth.

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