

Education in India

India's desire to take on the future will only come true by unlocking the potential of her people.

Monday, 05 November 2007

“The State shall strive to provide free and compulsory education to all citizens up to the age of 14.”

Article 45, The Indian Constitution (1945)

What is education? Have you heard of it?

Over 268 million people in India haven't. Every second illiterate person in the world lives in South Asia and every third one of them lives in India.¹ The situation is grim.

Literacy rate - 1 in 3 people in India are illiterate. Half of all women are unable to read or write. (2001)

Girl Children – The mean schooling for girls in India is 1.8 years (1999)²

Working Children – Over 13 million of the world's working children are in India, earning as little as 5 rupees/day.³ Up to 100 million children may be out of school.⁴

Dropout rate – 40 percent of kids don't even make it to class 5 (1999).⁵ Only 1 in 2 children complete 8 years basic education. (2004)⁶

Teachers/school – In 75 percent of schools there is only one teacher for several classes.⁷

Funding – India spends just 3.3 percent of GDP on education way below the international recommendation of 6 percent. (2004)

A QUICK OVERVIEW

India's population is set to increase by almost 400 million people by 2025 putting it at 1.4 billion, and possibly even ahead of China.⁸ By then, two thirds of the population will still be living in rural areas with an estimated 400 million below the poverty line.⁹ Yet, according to UNESCO, India will not meet its Education for All targets by 2015. Literacy is the key to unlocking the gates of poverty and showing people the road to a new life. In the 21st Century of Internets and mobile phones, change spreads fast and for children to even stand a chance, they *must* have an education.

Literacy rate

Of India's almost 1.1 billion people, only 61 percent are literate which means a quarter of all men and half of all women cannot read or write – the highest number of illiterates in the world. Only Sub-Saharan Africa comes close in comparison. There are more illiterate people in India than the people of America and Great Britain combined. The literacy rate in the Indian state of Bihar alone stands at 47 percent.¹⁰

The situation isn't totally bleak, however. Over the past decade from 1991 to 2004 literacy increased from 49 percent to 61 percent of the population aged 15 and above. Poverty has decreased from half the population in 1951 to a third at the turn of the century. Yet, political will remains intermittent.⁹

In 2003, India launched its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program to guarantee 8 years of education for all children nationwide by 2010. Whilst enrolments have increased at the primary level, UNESCO reports that teacher absenteeism, dilapidated schools and poor facilities have since made quality a major issue and at current rates of progress India will not meet its goal.¹¹

“Education means all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit.”

Mahatma Gandhi

UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

Universal Education means that every child, whatever her background, has access to an education. Let me repeat here, “every child.” As of 1993 ‘free and compulsory’ education in India is a constitutional right available to all children aged 6 – 14.¹² So why do only 60 percent receive it? Although net primary enrolment for India has increased from 78 percent in 2002 to 88 percent in 2005,¹³ less than 50 percent complete it⁶ and only 54 percent enroll in secondary school.¹⁴ Across the country, your sex, caste and social status greatly influence your level of education. Behold a work in progress.

Girl Children

An old Indian 'proverb' says, "raising girls is like watering someone else's lawn".¹⁵ It's a sad fact that boys are still valued more highly than girls. There are currently 933 females born to every 1000 males on the sub-continent.¹⁶ Females are still viewed in India as a bad future investment and millions are killed by their own mothers simply because they perceive girls as unable to care for them in their old age. Millions more are murdered because the family is unable to afford a dowry for the future wife to be.¹⁷

Where does it end? Nationwide, 4 million girls¹⁸ never begin primary school despite the fact that eight years education is a right under Indian law. 60 percent of all girls don't even complete class 8 and only 1 out of four completes class 10.¹⁹ The mean years of schooling for most women in South Asia is only 1.8 years.² After Grade 8 many girls are pulled out of school to marry or because further education is seen as useless.

There is a direct correlation between high female literacy and reduced population rates. An extra year of schooling for 1,000 girls in South Asia prevents roughly 60 infant deaths when these girls become mothers. That's pretty important with India's population expanding at 17 million per year.⁸ Educated mothers have smaller

families, protect themselves better from HIV and are more aware of their human rights.

