

RESEARCH UPDATE

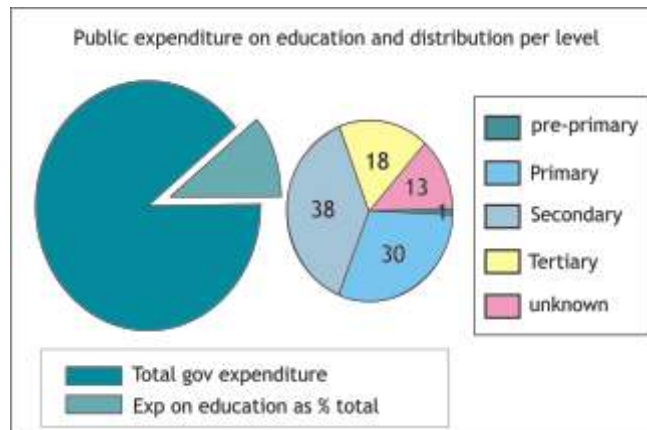
The urgent need for focus on secondary education in India

- A secondary research update

Basic education is widely recognized as an essential human right and a key to poverty alleviation. Attaining the objectives of Education for All (EFA) by 2015 has become top priority among the nations of the world. For this, the financing aspect of EFA has become a key issue. The 'Global Education Digest 2007', released by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics for the year 2007, focuses on the aspect of 'financing of education'. It has tried to provide a series of indicators to compare spending patterns across countries by mapping the latest education statistics from primary to tertiary levels in more than 200 countries.

The study observes that in India the distribution of funds is extremely uneven among its respective school-age populations. The reason cited is "low participation rates at higher levels of education"- majority of children do have access to low-cost primary education but they are largely excluded from higher level of education, where greater resources per student are invested. Equity issues are clearly at play given this uneven distribution of resources.

Ground reality



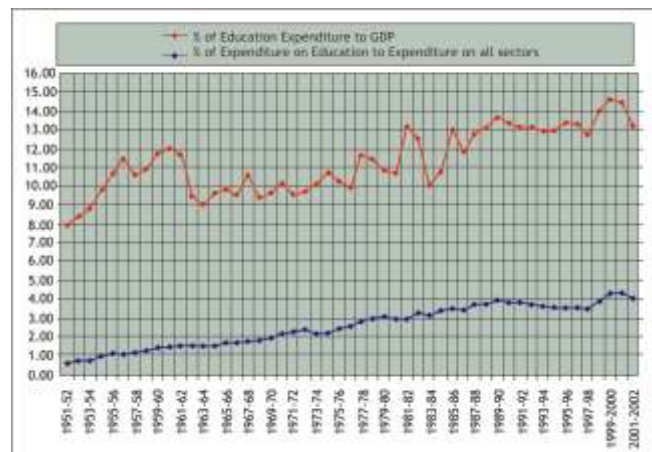
Source: UNESCO - UIS 2007

In India, public expenditure on education is 3.8% of GDP and 10.7% of total government expenditure (1999). Of the total public expenditure on education, 1% is invested at the preprimary level, 30% at the primary level (grades 1-5), 38% at secondary level (grades 6-12) and 18% at the tertiary level.

The government's education expenditure as a percentage of GDP has never ever risen above 4.3% of GDP, despite the target of 6% having been set as far back as 1968 by the Kothari Commission. The GDP seems to be rising at a much faster

pace than the government's education expenditure, to be able to reach the 6% target.

At primary level, we have been able to provide universal access. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is more than 100%. It is seen that 3% of the students repeat in the primary level and only 73% of the students survive till grade 5. What is more bothersome is that the GER at the secondary level is 53% and as you go higher up, at the tertiary level it falls down to 11%. In spite of the gross student intake rate in the last grade of primary being 90%, the GER at secondary level clearly shows that major chunk of students leave the schooling system even before entering the secondary level.



Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (blue) and as a percentage of expenditure on all sectors together. Source: Education Ministry's web site

Some of the reasons for this dismal state of secondary education are low accessibility, mismatch between the demand and supply and poor achievements at the primary level.

Other possible reasons cited from time to time are:

- Prevalence of low transition rates (out of 100 entering grade-one, less than 50 make it to secondary level)
- Issues pertaining to demand side factors like high direct and opportunity cost of schooling
- Lack of information on the benefits of secondary education and the value of girls education
- Issues pertaining to supply-side factors like lack of adequate infrastructure (over 1/3rd of villages do not have schools in 5 kms. radius)

- Inadequate incentives for private sector to expand
- An inflexible delivery system which does not cater to the needs of the client.

India has a long tradition of partnership between the public and private sectors in secondary education. There are four types of school management prevalent:

- Government - established by state governments (as well as some centrally established institutions);
- Local body - established by elected local government bodies;
- Aided school - private schools that receive state government grants-in aid; and
- Private unaided school

Most of the growth of secondary schools, in the private sector, in the last two decades, has occurred among unaided schools (25% of schools). About 60% of schools are now aided or unaided. Enrolments follow roughly the same pattern. The DISE report states that 45.18% of integrated higher secondary schools have private unaided management. The above data clearly highlights the issue of accessibility to these education levels for the majority of the population, the issue of economic affordability, geographical accessibility and most importantly, social equity issues.

