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August 2006

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/622/>
MPRA Paper No. 622, posted 30. October 2006

GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION - NEEDS **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

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ABTRACT

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. Education of girls therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of the girl child. The government has resolved to make the right to free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right and to enforce it through suitable statutory measures. Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has been accepted as a national goal since 1950. In order to achieve the goal, concerted efforts have been made and as a result, the elementary education system in India has become one of the largest in the world. The primary education enrolment rates of girls have a positive impact on economic well-being of women, their families and society in the long run. Since the mother carries the main burden of looking after the health of her child, how well she does this task depends on the knowledge and confidence that she gains from education.

While Universalisation of Elementary Education is the ultimate goal, no strategy or programme of action can succeed without addressing itself to gender dimension. Gender disparities are conspicuous in regard to enrolment which has grown at the primary stage from 5.4 billion in 1950-51 to 47.5 million in 1995-96 and at upper primary stage from 0.5 million to 16.0 million. The rate of growth of enrolment of girls has been higher than that of boys. But disparities still persist and the dropout rate for girls is much higher than that of boys at the primary and upper primary stages. Although over a period of time percentage of female students to total number of students increased but the gap is still wide

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between boys and girls and more so at upper primary stages. Girls have not been able to take full advantages of the available opportunities and facilities due to several socio-cultural and economic factors. Thus Universal provision of adequate educational facilities within easy reach of the girl child should be ensured. Active participation of Panchayat and village level committees are necessary. While such measures to involve people's institutions in the education process are welcome steps there is need to revitalise these communities. The participation of the community should be at all levels of decision making and from the very lowest level. Peoples institutions such as Youth club, Mahila Mandals and local NGOs should be effectively involved along with some educated personalities of the unit. Gender Sensitisation camps for community survey emphasis on girls education and other gender issues should be organised from time to time by NGOs with the support from NCERT, SERT, DIET etc.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to provide feedback in order to identify the problems and constraints in implementation. Community participation is essential not only to know how many but who benefits from education. It helps to determine which need and whose needs are met. It is increasingly gaining ground that the best monitoring system is one in which beneficiaries do some checking themselves.

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Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. Education of girls therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of the girl child. Efforts have been made over the four and half decades of planned development to enroll more girls in schools to continue their education as long as possible. The National Policy on Education (NPE) envisages that education would be used as a strategy for achieving a basic change in the status of women. High priority has been accorded to primary school education in the various five years plans to fulfil the requirements under Article 45 of the constitution for universals, free and compulsory elementary education upto the age of 14 years. Recognising the need for a literate population and provision of elementary education as a crucial input for nation building, the government's stand was reiterated in the NPE and the Programme of Action 1992, to work towards provision of education of satisfactory quality to all children upto 14 years of age before commencement of the 21st century.

The government has resolved to make the right to free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right and to enforce it through suitable statutory measures. Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) has been accepted as a national goal since 1950. In order to achieve the goal, concerted efforts have been made and as a result, the elementary education system in India has become one of the largest in the world. Universal access, universal retention and universal achievement are the broad parameters to achieve UEE.

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Advantage of Female Education

The primary education enrolment rates of girls have a positive impact on economic well-being of women, their families and society in the long run. Since the mother carries the main burden of looking after the health of her child, how well she does this task depends on the knowledge and confidence that she gains from education. Higher levels of schooling for girls increase children's chances of getting immunized and are therefore increase their chances of survival. Female literacy rate correlates with lower fertility and infant mortality rates. The mother's education appears to reduce the negative effects of poor community sanitation and hygiene. Educated women generally marry late and likely to practice family planning and have smaller families.

Education empowers women, it increases women's status in the community and leads to greater input into family and community decision-making. Perhaps more importantly, education provides girls with a basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and citizens. Having knowledge and decision-making power can place women on a more equal footing with their male counterparts. Education also provides people with knowledge and skill especially in the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and the environment. Girl's education is a necessary condition to ensure that development efforts will be sustained.