"That is true education which leads to freedom"

Mahatma Gandhi (Ahmedabad, 18 November 1926)

Article: Barriers to Girls Education

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jun/edu-barriers.htm>

Out of School, Out of Mind

Nobody enforces compulsory education on the subcontinent and truancy is taken for granted. Over 14 million children are 'out of school' in India (possibly 150 million if we include under 19s)⁴ of which many are forced to work. India has 12.59 million working children, the highest figure in the world.³ The 1999 PROBE report showed that the majority of children out of school remained home to watch younger siblings or tend livestock but millions more are still employed in factories, breaking stones or knotting carpets, usually for less than the money it takes to feed them.²⁰

Education is a fundamental right for all citizens up to 14 years old under the 83rd constitutional amendment,¹² and yet only 60 percent of those beginning primary school are likely to finish it. The reality is that whilst education is compulsory, it certainly isn't free. Though endless studies show that parents want to educate children, millions of couples can neither afford the fees nor see the value in a mostly defunct school system. This is especially true in rural areas.

Success Stories 1 - Rajesthani girls in Rural India

<http://www.r4e.org/successstories1.htm>

THE ISSUE OF QUALITY

Dropout rate

Why send your girl to school when the teachers are never present or the school too far away? Will you spend your meagre income on a school where the blackboard is missing or the toilet a forgotten myth? What about the text books and the midday meal? Where will the money come from? Will your child even attend a school like this?

These are the realities of the archaic school system in India. Although primary school enrolment is high at 87 percent only 1 in 2 children complete eight years.⁶ Many students (mostly girls) are pulled out of school by their parents) due to many of the issues raised above, (14.4 percent don't even give the first grade a chance). In Bihar out of 16.5 million children, 5.8 million don't go to school. 4.2 million are girls and 1.6 million are boys. The dropout rates in some states can top 60 percent.²¹

Government Schools

For any Indian child wishing to excel, they face a government system hopelessly under-funded. A national study by Harvard University found that on any one day, one in four teachers are absent from school and of those present only half are teaching.²² Officially there are 40 students per teacher at primary level and 34 students at higher secondary level which isn't too bad until you consider that in 75 percent of schools there's only one teacher for several classes in a single classroom⁷ and class sizes in Bihar can reach as high as 83 pupils (2006).²³ (See "Bihar's Dilemma" below). Multi-grade teaching is extremely difficult to accomplish and unsurprisingly over 3 percent of all students end up repeating grades they failed previously.

[Why are Children not in School?](http://www.infochangeindia.org/EducationIbp.jsp)

<http://www.infochangeindia.org/EducationIbp.jsp>

From state to state over 95 percent of all education costs are spent on teacher's salaries leaving in some cases less than 1 percent to spend on everything else.²⁴ In India, the Delhi Government often talks a lot but only provides 25 percent of the cost of national education expenditure, leaving the states to make up the rest. Since budgets are rarely increased and with the additional pressure of Education for All, cutbacks are inevitable and it's teachers who suffer first.

Bihar's Dilemma

Bihar, home to the birthplace of Buddhism at Bodhgaya, is today the poorest state in India. Despite a history that harks back to the time of the Great University at Nalanda, one in every two adults were illiterate in 2002 - including 1 in 3 women.²⁵ High dropout rates mean that 4 of 10 children never finish primary school and only 13 percent of those who begin actually complete eight years of school.²¹ Making matters worse, a teaching ban on "full-time, trained" teachers over the last decade meant that pupil to teacher ratios were 100:1 in 2002²⁶

Teachers

The teaching profession is now in crisis. In some states like Madhya Pradesh, the state has stopped hiring fully qualified teachers altogether, preferring to hire local 'volunteers' (or Para teachers) on a pittance allowance and lower qualifications.²⁷ The UNESCO EFA report 2005 states that "*teachers are the strongest influence on learning*" but today many are viewed by society as lazy and low value.²⁸

With little money to spare after paying teaching salaries, next to fall are the schools themselves. Consider this. 50 percent of all public schools have no common toilet; 50 percent have no boundary wall; 85 percent of Secondary schools lie over 6kms from the average home; a third of all schools have no female teachers; 10 percent of all schools only have one teacher.²⁹ Could your child learn in such a system? Is it

any wonder that the majority of children quit school *themselves* as they fail to see the relevance?

