



Millennium Development Goal 2:

Universalising Primary Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are immensely grateful to **Dr. Dhir Jhingran** (Senior Advisor, Education, UNICEF India), **Mr. Ambarish Rai** (National Convenor, RTE Forum), **Ms. Dipa Nag Chowdry** (Deputy Director, MacArthur Foundation India), **Ms. Indrani Bhattacharya** (Assisted Director, CINI), **Mr. Rajib Haldar** (Additional Director, CINI), for their time and valuable inputs to validate the findings of the report.

We would also like to thank the team at Athena Infonomics India Private Ltd., (Chennai) for their assistance with writing and designing the report.

We are thankful to the members of the Save the Children India team for their effort in bringing out this report in time for the 500 days countdown for the MDGs.

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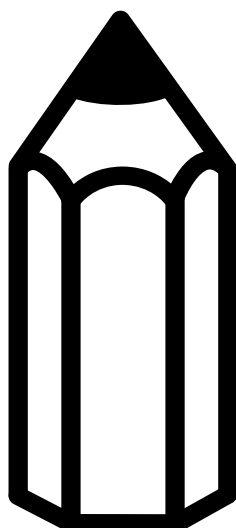
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Education is the cornerstone of human development and the foundation on which ideals of growth and development are realised. As the 2015 deadline for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, it is imperative that nations around the world take stock of the progress countries have made in their pursuit of this goal, and assess their progress based on data that reflects a holistic and accurate picture about access to universal quality education.

However, there is no doubt, that throughout the world, concerted effort has been exerted toward making primary education more accessible. Between 1999 and 2011, the number of out school children fell almost by half and **South and West Asia recorded the steepest decline in the number of out of school children (40 million in 2000 to 12 million in 2012).**^[1]

Even while the global narrative is seemingly shifting from 'access' to 'quality of education and learning outcomes', latest reports suggest that universal access to primary education is still a distant reality. Currently, **57 million children remain out of school with 50% living in conflict-affected areas**; 50% of these children are unlikely to ever enter a school.^[1] Needless to say, extreme and debilitating levels of poverty and disability brought on by socio-political strife prove to be insurmountable barriers for children trying to access even the most basic levels of education in these countries. If we wish to commit to an education that is **accessible, equitable and affordable** for all children, we must focus our attention on those cohorts of children who, due to severely limiting socio-economic circumstances, are unable to enter and remain within a traditional institutional set-up. We must look at innovative and non-traditional methods to ensure that no child, girl or boy, anywhere in the world, gets left behind.



1. Net enrolment ratio



2. Youth Literacy Rate -
Literacy rate of 15-24 age group



3. Apparent Survival Rate i.e. proportion of pupils starting at Grade I who reach Grade V

Where does India stand?



India is home to the largest child population in the world of around **450 million children**—nearly **50% fall under the age group of 24 years** with **30% of this population belonging to the 0-14 age group.**^[2] With India laying claim to such a vast majority of the global child population, its progress on this MDG is bound to have far-reaching impact on the global achievement of the MDG.

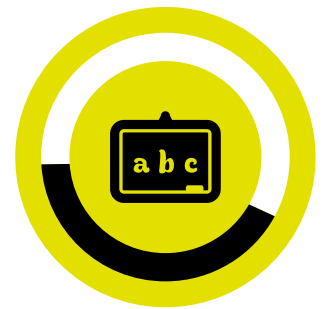
The Government of India (GoI) initiatives have greatly contributed to India's commendable performance on this MDG. Initiatives such as the mid-day meal scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan enrolment drives, increased attention to the enrolment of girls and increase in the number of schools have gone a long way in making education more accessible. The Right to Education Act, a milestone legislation passed in 2009, made elementary education a fundamental right of all children of 6-14 years (Grade I to Grade VIII). Among the three indicators that contribute to the achievement of the MDG, the goal of universalising primary education has received the most attention from the Government over the past few decades, and its efforts have been vindicated by the positive outcomes: **India has achieved a net enrollment rate (primary level) of nearly 96% and an Apparent Survival Rate (at primary level) of 93%, indicating that nearly 93% of children who enroll in Grade I are able to remain in school till Grade V and attain at least a primary level of education.**^[3]



