

Status of the Girl Child in Secondary Education in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan

Prepared by Catalyst Management Services as a part of the Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education

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The **Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education (PSIPSE)** aims to accelerate innovation in secondary education programming, research, and development. It is led by a group of private donors and donor advisors, including Central Square Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, Human Dignity Foundation, Intel Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Marshall Family Foundation, MasterCard Foundation, and an anonymous donor. Project durations are one to three years, and are located across East Africa (encompassing Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda), India, and Nigeria. Results for Development Institute has been selected as a learning partner, and will work with three local learning partners to monitor the funded projects, draw out and share important learnings from the efforts, and use these learnings to inform future programming.

Introduction

“While primary education is a basic enabling factor for participation, freedom, for leading life with dignity and overcoming basic deprivation, secondary education is the gateway for prosperity, for transforming the economy and establishing social justice in any country. It opens the world of work to the youth of the country and contributes to socio economic development of the community. Secondary Education is a crucial stage in the educational hierarchy as it prepares the students for higher education and also the world of work.”

Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), India

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) ascribes the importance of secondary education and considers this to be the stepping stone for the youth towards employability, leading to the larger economic and social development of the country. Recent economic studies have shown that secondary education is critical to breaking intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The Government’s current policy is to make secondary education of good quality available, accessible and affordable to all young people ages 14-18. Rashtritya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) launched in 2009 is the most ambitious project of the Government of India. The RMSA seeks to attain 90% gross enrolment ratio (GER) by 2017 and 90% retention by 2020.

Unfortunately, access to secondary education in India is highly unequal. According to a 2009 World Bank report (Secondary Education in India-Opportunity for Universalisation), there is a 40 percentage point gap in secondary enrolment rates between students from the highest and lowest expenditure quintile groups (70% versus 30% enrolment, respectively). In addition, there is a 20 percentage point gap between urban and rural secondary enrolment rates, and a persistent 10 percentage point gap between secondary enrolment rates of boys and girls. Enrolment of scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and Muslims is well below their share in the population at large.

Policy documents like the Kothari Commission Report (Gol, 1964-66) and the National Policy on Education 1986 (Gol, 1986) and its Programme of Action (POA) in 1992 (Gol, 1992a) have put enormous emphasis on the promotion of gender equity in education by reducing the gender gap in access, retention and transition from one stage to other. Despite such policy recognition, data shows a continuing gender gap in relation to attendance and drop-out.

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Gender disparities in education at all levels continue even after 66 years of independence. According to the District Information System for Education (DISE) (2011-12), report, female enrolment at the primary level (Class I-V) stands at 48.35, compared to 51.65 for boys. Also, at the higher education level, the gross enrolment ratio for male population is 20.8 while that for female it is 17.9 respectively.

Some of the reasons for parental under-investment in female education include deeply embedded undervaluation of female labour, women being identified primarily with the reproductive or household spheres, and belief that educating females bring low returns, as skills required in the reproductive sphere require domestic socialization and not many years of schooling (Subrahmanian 2005). Further, the gender division of labour continues to reward women less in the workplace (Kingdon, 1998). This has resulted in relatively lower female education and work participation reflecting the ideological bias against considering women as household bread-winners.

A study by Jha and Jhingran (2002) shows the continued belief in the importance of marriage for girls at an early age and gender-differentiated ideologies cut across all social groups. For instance, responsibilities for securing domestic water and fuel place tremendous time burdens on women and are often shared with younger girls in the family who could otherwise be in school, at rest or at play. Investments in water supply, sustainable energy and renewable sources of fuel all can have significant impact on female education. Sexual harassment and violence also continue to be major constraining factors preventing parents from freely sending their girls to school. Transporting girls to school and back safely, especially where secondary schools are far away from their homes, is a critical policy measure that has received scant attention.

Further, Bandyopadhyay & Subramaniyan (2008) conclude that there is a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling and states such as Bihar and Rajasthan have a long way to go to catch up. Trends suggest that though much has been done in policy terms to increase female access to schooling – notably through improving access to primary schooling by rapid expansion of schooling infrastructure – there are still major policy challenges to be met in terms of improving the quality of schools and ensuring better opportunities for girls at higher levels of education, particularly in upper primary and secondary school. The gender-sensitivity of the infrastructure of schooling through provision of toilets, water and better security is another particular dimension that also requires attention. Additionally, although initiatives to teach girls self-defense or cycling have been widely hailed as critical components of gender-sensitive education, they have not really been taken up and promoted widely through the education system.