The problem with public school attendance in India is not that people don't see the value of an education; it's that they don't see the value of a public education. Private schools are now flourishing across the country. Reading scores and mathematic results are typically 20 percent higher than in public ones. It seems only sensible that 16 percent of all boys and girls attend private schools, (in 8 states this is as high as 30 percent).³⁰

[Success Stories 2 – Unsung Heroes](http://www.r4e.org/successstories2.htm)
<http://www.r4e.org/successstories2.htm>

Rural India

In rural areas the literacy average is 20 percent less than that in urban areas and drop out rates much higher.³¹ Already in 2001, approximately 60 percent of India's national income was generated in towns/cities.³² Infrastructure in rural areas simply doesn't exist to allow local people to compete with big business in the city. The big cities almost always attract the most investment.

Rural India is also the most traditional and resistant to change and 72.2 percent of India lives there in 2001.³³ As far as education goes, it's a case of demand over running supply and educational infrastructure cannot keep pace. Disadvantaged groups such as low castes and tribal groups lose out the most. Due to their isolation, these people suffer in endless silence. Imagine yourself trapped in a situation with no way out, simply because you didn't know about it.

“As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities”

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO

Funding

The Indian Government faces a dilemma; how to face up to its responsibilities of Education for All and not pay out huge sums of money? Yup, by now you've guessed it. Topping the list of problems facing children in India, the Government is unwilling to pick up the tab – or at least prioritise the issue. The issue of funding and quality is perhaps the single biggest issue facing education in India today, for without it none of the schemes to generate social equality will happen and none of the thousands of schools needed will get built.

It is generally recommended that Governments spend 6 percent of their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on education in order to make EFA a reality. India spends around 3.3 percent (2004). The international community promised that “we will spare no

effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty.”³⁴ Currently the world is \$5 billion per year short on EFA.³⁵ Even with India’s ambitious Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program, financial commitments are still not being kept. What’s a child supposed to do?

Take Action Now

The sum of all this is that while the Government of India dawdles, wiping its conscience clean on report after report, people are starving, dying and living a life they didn’t choose. India needs schools, teachers need paying and children need support. The need is especially acute now that primary enrolment has increased and students are rapidly finding out there isn’t a secondary school to move onto.¹⁷

The purpose of this article is to show you that India needs your help. In many respects India is an ‘anti-China,’ run by the people and not by the Government. But they cannot accomplish this on their own. They need help, from you and from me, and *that* is the goal of this ride.

Success Story 3 - An Assam Case Study
<http://www.r4e.org/successstories3.htm>

WHY THIS RIDE?

In Nepal, I saw all these problems up front when I was an English teacher there. My school had only a few rooms and none of the ‘registered’ teachers ever showed up. Some days I even had to run the 100 student school on my own. Each day I looked down at a hundred beaming faces and each day I had to tell half to go home. It’s impossible to teach them all. The most difficult thing for me was seeing one hundred innocents wave away ambition at such a young age. Studies have shown that most parents want to give their children an education but often there is not the means to do so, (i.e. no teacher, no school bus or no school).

HOW YOUR DONATION MATTERS?

I’m setting out to raise a very real £100,000 to help ActionAid India combat illiteracy in India. Every day, ActionAid helps run hundreds of tiny schools across the country to give thousands of lives the beginning they deserve. The organisation has over 40 years experience in India, an expanding network of 14 offices nationwide and a great record of success when it comes to improving children lives and changing Governmental policy. Your donation will help ActionAid to:

- a) Build schools and support hundreds of organisations across India to focus educational support in rural and urban communities dominated by illiteracy and subsequent poverty.
- b) Help millions of illiterate children start on a path to a future of hope, not despair.
- c) Push the Indian national Government to make ‘free’ education a reality and keep educational reality sharply in focus to open the gateway to millions of innocents whose lives are shackled the day they are born.

- d) Work with regional state governments to establish child-centred educational programs, allocate funds more effectively and build model schools for others to learn from.

Further Action:

People who have an education have the means to mobilise resources, innovate and avoid the traps of extreme poverty. So please use your resources to mobilise now and help in the battle to make poverty history.

<http://www.standagainstopoverty.org/>

Stand Up Against Poverty and join a global campaign to eradicate hunger and want amongst the world's poor and keep international commitments to Education for All and the Millennium Goals alive.

Final thought:

The world is full of education mishap, but the occasional work of a few organisations and individuals continue to give us hope and help define the road to success. These are only a few of my favourites.