50% of India's population is under 24 Years

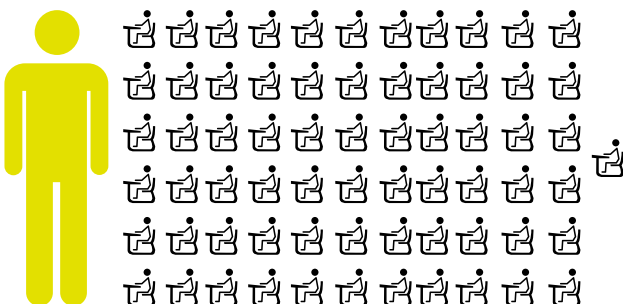


India has 20% of the 0-4 years' child population of the world



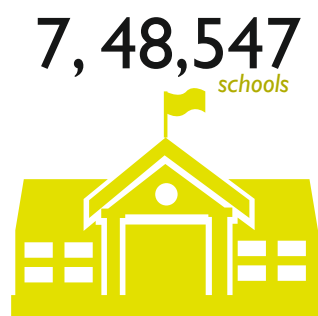
More than 45% of total education expenditure in India is dedicated to primary education

There are currently 21 Lakh teachers in the primary schools across India which renders an unfavorable student teacher ration of 1:67, clearly indicating a severe shortfall in supply.



Source: DISE Elementary Flash Statistics (2013-14)

India has a total of 7,48,547 primary schools (Grades I-V), with a total enrollment of around 14 Crore children.



14 Crore children



Source: DISE Elementary Flash Statistics (2013-14)



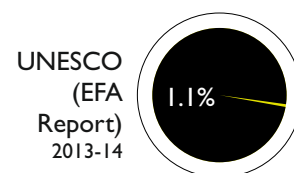
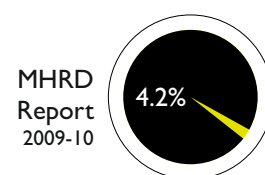
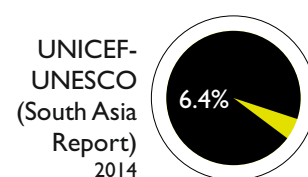
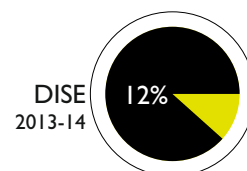
Despite the attention paid by the Government to achieving a 100% net enrolment rate (NER) in primary education, data about the NER are not in alignment and paint a very disjointed picture; this in itself is a hugely problematic area. Although the MDG India Country Report 2014 concludes that India had achieved the cut-off NER line of 95% in 2007-08 itself, the **latest DISE data (2012-13) suggests that the NER has actually declined from 99% in 2011 to around 88% in 2013. However, few other reports seem to validate the DISE data.**

A more meaningful exercise to assess NER would be to look at reports that discuss the proportion of out of school children at a particular age group, in this case 6-11 years. The **UNICEF-UNESCO** report on out of school children (OoSC) in South Asia^[4] indicates an NER (among 6-11 year old children in India) of around **94%** and comes closest to the results of the study conducted by **Ministry of Human Resource Development**^[5]: The UNICEF report found that approximately 6.4% (7.8 million) children were out of school in India (at the primary level) while the MHRD report estimated it to be around **4.2%** (8.1 million). A recently released UNESCO report (2014) concludes that only 1.4 million children are out of school currently in India, which the experts believe is a gross underestimation of the actual ground reality.

