

the child". While the quantum of family expenditure on primary education varied between 1.96 to 7.32 percent of the total family expenditure per year, the expenditure on private tuition happened to be nearly 35 percent of the total family expenditure on education, an overwhelming majority of who belong to the most socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

The crisis in primary education in India has reached a state when the Planning Commission, Government of India, had to quote the World Development Report 2004 (Making Services Work for Poor People): "In random visits to 200 primary schools in India, investigators found no teaching learning activity in half of them at the time of visit." It is time that the major non-government education providers, foundations and the civil society in India take the lead in reforming the system,

taking advantage of the following policy pronouncement of the Planning Commission: "Public-private-partnership (PPP) is an alternative to the traditional approach of providing services through the in-house facilities. Community participation, through supervision of schools and involvement of non-profit service agencies, in providing social services is being increasingly favoured and encouraged by the governments."

Prof. A.K. Jalaluddin has held senior faculty and technical advisory positions at NCERT, Directorate of Adult Education, Delhi University, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF. He has had a long association with educational research and training and has contributed significantly in the field of elementary, secondary and adult education in India and abroad.

Educational development index and what it reveals

Vimala Ramachandran



Government of India and National University for Educational Planning and Administration have developed an educational development index using four variables - physical access to an elementary school, infrastructure, teacher related characteristics and outcome, using retention and dropout rate, and an "exit ratio" being the proportion of children who enroll in class one and successfully complete the primary cycle. Educationists may squabble over the robustness of these indicators and we may be able to make this index more sensitive. Nevertheless it reveals a lot about the regional variations that exist in the country.

The five "worst ranking" states, on elementary education (composite primary and upper primary together), are Bihar (35), Jharkhand (34), Assam (33), Uttar Pradesh (32), Arunachal Pradesh (31) and West Bengal (30). The top five ranks go to Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. Though Delhi and Chandigarh rank quite high, they cannot be compared with large states having both rural and urban areas. The ranks of states traditionally seen as being educationally backward are Chhattisgarh 24, Madhya Pradesh 29, Orissa 27 and Rajasthan 25.

Here are some startling facts. If we take the ratio of primary schools to upper primary schools it is quite alarming to note

that the worst situation prevails in West Bengal where the ratio is 5.28, meaning that there is only one upper primary school (class 5 to 8) for 5+ primary schools. Next to West Bengal is Jharkhand with a ratio of 3.97. Perhaps this indicator drags the W. Bengal ranking down. Travelling across districts of the state reveal that the situation on the ground is indeed quite grave. A large number of children who complete class 4 are not able to access schooling because of a severe shortage of upper primary schools or high schools with upper primary sections.

Another set of sensitive indicators of quality and functionality are the percentage of single classroom schools, the percentage of single teacher schools and percentage of schools with a pupil-teacher ratio of more than 100.

The five states with high percentage of single classroom schools are Assam (52.59%), Andhra Pradesh (24.83%), Meghalaya (18.39%), West Bengal (15.04%) and Jammu and Kashmir (11.39%). Goa also has a high percentage of single



classroom schools being 23.94% - however the average size of the school is small with around 24 children per classroom. The percentage of children enrolled in schools with a student-classroom

ratio that is more than 60 (meaning 60 children in one room) is highest in Assam (74.47%) followed by Uttar Pradesh (60.27%) and West Bengal (52.39%). If we juxtapose this information with the percentage of single teacher schools, it is indeed revealing that the above states are not the worst, with Assam having 16.67% and West Bengal 5.11% only. The percentage of single teacher school is quite high in Rajasthan (26.17%), Arunachal Pradesh (48.08%), Jharkhand (25.70%), Madhya Pradesh (25.05%) and Goa (31.52%). The most alarming situation with respect to pupil-teacher ratio prevails in Bihar (18.13% schools with PTR>100) and Uttar Pradesh (15.22% schools with PTR>100).

It is therefore not a surprise that the retention rate at the primary level is alarming in states where there is little linkage between availability of schools at primary and upper primary levels, availability of teachers and school infrastructure. Only 42.34 percent children in Bihar are retained in school through the primary cycle (classes 1-5). The situation in Rajasthan (51.74%), Jharkhand (59.38), West Bengal (58.26) and Uttarakhand (52.31) are also as alarming, with less than 60 percent children completing the primary cycle.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (Performance Audit Reports 2006) confirms our fears with respect to the utilisation of funds.

“Five States/UTs failed to maintain the SSA norm of 1:40 for teacher student ratio. The PTR in primary schools to upper primary schools ranged between 1:60 and 1:130 in test-checked districts of Bihar. Cases of uneven distribution of teachers amongst schools were noticed. Rural schools were suffering for want of teachers.

75,884 of the primary schools in fifteen states were operating with one teacher only. 6647 schools in seven states were without any teacher. The position was alarming in the states of Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.” (Para 7.4.2)



“SSA guidelines provided for one upper primary school / section for every two primary schools. In nineteen states / UTs, out of 204,850 primary schools, there was a shortfall of 46,622 (23 per cent) upper primary schools in meeting this ratio” (Para 7.4.3.1)

Why are these statistics important?



It is now unanimously agreed that the biggest challenge facing Indian education has to do with quality and that access by itself is a meaningless indicator, unless we make sure that children are able to go to schools that

function and where teaching and learning happens. It is fairly obvious that in many parts of the country even bare essential requirements with respect to teachers and classrooms have not been met. Furthermore, if all children were to complete the primary cycle, there are not enough upper primary and high schools to absorb them. The educational system effectively ejects children at different points - end of primary, end of middle school and at the end of high school.

Two national programmes - District Primary Education Project (1993 to 2004) and now the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001 onwards), have allocated a lot of resources to augment infrastructure and appoint teachers. Utilisation of resources has been obviously rather skewed. A national debate is called for on why the system is structured in this manner and what the civil society can do to force the attention of the central and state governments and all the key political parties.

The situation will not change unless all concerned persons and organisations from the non-governmental sector, from the corporate world, and from the academic community start raising their voices and also come up with concrete strategies to bring about far reaching changes on the ground.

Vimala Ramachandran is an educational researcher and consultant. She was the first National Director of Mahila Samakhya.