Gender Disparities

While Universalisation of Elementary Education is the ultimate goal, no strategy or programme of action can succeed without addressing itself to gender dimension. Gender disparities are conspicuous in regard to enrolment which has grown at the primary stage from 5.4 billion in 1950-51 to 47.5 million in 1995-96 and at upper primary stage from 0.5 million to 16.0 million. The rate of growth of enrolment of girls has been higher than that of boys. But disparities still persist and the dropout rate for girls is much higher than that of boys at the primary and upper primary stages. Although over a period of time percentage of

female students to total number of students increased but the gap is still wide between boys and girls and more so at upper primary stages as revealed from the table given below:

Table : Percentage of female students to total number of students at different levels of education

Year	Classes	
	I-V	VI-VIII
1950-51	28.1	17.1
1955-56	30.5	20.2
1960-61	32.6	24.3
1965-66	36.2	27.0
1970-71	37.4	29.2
1975-76	38.1	31.4
1979-80	38.2	32.4
1980-81	38.6	32.8
1981-82	38.6	33.0
1982-83	38.9	33.7
1983-84	39.0	33.9
1984-85	39.2	34.3
1985-86	40.3	35.1
1986-87	40.7	35.0
1987-88	40.8	35.5
1988-89	41.0	35.7
1989-90P	41.2	35.8
1990-91	41.5	36.9
1991-92	41.4	38.2
1992-93P	42.6	38.8
1993-94P	42.7	39.1
1994-95P	42.8	38.9
1995-96P	43.2	39.0

Source : Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education Provisional.

Reasons for gender disparities

Girls have not been able to take full advantages of the available opportunities and facilities due to several socio-cultural and economic factors because-

- (a) There is a general indifference to education of girls mainly due to gender bias.
- (b) Prevalence of child labour among girls belonging to weaker section of the society.
- (c) Social resistance arising out of fears and misconceptions that education might alienate girls from tradition and social values.
- (d) Girls are treated as *Parayadhan*-liabilities hence parents attach less importance to girls education.
- (e) Stereotyped role assigned to girls in society i.e. girls will look after the household and family.
- (f) Unsuitable and inflexible school timing.
- (g) Lack of toilet facilities in schools.
- (h) Inadequate provisions of the female teachers in primary schools.
- (i) Lack of awareness about importance of female education.
- (j) Non-involvement of community and people's institutions in schools education management.
- (k) Unattractive curriculum and teaching.
- (l) Lack of gender sensitivity of school teacher in recognising girl's education problems.

Action Needed to remove disparities

- (i) Universal provision of adequate educational facilities within easy reach of the girl child should be ensured.
- (ii) Primary education should be made cost-free through universal coverage of programme of mid-day meals, books, uniform etc.

- (iii) Opening of primary schools in every village and making women elected representatives of Panchayats responsible for ensuring enrollment and attendance of girls should be attempted.
- (iv) Dropout rate is higher amongst girls, still higher among rural girls and highest among tribal girls. Therefore special efforts may be made by the community and people's institutions to check the problems of dropouts.
- (v) Community and rural people's institutions should be mobilised to create a positive climate for girls education among rural people.
- (vi) Support facilities should be provided to parents to enable girls to continue schooling.
- (vii) Efforts should be made to sensitise the education structure and innovative projects with region culture specific issues should be developed.
- (viii) Ancillary facilities like drinking water, urinals and lavatories should be provided in schools.
- (ix) Mass media should be utilised for projecting positive image of girl child and gender sensitisation campaign for community should be initiated. The school teacher should also be oriented towards gender issues.

Community Participation

Community participation in public affairs goes back to the beginning of human society and the concept has taken new significance as societies have grown in size and complexity. In literature its origin can be traced to Aristotle. He was of the opinion that participation was essential to development. According to him the best state was one where there was broad participation with no class domination. The need for participation of people in different areas has been the central theme of many scholars. DeTocqueville, J.S. Mill, Robert Owen, Rousseau, Bentham and Karl Marx were great advocates of participation

of the citizen. The literature on development shows that followers of various approaches i.e. structural-functional approach, comparative history approach, social process approach, political approach etc. all emphasised the significance of people's participation in the development process.

Community Participation in Education

The District Primary Education (DPED) is another thrust area in primary education. The DPED is distinct from conventional projects as it takes a holistic view of elementary education, emphasises decentralised management, community mobilisation and undertakes district and population specific planning. It emphasises on building an integrated and locally relevant curriculum. A number of other externally assisted projects such as- Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Programme, Bihar Education Project, Shiksha Karmi and Lok-Jambish Project in Rajasthan, Mahila Samakhya Project and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project are also under implementation.