Similar findings have been highlighted by Save The Children's own study '**Surviving the Streets**'. The study found that **Delhi** alone had more than **51,000 children below 18 years of age who could be identified as street children** of which around 61% belonged to the 7-14 years age group while 23% were from 15-18 years age group. The study also concluded that more than 50.5% of these street children were out-of-school with only 20% having received some kind of formal education up to middle school level.

By reconciling the various data sources available, it may be safe to assume that the net enrolment rate/retention in primary schools in India is anywhere between **94-96%**. It still seems that an overwhelming number of children in India – those that live on the margins of society - do not have access to primary education; or it may well be that the system has failed to retain them.

Percentage of out of school children (OoSC)



Building on the gains

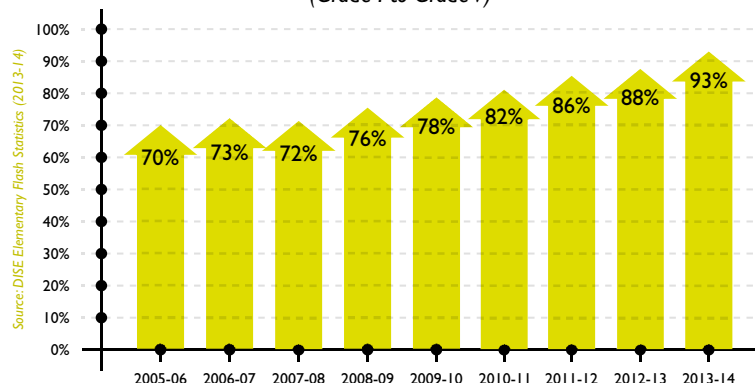


The improvement in NER at the primary level of education in India may be cause for some celebration. But, to ensure that the figure of 100% NER is meaningful we must first ensure that all children are able to attend school regularly and survive at least 5 years of primary school.

The Apparent Survival Rate – measured, as the number of students in Grade V as a ratio of number of students in Grade I - is a critical

Apparent Survival Rate in India

(Grade I to Grade V)

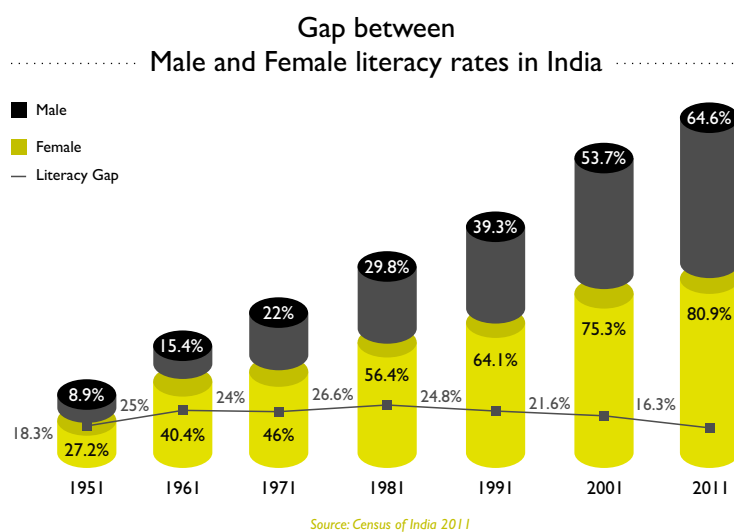


indicator of how efficiently the education system is able to retain students and keep the dropout rates low. There has been a steady growth in the Apparent Survival Rates (ASR) in India since 2005-06 – **ASRs recorded an all India increase from 70% in 2005-06 to 93% in 2013-14.**^[3] However, the ASR does not account for under-age and over -age enrollments and cases of repetition, which are quite common across primary grades. Experts also point to another flaw in the system where many schools are seldom known to strike the name (from the attendance register) of the children who have dropped out from school. This often leads to misrepresentation of data about survival rates.