State Context

The status of education in the three focus states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra are as follows:

I. Rajasthan

Rajasthan is India's largest state in terms of area (3.42 Lakh Sq Km, comparable to Republic of Congo) and 8th largest State in terms of Population (6.86 Crores, comparable to Thailand). The state has one of the largest and oldest indigenous populace, and has made significant progress in imparting modern education.

Rajasthan had the biggest percentage decadal (1991–2001) increase in literacy of all Indian states, from about 38% to about 61%, a leapfrog that has been termed "spectacular" by some observers. Aggressive state government action, in the form of the District Primary Education Programme, the Shiksha Karmi initiative and the Lok Jumbish programme (both adult literacy programs done with the involvement of citizen groups and non-government organizations), are credited with the rapid improvement. The decadal rise from 2001–11 was only 7% (60.4% in 2001 to 67.1% in 2011). When statehood was granted to Rajasthan in 1956, it was the least literate state in India with a literacy rate of 18%.

As per the District Information System for Education (DISE) report of 2011-12, Rajasthan has 1.09 lakh schools, 4.06 lakh teachers for 12.4 million children. PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) is 27, below the prescribed ratio of 30. The NER (Net Enrolment Ratio) for lower primary is 87.3 and upper primary is 55, indicating that there are still challenges of enrolment for universalisation of primary education.

Meanwhile, as per the Secondary Education Management Information System (SEMIS) flash report of 2010-11 (although still not very accurate and complete), Rajasthan had 1.6 million children in secondary and 1.23 million children in higher secondary schools. The transition rate from secondary to higher secondary is 68%. The approximate GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for secondary was 86% for secondary and 40% for higher secondary.

However, while Rajasthan has made significant leaps in certain areas, women still lag behind, as can be seen in Table 1. While elementary education has shown significant progress in attracting girl (although there is room for improvement), much can be done to improve the situation in secondary education.

% Share in Population	48% (Sex Ratio 962)
Women Literacy Rate	52.66% (compared to 80.51% for males; the female literacy rate is the lowest in the Country.)
% of Enrolment in Elementary Education	46%
% of Enrolment in Secondary Education	39%
% of Enrolment in higher secondary education	36%

Table 1: Status of women/ girl child

II. Gujarat:

Gujarat is 7th largest state in India in terms of area (1.96 lakh Sq Km, the size of Senegal) and with a population of 60.38 million, it is equivalent to Italy.

As per the DISE report of 2011-12, Gujarat has 40943 schools, 2.73 lakh teachers for 8.37 million children. PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) is 31, slightly more than the desired level of 30,

indicating a need to recruit more teachers. The NER (Net Enrolment Ratio) for lower primary is 85.7 (GER is 110.2), while at upper primary is 49 (GER is 69.2), indicating that the state has big challenges in achieving universalisation of primary education.

Meanwhile, as per the SEMIS flash report of 2010-11, Gujarat had 2.33 million children in secondary and 0.78 million children in higher secondary schools. The transition rate from secondary to higher secondary is 96%. The approximate GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for secondary was 105% for secondary and 35% for higher secondary. Table 3 also makes it clear that Gujarat needs to improve its gender ratio although it has made significant progress during the decade 2001 to 2011.

For instance, society's awareness and its value for the girl child needs to increase. The government should crack down on clinics that unabashedly continue with sex determination, and awareness drives by the government, media and NGOs need to be taken up a notch. Indeed, the state has a long way to go before it can claim to have won the war against female feticide.

	Female/Girl Children
Share in Population	46% GR:918 per 1000, one of the lowest in the country.
Literacy Rate (2011)	71
Total Enrollment in Primary Schools (Million Children)	46%
Total Enrollment in Secondary Education (Million Children)	
Secondary	41%
Higher Secondary	43%

Table 2: Status of women/ girl child in Gujarat

III. Maharashtra

Maharashtra, with an area of 307,731 km, is the 3rd largest State in India (comparable to Italy) and it is the second most populous state (112 million, or the size of Mexico). Maharashtra is the wealthiest state in India, contributing 15% of the country's industrial output and 13.3% of its GDP (2006–2007 figures).

According to the 2011 Census, Maharashtra is doing well in terms of its literacy rate, with a literacy rate of 83% (Table 4). In 1951, it was only second to Kerala in literacy rates among major states. Table 4 illustrates the growth of literacy rates in Maharashtra.

Year	Literacy rate(Rounded off)
1951	28
1961	35
1971	46
1981	57
1991	65
2001	77
2011	83

Table 3: Literacy rates in Maharashtra

As per the DISE report of 2011-12, Maharashtra has 1 Lakh Schools, schools, 5.33 lakh teachers for 16.18 million children. The PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) is 30, which is desirable. The NER (Net Enrolment Ratio) for lower primary is 88.3 (GER: 105.3) and upper primary is 70 (GER 92), indicating that the state is close to achieving the goal of universalisation of elementary education.