<http://www.r4e.org/success-in-education.htm>

“Real education consists in drawing the best out of yourself. What better book can there be than the book of humanity?”

Mahatma Gandhi

SOURCES:

All the figures used above are taken from the latest India Census 2001 and updated where possible using data from UNESCO's EFA Report 2007, which uses the latest Government figures to calculate country progress towards universal education. Please note that literacy figures taken from the EFA 2007 Report are for adults aged 15+. India census data is based on age 7+.

Official figures are likely to be lower than the real ones so only use them as a guide. Governments measure what they can see and not what they cannot (i.e. domestic or informal activities). Private surveys often get where larger national ones cannot and these have been used and referenced in the text.

Education for All is a politically hot potato for many developing countries and one popular in the media. Any figure lauded in the press or development sector, whether good or bad, could be from any time or source depending on the angle of the article. Effort has been made above to use only surveys that are well known and reasonably comparable with the Government's results.

REFERENCES:

1. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 - Statistical tables (P211) - <http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>
Note:
 - Census of India data (<http://www.censusindia.gov.in>) classifies literacy as the percentage of population “aged 7 and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language” UNESCO calculates literacy as the percentage of population aged 15 and above who can read and write subject to that country’s definition. See <http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>
 - At time of writing India has just updated its Census 2001 website and some pages from the previous site are missing and will be hopefully working in the future.
2. Source: PROBE (Public Report on Basic Education) Report 1999, P9. This is the average level of schooling for all women across India, including hundreds of millions of illiterates and dropouts (<http://www.ashanet.org/stats/PROBE.html>)
Note:
 - This is the Survival rate to Grade 5 figure for 1999, which is more referenced than the Government’s quoted figure for 2003 of 21.1%. The latter figure is also utilised by UIS, but the validity of this figure is doubtful given the sharp decrease in dropout rates between ’99 and ’03.
3. Source: Census of India 2001 Press Release.
http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page1.asp?relid=3525
Also see: Initiatives for Child Labour Prevention, Elimination and Rehabilitation 1998-2003 <http://www.isca.org.in/reports/3.pdf>
4. Source: Census of India 2001 – Out of School Children data
<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>
The 100 million figure accounts for Indian government data that includes children that have dropped out of school as well as those under the age of 19. The majority of children in India fail to attend Secondary school.*
5. According to EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 data tables and official data.
Also see:
 - India Vision 2020 <http://www.developednation.org/government/indiavision/education.htm>
6. Source: Global Campaign for Education – More teachers needed – UNGEI, April 2006
Last February, the Prime Minister of India said that he was pained to note that “only 47 out of 100 children enrolled in class I reach class VIII, putting the dropout rate at 53 per cent.”
 - http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/india_704.html
 - <http://www.hindu.com/quest/200709/stories/2007091450270800.htm>
 - http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/downloads/tech_motiva.pdf
7. Source: Economic Survey of 2003-04
<http://www.indianngos.com/issue/education/statistics/index.html>
8. Source: Country Projections India – Population projections for India
<http://countrystudies.us/india/33.htm>
In reality the population is likely to level off between 1.3 and 1.4 billion at a current rate of 1.1% per year expansion.
Also see:
 - a) <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/US/02/24/un.population/index.html> (CNN)
 - b) http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Projected_Population/Projected_population.aspx (India Census 2001)