Delivering on our promise to our girls



It may be heartening to note that today, there are as many girls attending primary school as there are boys. But, the sharp decline in girls' enrollment and completion rate after Grade V clearly suggests that social impediments that prevent girls from accessing education once they have attained puberty still persist; their plight is compounded by a lack of adequate sanitation facilities in schools. **The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights statistics show that while about 25% of girls drop out of school between the ages of 6 and 10, that rate doubles to more than 50% for girls ages 10-13.**^[6]



Literacy rates among the 15+ age groups in India have grown steadily over the past few decades, rising from a rate of just from 62% in 1990 to 81% in 2010.^[2] While absolute numbers such as these signify a fair amount of progress, the gender dimension of this particular indicator leaves a lot to be desired. The female literacy rate in India has increased at a relatively slower pace and is just over 74% today compared to higher male literacy rate of around 83%. The gender parity statistic between male and female literacy rates is even more disappointing and seems to have stagnated over the past 50 years – while the difference between male and female literacy rate was 18% in 1951, the difference had reduced only negligibly to 16% in 2011-12.^[2]

Perhaps, the one silver lining emerging from this scenario is the positive growth rural female literacy rates have shown over the past decade - **rural female literacy rates rose from 48% in 2003 to nearly 60% in 2011**^[2] while the rural male literacy rate around the same time period witnessed only a marginal increase from 74% in 2003 to 80% in 2011. Among the leading states with highest female literacy rates, Kerala tops the list as the only state with 100% female literacy in the country.

High Female Literacy	%	Low female Literacy	%
Kerala	100.00	Bihar	46.60
Mizoram	86.72	Daman and Diu	46.37
Goa	82.16	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	47.67
Lakshwadeep	82.69	Rajasthan	47.76
Himachal Pradesh	73.51	Jammu and Kashmir	49.12
Tripura	78.98		

We simply cannot afford to lose the momentum that has been built to mobilize efforts to neutralize gender parity in education and other critical areas of human development. A high rate of female literacy is by far one of the most defining factors for any country in pursuit of ambitious goals of growth and development. Any government or civil society looking to achieve meaningful gains in human development and the social well being of its citizens should make this their immediate priority.



Source: Census of India 2011 & DISE Elementary Flash Statistics

NER				Apparent Survival Rate				Adult Literacy (age 15+ and above)			
Top 5	Index	Bottom 5	Index	Top 5	Index	Bottom 5	Index	Top 5	Index	Bottom 5	Index
Nagaland	99.39	Rajasthan	79.54	Madhya Pradesh	99	Assam	72	Kerala	94	Bihar	61.8
Goa	97.51	Lakshadweep	79.06	D&N Haveli	98	Mizoram	63	Lakshadweep	91.85	Arunachal Pradesh	65.38
Jharkhand	96.49	Daman & Diu	75.55	Odisha	97	Manipur	61	Mizoram	91.33	Rajasthan	66.11
Meghalaya	95.28	Puducherry	77.76	Goa	97	Arunachal Pradesh	58	Goa	88.7	Jharkhand	66.41
Chhattisgarh	93.79	Jammu & Kashmir	68.99	Bihar	92	Meghalaya	54	Tripura	87.22	Andhra Pradesh	67.02

Intra-country inequalities in India highlight a familiar trend – states that have traditionally performed well on the human development indices continue to perform well on several educational parameters. It is also encouraging to see other states some of which are plagued by high incidence of civil strife and political unrest (Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, etc.), also demonstrating commendable improvements in some of these parameters.

Data for youth literacy reinforces the importance of proactively addressing the issue of high rates of dropout across primary and upper primary levels of education. States that have historically achieved high rates of net enrolment at primary level tend to perform well on the literacy indicators as well (**Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Goa**). However, states such as **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Jammu Kashmir - that have only recently recorded improvements in their NERs - have registered literacy rates of less than 70%**.^{[2][3]} These states would do well to now leverage gains made in their NERs and initiate effective policy interventions to ensure that children continue to attend school regularly and that the system is able to retain them and provide them access to quality education.

