

PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

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Majority of India still lives in villages therefore the topic of rural education in India is of utmost importance.

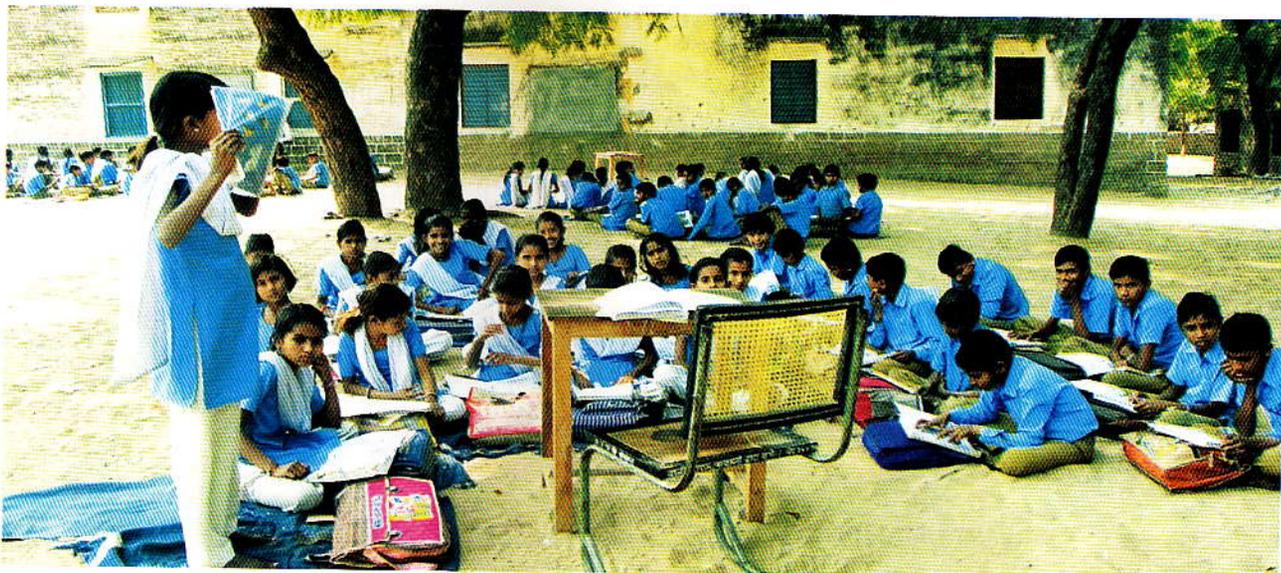
The number of rural students, attending schools is, rising and 96 per cent of children in the age group of 6-14 are enrolled in a school. The foundation to turn India into a strong nation has to be laid down at primary and rural levels, so the quality of education right from the beginning should be excellent. Right to Education Act passed in 2009 made education a fundamental right of every Indian citizen. India, with more than a billion residents, has the second largest education system in the world (after China). Experts estimate that 32 per cent of its current population is under the age of 15 years. Education system has a huge challenge to provide quality education especially in rural areas.

Following are the main infrastructural bottlenecks in rural schools, that can be worked upon to improve education in rural areas.

School Infrastructure:

School building, furniture, textbooks, libraries, laboratories, uniforms, and mid-day meals are basics of school infrastructure. Paucity of proper class rooms is concern in rural schools. All classrooms need refurbishing or upgrading to acceptable minimum standards for learning. India needs almost more than a million new classrooms largely in rural and marginalized areas, to accommodate those who are not in schools and properly accommodate those students already studying in schools. More classrooms will alleviate overcrowding and cut class sizes. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) prescribes the minimum infrastructure required in school.

1. The school must have about 2 acres or as otherwise permitted measurement of land and a building constructed on a part of land and proper playground on the remaining land. It should provide minimum floor space of 1 Sq. Mtr. per student in the class.



2. The school should have a well equipped and spacious library with minimum of 1500 books and at least 15 magazines. Also, the school should maintain pupil book ratio 1:5.
3. The school should have at least 1 computer lab with minimum 10 computers or computer students ratio of 1:20 and internet connection.
4. Adequate facilities should be provided for recreational activities and physical education as well as for conduct of various activities and programmes for the social, cultural, physical and moral development of students and for safeguarding their health.
5. Science labs composite for secondary or/ separate physics, chemistry, biology labs for senior secondary should be available. Minimum size should be 9m*6m each, approximately 600 sq. Ft / students.
6. Separate toilet block for boys and toilets for girls to be installed as per norms. A closed container for disposal of sanitary napkins to be provided within each cubicle for girls.
7. Safe drinking water source inside school premises is mandatory. There should be minimum 500 Ltrs water tank for every 100 children.