The above reasons may probably answer some of the questions on why only a selected few from the mammoth population get access to secondary and thereafter higher education and how a majority of the underprivileged, for whom the subsidies in higher education are meant, to facilitate their climb in the social ladder, never get to utilize the investment that is supposedly for them.

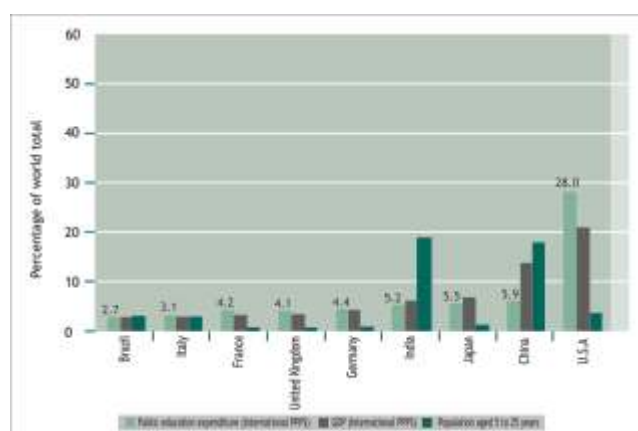
In order to address the above lacuna in the system, it is essential to appreciate the need to invest more in secondary education. A number of studies have shown how the benefits of secondary education not only impact the overall lifestyle of individuals, but also that of entire households. 'Secondary Education in India: Investing in the future' by the World Bank (2006), 'Education and Women's Labour Market Outcomes in India' by Geeta Kingdon and Jeemol Unni (2001), 'Return to Education: New Evidence for India' by Vasudeva Dutta (2006), are research studies that emphasize focus on secondary and higher levels of education. Marginal rates of return are high in secondary education, especially among women and it increases more so with upper secondary and tertiary

education. This is accompanied with social benefits like lower fertility rates, better health and intergenerational mobility, particularly when women are better educated.

Any talk of significant expansion at the secondary level only makes sense when the elementary education agenda is complete. There is a clear need for ensuring universal retention and quality at elementary level, as also the need to enhance access at secondary level at the same time.

Criticality of adequate funding

Though public expenditure in India is the largest on secondary education (38%), a number of issues remain to be addressed. The key requirement really is to increase the overall public expenditure on education. This issue has to be urgently addressed if the growth potential predicted for India is to be fulfilled. A number of studies around the world have stressed the importance of ensuring a sufficient and stable source of funding for education while identifying characteristics that are associated with progress towards education goals. (Colclough with Lewin, 1993; Mehrotra, 1998; Bruns, Mingat and Rakotomalala, 2003) The United States, which is home to just 4% of the global population aged 5 to 25 years, accounts for more than one-quarter of the global public education budget. It spends as much as all governments in six global regions combined: the Arab States, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, India which is home to around 20% of the global population aged 5 to 25 years accounts for only 5.2% of the global expense.



Global distribution of public expenditure on education, GDP and population aged 5 to 25 years for selected countries, 2004 (Note: Data for China are based on a UIS estimate for 1999) Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Reality check

Comparing India's educational achievement with China, it is seen that India is more than 30 years behind China in terms of the proportion of the population with completed secondary and post secondary schooling.

This is not to belittle India's educational achievement but is more a reality check to capitalize on the need to prioritize the requirement of education in the country. Our failure to prioritize our budget expenditure on education will not only have economic repercussions but more so will aid social repercussions in terms of inequality and inequity in the years to come.

References:

Arun.C.Mehta; Elementary Education in India: Analytical Report 2004: Based on DISE data; NIEPA

Geeta Gandhi Kingdon (March, 2007); The progress of school education in India: ESRC Global Poverty Research Group

Global Education Digest (2007); Comparing Educational Statistics across the World: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

King Bing Wu & Amit Dar; Secondary Education in India Investing in the future; World Bank

S. Gayathri, Azim Premji Foundation

FOUNDATION UPDATE

The President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil launched a national portal for teachers www.teachersofindia.org, at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 5th September 2008, on the occasion of Teachers' Day. Launching the Portal, the President said that it is definitely a medium to improve the quality of education in schools and will also improve the teacher-student interaction in class.

Azim Premji Foundation has developed the Portal, with support from the National Knowledge Commission, which has been working for the creation of web-based portals on key issues for aggregating and disseminating knowledge. The portal for teachers will offer a platform for sharing best practices and generating discussion in the teaching community. Over the next few months the portal will offer content in several languages as

well as provide access to other communities such as students, parents, teacher educators, etc.

The initial phase of the portal envisages a space for teachers to express their ideas and share their thoughts on any subject that touches their professional lives. Phase one involves the

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Teachers of India portal. At the top, there is a blue navigation bar with the logo 'TEACHERS OF INDIA' and links for 'Home', 'About Us', 'Our Space', and 'Directory'. Below this, there are several content blocks: a 'Welcome to Teachers of India' section with a photo of a classroom, a 'Teacher of the Month' section featuring Hemraj Bhatt, an 'Our Space' section with a photo of a teacher, and a 'Resource Organisations' section listing Eklavya, Centre for Learning Resources, and National Council of Educational Research and Training. The footer contains contact information and a copyright notice.

<http://www.teachersofindia.org>