- c) By 2050, the world may have 9 billion people and India and China will have 3 billion or a third of the total – similar to today.
<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/longrange/longrangeExecSum.pdf>
9. Figure taken by the Government as the defacto definition of poverty at the time. Recent Government figures place Indian poverty at 26% (2006) but these are debatable. Calculating poverty is a funny old game as no-one can quite know how it should be measured. The World Bank defines absolute Poverty as \$1 US per day and upper poverty as below \$2 US per day. This is the standard also used by the Millennium Development Goals. UNESCO states that 80% of India's population are living on less than \$2 per day. Source: National sample survey, 55th round. CSO; Feb 1997. Also see UNICEF
http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_india_statistics.html)
- Recommended:**
- A thin Indian Line – <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/mar/ddz-povline.htm>
 - Just what is poverty in India?) <http://www.sajaforum.org/2007/09/statistics-indi.html>
 - How old is Poverty as we know it? <http://www.infochangeindia.org/PovertyIbp.jsp>
 - 15% of the world's poor reside in India
<http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/mdgs/progress?gclid=CLfz3Lr60Y8CFQMFTAodvVwgCw>
10. Source: Census of India 2001 Overview –
http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_data_finder/C_Series/Literacy_rate.htm
- Also See:**
- One-third of Bihar's children do not go to school – Infochange India, 19 June 2002
<http://www.infochangeindia.org/archives1.jsp?secno=5&monthname=June&year=2002&detail=T>
11. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 – <http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>
 Though access to education has greatly improved for millions of children, India is currently not spending enough to ensure quality of education. Without achieving EFA goal 6, EFA will not be achieved.
12. *Unnikrishnan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993)* – Supreme court ruling on the right to an education under the provision of article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
- Recommended:**
- Deciphering Education Laws in India –
<http://india.smetoolkit.org/india/en/content/en/39421/Deciphering-Education-Laws-in-India-By-Yashashree-Kulkarni>
13. Source: UIS (UNESCO Institute of Statistics) – India Report Card.
http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=3560
14. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 - Statistical tables (P211-) -
<http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>
 Rate based on less accurate GER data and not NER data.
15. Source: Asia Social Issues Program – Health and Education NGOS in India
http://www.asiasource.org/asip/ngos_education.cfm
16. Source: Census of India 2001 – Sex Ratio tables
http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/fsex.aspx
17. Dowry – In South Asia, girls traditionally move in with their husband's family after marriage. A dowry used to be money given to the bride as her inheritance; sought of like her safety net as she moved on to a new life. Today dowry is seen as a gift, usually financial, paid by the bride's family to the bridegroom's parents at the time of her marriage – in other words the price of the bride. With the advent of the capitalist economy in British India, the poor now see dowry as a means to increase their financial standing; meaning that future bridegrooms are

preferred to future brides. Dowry is prohibited by Indian law (1961) but is still commonly practiced. Every year ‘unsatisfactory’ dowries cause thousands of deaths with usually by ‘bride burning.’

Recommended:

- a) Rising number of dowry deaths in India - <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jul2001/ind-j04.shtml>
- b) Dowry in India - http://www.indianchild.com/dowry_in_india.htm
18. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 Statistical tables, p267
Figure based on no. of female Out of School Children in 2004.
19. Source: Selected Education Statistics (2000-2001)
http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/downloads/edustats_03.pdf
Compulsory Basic Education calculated up to class 8 has a 57.7 percent drop-out rate for girls and 71.5 percent drop-out rate up to class 10.
20. Source: PROBE (Public Report on Basic Education) Report 1999
<http://www.ashanet.org/stats/PROBE.html>
21. One-third of Bihar’s children do not go to school – Indo Asian News Service, June 2002
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<http://www.newsweek.com/id/46822>
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<http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/aug/edu-secschool.htm>
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http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=35939&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
29. Source: Indian NGOs.com Recent selected education statistics
<http://www.indianngos.com/statistics/education.htm>
30. Source: ASER REPORT 2006 - www.pratham.org/documents/aser/Aser2006.pdf
31. Source: Literacy as seen in the 2001 Census – India Government
<http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2001-02/chapt2002/chap106.pdf>
Rural Literacy rates were 59.40 percent in 2001 as compared to 80.30 in urban areas. The 20 percent gap in 2001 is an improvement over 30 percent gap in 1991.
32. Source: Strengthening Urban Management India: Unlocking the Potential of Indian Cities 2004 – Dr. A Narander, 2004
 - In 2001, 60 percent of national income was produced in urban areas, with the total predicted to rise to 73 percent by 2021.

- <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/115136/sum/docs/sum/day1/Dr.A.Narender.ppt>
- One third of national income is produced in India's villages, predominantly in low-tech operations.
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2114/stories/20040716002009000.htm>
33. Source: Census of India 2001 – Indian Government
http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_Glance/rural.aspx
34. Source: The Millennium Declaration signed by 189 Governments from around the world and the basis for the eight Millennium Development Goals. -
<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>
35. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007, P102 – UNESCO has calculated that \$11 billion per year in external aid will be needed to help developing countries accomplish Education for All. Currently the amount forecast (including recent pledges) is \$5.4 billion, “less than half the amount.”
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