States' spending of Education Budgets



Per student allocation: Among the different states, per student allocation (Of the total budget sanctioned under SSA for FY 2010-11) stood highest for Chhattisgarh at Rs 7111 followed by Haryana, Rajasthan, and Bihar at over Rs 5,000 per student.^[8]



Expenditure levels: Bihar utilized only 37% of the budget sanctions in FY 2010-11 for SSA initiatives. Kerala and Gujarat spent around 92% and 86% of their SSA allocations for teacher training.^[8]



Quantum of training for teachers: Just 2 percent of government school teachers in Haryana and 8 percent in Rajasthan received training. On the contrary, in Kerala and Gujarat up to 66 and 62 percent of school teachers underwent formal in-service training.^[8]

Resource Allocation

Budget allocation for the promotion of education in India increased from **Rs. 152,847 crores** in 2004-05 to **Rs. 372,813 crores** in 2009-10.^[8]

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) budget allocations rose from **Rs. 7,156 crores** in 2005-06 to **Rs. 15,000 crores** in 2010-1.^[8]

On an average, more than **30%** of the education budget remains unspent every year.^[8]

More than **45%** of the total education expenditure is dedicated to elementary education.^[14]



2015 and beyond



India is unlikely to meet the target for MDG 2 by 2015 since its youth literacy rate is not on track to meet the 100% mark by next year. But, given the massive strides it has made in all other aspects, the large-scale and sustained efforts to hasten the pace of progress to universalise primary education have certainly not been in vain.

Though Government reports suggest that India is on track to achieving 100% universal primary enrolment, it may still be that children from the most marginalized sections of society continue to remain neglected by a system rewards only those children who are able to get assimilated into a formal educational set-up. If India were to truly aim for 'near universal' primary enrolment, it must look at ways and means to provide access even to those children constrained by circumstances and unable to attend a traditional school everyday.

The Government must also start paying closer attention to the issue of equity and quality in education. **The Approach Paper for the 12th Plan reports that nearly half the children in Grade 5 are unable to read a Grade 2 text.**^[7] **National Achievement Survey (2012) results concluded that students from minority groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Categories) scored significantly lower in achievement tests than students in the General category.** Therefore, it is the prerogative of the Government and the civil society to ensure that children who are able to least afford quality education— and perhaps need it the most - are provided access to an education that is on par even with their most privileged peers in India.

Getting our priorities right



- India must look at building **a single robust system of collecting and validating data** that is mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. We need a central and unbiased system of data collection that is equipped to take stock of the actual ground realities dispassionately, going beyond mere reproduction of data already available on paper.
- India should work toward institutionalising **a common schooling system** that ensures equal opportunity of learning for all children. Government and civil society must resolve to tread the last mile and do it with a guarantee of providing all children - regardless of gender, caste, creed, economic status or learning ability— access to high quality education.

- Greater emphasis and attention must be directed to **early childhood education (ECE)** in the form of pre-schools, while ensuring universal accessibility and quality. Innumerable studies have highlighted the value of ECE, and the need to build on children’s cognitive development during their early years. It has also been noted that children who enter the system early get acclimatised to the school environment more easily, are able to cope with the system better and thereby are less likely to dropout early (Early Childhood Development: Investing in the Future. Mary Young, The World Bank, 1996).
- Efforts to **reduce the gender gap in literacy levels** and net enrolment rates of girls in upper primary and secondary levels of education must be immediately and adequately reinforced.
- The Government must devise effective systems to ensure that closer attention is paid to the processes that ensure delivery of quality education. While recent public discourse has centred on the need to measure learning outcomes, the Government must first look at **strengthening the fundamentals of the current system of governance**.
 1. A common system of schooling that delivers on the promise of equity and quality, and is accessible by all children
 2. Schools that function daily where meaningful teaching happens consistently
 3. Adequate attention and resources should be directed toward quality teacher training programmes
 4. Attention must be paid to the attendance levels of children and reasons for irregularity must be closely investigated and addressed



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