Teaching Staff:

Small schools are a significant feature of the educational landscape in India, with approximately 78 per cent of primary schools having three or fewer teachers to attend to all grade levels. If the quality and commitment along with number of teachers can be improved in these schools, then aspiring rural children can fulfill their dreams of doing something great. Some government schools in rural India are overly packed with students, leading to a distorted teacher- student ratio. It is difficult for teachers to pay full attention towards each and every student. The pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) in primary and upper primary schools in India was 28:1 and 30:1 respectively in 2013-2014. The Right to Education (RTE) Act recommends a PTR of 30:1 for primary classes and 35:1 for upper primary classes.

Accessibility to School:

The lack of proper connectivity makes it difficult to reach school. Students need to cross the



rivers, dense forest and difficult terrain or to cycle or walk a considerable distance, through narrow muddy paths and wading across streams to reach the school. In difficult weather conditions, it's almost impossible for them to reach the schools. Schools in high reaches, deserts, far flung areas of North East and Jammu and Kashmir are often closed due to accessibility issues.

The Government has formulated a proposal for providing the road connections to more than 38,484 villages above 1000 population and all 20,867 habitations above 500 populations in hilly and tribal areas. A sum of approximately Rs.48, 000 crore is proposed to be invested to achieve this. With implementation of such schemes, accessibility is improving which will enable students to attend schools.

Separate Toilets for Boys and Girls:

Adequate sanitary facilities and water for hygiene are also lacking in rural schools. The health implications of inadequate toilets and sanitation can be serious. Girls in particular are pushed out of school if facilities are inadequate. Older primary-age girls are unlikely to continue at school after they attain puberty if sanitary facilities are poor or non-existent. "Swacch Vidyalaya Abhiyan", an initiative taken by Prime Minister, in this regard is proving to be revolutionary for improving the sanitation facilities in rural schools.

Electricity and Internet Connectivity :

Electricity and Internet are essential requirements to meet the high education standards. Electricity has not reached to the many remote areas. Frequent electricity cuts make it

difficult to use electricity operated educational tools in the school. Study says that only 60 per cent of schools have electric connections in India. Nowadays Internet has become a vital tool in education. Without an internet connection in most of the remote area schools, it can be difficult to use smart classes and virtual class room facility to provide quality education to the children. Central Government in Union Budget 2016-17 promised for 100 per cent electrification in all the villages. It will provide impetus to knowledge dissemination efforts in sub-urban parts of India.

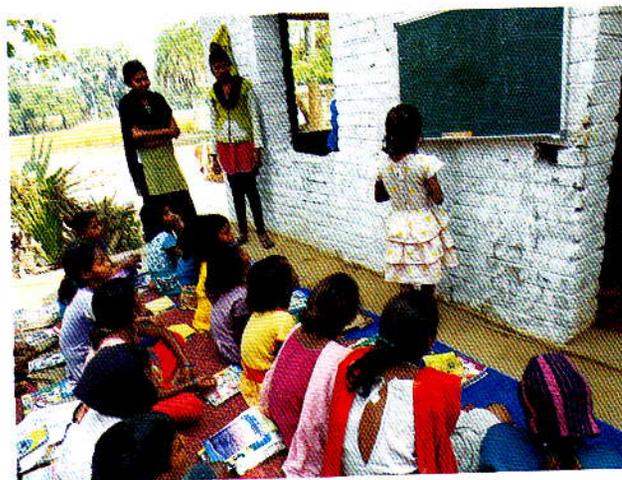
Poverty:

In rural India, people struggle to meet their basic needs. Their low income is hardly enough to cover daily supplies of food and shelter, let alone education. Children are needed to work in fields, which eventually mean that they drop out of school, usually after their primary education. A report by UNICEF estimates that there is a 40-percentage point difference in attendance rate between primary (69.4 per cent) and secondary (39.1 per cent) of students coming from poor families. In rural areas, 15.9 per cent of boys and 17.3 per cent of girls in age group of 15 to 16 years are currently out of school. If the rural infrastructure are developed to reduce the unemployment level and income of people is increased, people in rural India will automatically be encouraged to send their children to schools.

Infrastructural support: Government Initiatives

Education is a state responsibility, consequently, state and local governments provide more than 90 per cent of the funding for public education up to Class 12th. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) shows that 71 per cent of students are receiving education in government schools in the 6 to 14 age group. Beside this, Central government has also taken various steps to provide Infrastructural support.