Mahila Samakhya Programme is a direct outcome of the commitment to affirmative action in support of women's education mandated in the National Policy on Education. This programme gives emphasis on community participation and collective mobilisation of women in order to change their own lives. The process of mobilisation and organising women is facilitated by a "Sahayogini". She is the crucial link between the village sangha and the district implementation unit of the programme. Vibrant and strong "Mahila Sanghas" or women's collectives have evolved at the village level thereby laying a foundation for women's empowerment at the grassroots. Women Sanghas have taken an active lead in the area of girl child education.

In Gujarat, Early Child Care Centers are being run and managed by committees of Sakhi, Sahayogini and Anganwadis. These Committees monitor the centres and mobilise local resources in cash and kind. In U.P. Centres called Udan Khatolas, Hindola or Buransh cater to children who have dropped out, never gone to school and to pre-schoolers. In Karnataka, some Sanghas are

running Balwadis with no financial assistance from Mahila Samakhya except the initial setting up and training to the workers. These Sanghas are playing active role in enrolling children into primary schools. The Bal Mitra Kendras for girls have been started in Andhra Pradesh to cater to the needs of girls. An important feature of these kendras is the focus on establishing and creating a sense of partnership and ownership in this activity among the Sangha women, parents play important role in selection of teachers, monitoring the centres and contribution to teacher's fees.

At present, 590 voluntary agencies are running 38,900 centres in the country, under Experimental and Innovative programmes, new strategies on a pilot basis for micro-planning survey training, material development, education for the disabled and working children health education, running of non Formal education are taken up. At present 41 such projects are in operation. In addition, NGOs are running District Resource Units for providing resource support to the programme. The Bal Bhavan Society of India through its Bal Bhavan Kendras helps the children to explore their inner potential by giving opportunities for expression of ideas through various mediums.

The 73rd Constitution Amendment aims at a three-tier Panchayat system with one-third representation of women, this provides sample opportunities to women in local governance, decision-making and development. Article 243G (11th Schedule) of the constitution provides necessary power and functions to Panchyati Raj Institutions to plan and implement schemes for socio-economic development including primary and secondary school education. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee has proposed a broad framework for education management in the light of 73rd Constitution amendment. A crucial feature of the framework is the provision for a village level panchayat standing committee in case of single panchayat and a village education committee in the case of group of panchayat. The Constitution of the committee was specified : the number of members had to be not less than seven

and not more than 15 apart from the chairman or panchayat member and the headmaster of the primary school, a representative of the Schedule Castes and Tribes, a parent and an Anganwadi worker were to be included. The committee was expected to have the power to check attendance registers and report on among the other things, regularity of students, teacher's attendance and school functioning. While such measures to involve people's institutions in the education process are welcome steps there is need to revitalise these committees.

Strategies for Participation

Participation must begin at the lowest level. There must be real opportunities for participative decision-making and community should be involved from the earliest planning to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- (i) A village education committee should be formed with the involvement of elected representatives of panchayats and other local level people's institutions. The school teacher should facilitate the meeting. The discussion outcome should be recorded by the teacher.
- (ii) Women elected representatives should be made responsible for ensuring full enrollment of girls in the village.
- (iii) An education register should be maintained and updated based on the household survey.
- (iv) The community inputs along with school inputs should be identified properly and responsibilities should be fixed.
- (v) People's perceptions about a number of issues related to school education management eg. time, holiday curriculum etc. time, holiday, curriculum etc. should receive due consideration.
- (vi) Gender Sensitisation camps for community survey emphasis on girls education and other gender issues should be organised from time to time by NGOs with the support from NCERT, SERT, DIET etc.

- (vii) The people's institutions eg. youth club, mahila mandals and local NGO's should be effectively involved alongwith Anganwadi Workers of the area at various stages.
- (viii) Gender Sensitisation should be on inbuilt component for teacher's training and orientation programme alongwith how to elicit local participation in planning and implementation of elementary education programme.
- (ix) A mechanism should be evolved to involve representatives of panchayatiraj institutions, voluntary agencies, youth club, mahila mandals and other local level institutions to prepare micro planning at the village, block and district level. Special emphasis should be given to elicit women's participation.
- (x) Monitoring and evaluation are essential to provide feedback in order to identify the problems and constraints in implementation. Community participation is essential not only to know how many but who benefits from education. It help to determine which need and whose needs are met. It is increasingly gaining ground that the best monitoring system is one in which beneficiaries do some checking themselves.



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