Meanwhile, as per the SEMIS flash report of 2010-11, Maharashtra had 5.13 million children in secondary (which is highest in the country) and 1.9 million children in higher secondary schools. Transition rate from secondary to higher secondary is 64%, which is low compared to the national average and few other States like Goa and Delhi. The approximate GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for secondary was 123% (45% for higher secondary), and there is a big drop out post 10th standard. One of the reasons for this is the low number of higher secondary schools in the state. The state has just one higher secondary school for almost every three secondary schools; clearly Maharashtra needs a greater number of higher secondary schools.

Table 5 below indicates the status of girls in education in the state. In proportion to ratio in population, the state has achieved great progress both in elementary education and secondary education. Maharashtra has a great history of focussing on education by many freedom fighters in the pre independent era. The state has focused a great deal on primary education from 1960, when it was first established. High literacy rates, a high level of urbanisation and better per capita income have contributed to Maharashtra's success in education. At the secondary education level, greater participation by private sector has also contributed to access.

% Share in Population	46.4% (Sex Ratio 929 Lower than National average)
Women Literacy Rate	75.5% (Far above national average, and among top states)
% of Enrolment in Elementary Education	47%
% of Enrolment in Secondary Education	46%
% of Enrolment in higher secondary education	46%

Table 4: Status of women / girl child in Maharashtra

Development Challenges

Despite efforts by the government and non-state actors, it is clear there is a large gap in enrollment and gender parity. The report by the Ministry of Human Resource Development depicts the following challenges in achieving the target of 100% GER for grades 9-10 during the 12th Plan period:

- Consolidating the existing intake capacity of the government and government-aided institutions and assessing the potential capacity of the existing unaided institutions, particularly in the rural areas
- Ensuring that all secondary schools/sections conform to a minimum level of standards (clearly defined in terms of infrastructure, staffing, processes, autonomy and accountability of institutions)
- Revising the curriculum and examination system
- Empowering schools to adopt to the change/reform programmes
- Strengthening support services, resource institutions, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Additionally, the challenges foreseen are public private partnerships (PPPs) in education for the goal of ensuring equitable quality secondary education for all. The interesting option before the government is whether it should open more government schools or provide grant in aid to private schools? Since there is already a higher private presence in secondary education, the government has to devise a means of working with them to improve learning levels. Other challenges include improving the student-teacher ratios by appointing additional teachers in order to improve the classroom transaction process and environment.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) published by Pratham every year is the only source to understand the latest status in many parameters of education. Using a sample study, the ASER report gives immense information about schools, children and learning levels. ASER has captured the learning levels of children at Standard 8, which is the beginning year of secondary education. The data below indicates learning levels in secondary education.

Percentage of children who are able to read and comprehend				
Geographic area	Read 2 nd Standard level text	Read simple English sentences	Comprehend simple English sentences	Perform simple division
India	76.4	47	72	48
Rajasthan	77.5	39.8	68.2	45.1
Gujarat	80.9	35.1	69.1	41.3
Maharashtra	83.2	50	65	44

Source: Pratham, 2012

In addition to the problems of access and equity that have been highlighted in the previous section, the quality of education is also a challenge. First, it is clear that an increase in literacy

levels or enrolment numbers does not imply that the quality of education in the country has also improved. Hence, it is imperative that the quality of education that is provided also improves alongside access and equity. Second, it is important to acknowledge the absence of any national assessment of performance in secondary education. Different states have different examination boards that prepare examinations for students at the lower secondary and higher secondary level, separate from the national boards. Since all these examinations are of different levels and produce different pass rates, it becomes difficult to make comparisons across states. Therefore, there is no national picture on the quality of secondary education, as measured by the skills and knowledge acquired by students at the end of this stage of education.¹

There is a need for autonomy in both internal and external assessment systems in education. Even the Secondary Education Board – though supposed to be autonomous and representative of stakeholders – is hardly so in practice. Its major efforts are in conducting examinations and bringing about uniformity in teaching and evaluation. The school education both at macro and micro levels has become completely unmanageable. The administration has become highly bureaucratic in following procedures rather than improving quality of education. Meanwhile, the management in secondary and higher secondary schools have also lost initiative and have become indifferent as most of their efforts go in complying with government rules and regulation, with little room for individual initiative in the maze of government requirements. This leaves little energy for a sustained campaign on quality improvement in education, even though the Secondary Education Board has attempted to come to grips on various critical issues facing education (and has even succeeded in a few cases).