- **Scheme for Infrastructure Development in Minority Institutes (IDMI)** has been operationalised to aid Infrastructure in Private Aided/Unaided Minority Schools in order to enhance quality of education to minority



children. The scheme will fund infrastructure development to the extent of 75 per cent and subject to a maximum of Rs. 50 lakhs per institution for strengthening of educational infrastructure and physical facilities in the existing schools including additional classrooms, science / computer lab rooms, library rooms, toilets, drinking water facilities and hostel buildings.

- In order to create a pool of quality teachers, the Government launched the Scheme of Restructuring and Re-organization of Teacher Education in 1987. The aim of this scheme was to create a sound institutional infrastructure for pre-service and in-service training of elementary and secondary school teachers and for provision of academic resource support to elementary and secondary schools.
- Cleanliness and Sanitation has been major concern of Central Government. On 15th August 2014, Prime Minister announced the **Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan** and promised to build separate toilets for 137.7 million boys and girls at 11.2 lakhs schools nationwide within a year. On 15th Aug 2015, The Ministry of Human Resource Development, the nodal ministry, announced that 100 per cent targets of building 4,17,796 toilets has been achieved, thus now, separate toilets for boys and girls have been made available in all schools across India. Sanitation facility has a direct relation with drop-out rates. But now with the availability of toilet facilities, we can

hope to improve education in rural areas, however, continuous efforts are needed for upkeep and cleanliness of these toilets.

- **Digital Literacy Mission** has been started for rural India with a target to cover 6 crore new households within next 3 years. Government's effective usage of technology for imparting education in the remote parts can be a game changer in changing education's scenario.
- Education has been listed amongst the "9 pillars" in the Union Budget 2015-16. Allocation of Rs 72,394 crore compared to Rs 68,963 crore for last year is 4.9 per cent increase. In 2015-16, Rs 43,554 crore were allocated for school education and Rs 28,840 crore were allocated for higher education. However, education sector budget needs to be around 6 per cent of the GDP.
- The programme like **Skill India**, efforts of modernization of the ways of agriculture, effective implementations of schemes like **MNREGA** and **Mid-Day meal** will boost the rural economy and in turn, will increase the education level and standard also. Government focus on skills development and entrepreneurship should decrease the poverty level. Allocation of Rs 1,700 crore for 1500 multi-skill development centers, target of skilling one crore youth in the next 3 years under the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana** and allocation of Rs 500 crore for promoting entrepreneurship among SC/ST will encourage more and more people to send their children to schools. It has also been decided in Union Budget 2016-17 to open 62 more Navodaya Vidyalayas especially in remote areas to impart quality education.
- As part of the Central Government's commitment to make secondary education of good quality available, accessible and affordable to all students, **Rashtriya Madhyamik education Abhiyan (RMSA)** has been launched in public schools throughout India. The allocation for 2014-15 for the composite scheme of RMSA has been Rs.5000 crore. 10513 new secondary schools have been approved under the Scheme, out

of which, 9239 new secondary schools have been made functional. Strengthening of 35539 existing schools have been approved under RMSA scheme in which 24581 new science lab, 30761 art/craft/culture rooms, 19510 toilet blocks. With regard to teachers, 107480 teachers (including 41507 additional teachers) have been sanctioned for secondary schools. Out of which 59353 teachers have been appointed.

- Some of the other initiatives for improving school education in rural area have also been taken. **E-Pathshala** provides Web-site containing 364 ebooks, 137 videos and 100 audios books. **Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat (PBBB)** focuses on early learning on reading and arithmetic in Class 1st and IIInd. **Rashtriva Avishkar Abhivan (RAA)** was launched to motivate and encourage schools and students in science, mathematics and technology.

Conclusion:

Schools are the temples of learning. Education transforms lives and it is mandatory to build peace, eradicate poverty and drive sustainable development. Students of rural schools are very talented. They know how to survive in even very harsh situations. They know amazing variety of things. Many children here have amazing skills - drawing, making cane baskets and implements, weaving clothes and so on. Thus, infrastructures have to be upgraded to provide all important forms of learning.

Ensuring quality education of all children especially in rural area is highest priority of government. Emphasis should be on providing infrastructural support to all existing schools and to ensure quality education rather than increasing the number of school. Needless to say that Government's initiative to provide infrastructural support has improved the situation. Effective implementation of its various schemes for the elementary stage and for secondary level will ensure quality education to millions of children in rural areas.

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