Efforts by PSIPSE Grantees to address the challenges

Considering the challenges of secondary education, in June 2012, a donor consortium initiated the “Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education” (PSIPSE). The purpose of PSIPSE is to encourage a new wave of innovation and learning that can help inform the imminent expansion and transformation of secondary education. **Educational Initiatives** (EI), an organization funded by PSIPSE, has embarked on a benchmarking study of learning levels of students in secondary schools in Grade 9 and 10. The absence of any learning assessment in the secondary education makes this research significant. The results of the assessment have potential to change policies and priorities of central and state governments. This study will also include disaggregation of data according to the gender of the children, which in turn will possible result in focused efforts on female children.

The lessons from EI’s study will feed in the designs of other programmes such as **Pratham’s** open schooling initiative, which is another avenue for the female child to complete her education. The levels of learning at such open schools can provide valuable indicators on how to structure the courses and what changes in the curriculum can influence learning outcomes.

¹ Linden, T. (2012). Chapter 12: Secondary education. IDFC Report, Retrieved from http://www.idfc.com/pdf/report/2012/Chapter_12.pdf

As noted, another crucial challenge is training school leadership to drive necessary changes in education. The **Akanksha Foundation** has identified the lack of leadership as a challenge to make changes in the educational system, and will be creating the Indian School Leadership Institute with the aim of training a new generation of school leaders in order to improve learning outcomes. Both research-based and experiential evidence supports the criticality of the role of the school leader (i.e. principal/head of school) in equipping schools to deliver high student learning and development outcomes, including secondary school completion, college matriculation and job readiness. **ERU**, another PSIPSE project, will be specifically looking at female teachers, and will be conducting a study on the barriers to women becoming secondary school teachers in Rajasthan. Meanwhile, the **Population Council** is implementing a pilot intervention in rural India that will support adolescent girls' transition to and retention in secondary education, and improve their learning outcomes by building parental and community engagement in and accountability for secondary education.

The PSIPSE projects can bring in phenomenal learning from their respective initiatives which can be shared with other stakeholders. Because each initiative focuses on improved learning outcomes, the various strategies used by each of such programme can feed into the design and significantly influence the results of overall learning outcomes. Going forward, opportunities also exist to look at the influence of social, cultural, political and ecological issues on learning outcomes. The three states are at the hot bed of cultural dominance, and the knowledge generated by these efforts can be pooled into policy briefings target both the state and central level.

Conclusion

The institutional landscape of secondary education must be taken into consideration while trying to develop any strategy to address the challenges facing secondary education in India. Secondary education in India has a landscape that is very different from that of primary education, and more than half of students in secondary education study in privately-managed schools.² In addition to institutional realities, one needs to take into consideration the different social realities that come into play while discussing primary education and secondary education. A case in point is the education of girl children who are more likely to be prevented from attending secondary school due to social practices like early marriage. These realities vary from one state to another, as do other factors such as school infrastructure. All these complexities imply that a single solution that will be relevant for the entire secondary education sector is highly unlikely. To adequately handle the problems confronting secondary education, projects will need to employ a combination of innovation and experimentation, along with a strong monitoring and evaluation framework.

India has the challenge of helping every girl child continue her education until the end of secondary education, and the RMSA needs to gear up to its tough task. In next decade, it can achieve same wonders that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has achieved for access to primary education. Importantly, there needs to be a focus on learning, as even SSA has not been that

² Ibid.

impressive to achieve satisfactory learning levels among the children at the primary level. In summary, some of the key issues that face secondary education in India include:

- a) While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling. Increased female enrolment is, however, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children.
- b) Gender inequalities interlock with other forms of social inequality, notably caste, ethnicity and religion; girls from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslim minorities largely constitute the population of out-of-school and drop-out children.
- c) There are considerable variations in gender parity between states. While the greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh.
- d) Some micro studies suggest that girls are over-represented in public schools, demonstrating continued 'son' preference whereby boys are educated in schools managed by non-state providers which are of (perceived) better quality, and girls sent to public schools of (perceived) relatively poor quality. However, these micro studies are not conclusive. In the absence of large data sets on the profile of students in the non-state sector (notably private schools), it is hard to draw firm conclusions, particularly as the non-state sector is also diversifying rapidly to include different kinds of fee structures. This dimension would require further research and investigation.

These trends suggest that though much has been done in policy terms to increase female access to schooling – notably through improving access to primary schooling by rapid expansion of schooling infrastructure – there are still major policy challenges to be met in terms of improving the quality of schools and ensuring better opportunities for girls at higher levels of education, especially upper primary and secondary school. There is certainly scope for further learning between the states, and such collaboration can go far in reducing the disparities across the country.