

India: Secondary Education Project
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
Equity Action Plan

Inequalities in Secondary School Participation

As the Social Assessment for the project points out, inequalities in secondary school participation are of several kinds: geographic, economic, social and gender-based. Examples of each type are given below.

- *Geographic.* Participation in secondary school varies widely across the states of India, above and below the country's average Gross Attendance Rate (GAR) of 70 percent. It is below 60 percent in the major states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar, but over 90 percent in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, among the larger states, and a number of the small northeastern and hill states (NSS, 2007-08). While the urban GAR was around 85.2 percent, the rural rate was 65.6 percent.
- *Gender.* The GARs and Net Attendance Rates (NARs) for girls and boys are given in Table 1, which also shows these rates separately by gender for Rural and Urban areas. In all cases, the rate for girls lags behind their male counterparts.
- *Social and Religious Groups.* As shown in Table 2, Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and the Muslim minority have GAR's and NAR's well below the overall rates, while these rates for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) approximate the Overall rates. Attendance rates for children from upper caste Hindu households and other religions are significantly higher than the average.
- *Economic Status.* Attendance rates of children vary starkly by economic levels as shown in Table 3. The rates amongst the poorest children are about half those amongst the richest.

Although the above discussion of inequalities focuses on attendance rates, similar differences are seen in completion of secondary education.

Table 1. Gross/Net Attendance Rates for Girls and Boys, Rural, Urban and Combined

	Overall	Girls			Boys		
		Rural	Urban	All	Rural	Urban	All
GAR	70.2	59.1	80.9	64.3	71.2	89.1	75.3
NAR	41.0			39.0			42.7

Table 2: Gross/Net Attendance Rates by Social/Religious categories

	Overall	ST	SC	OBC	Hindu General	Muslim	Other Religions
GAR	70.2	52.5	61.0	70.5	91.0	51.0	81.9
NAR	41.0	27.2	34.1	41.8	56.4	27.2	46.4

Source: National Sample Survey 64th round.

Table 3. Gross/Net Attendance Rates by Economic Quintiles

Quintile →	Poorest	Poorer	Middle	Richer	Richest	ALL
GAR	52.9	61.8	68.1	81.0	96.3	70.2
NAR	31.0	35.8	38.9	46.4	59.2	41.0

Source: National Sample Survey 64th round. Quintiles based on household Monthly per capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE).

Reasons underlying Inequalities. Both supply and demand factors underlie these inequalities. Rural areas and the backward states have insufficient numbers of secondary schools, distantly located and poorly provisioned. Improper functioning of schools causes students to drop out as, in parental perceptions, the ‘costs’ are not worth the benefits. Children are withdrawn from school as soon as they are old enough to be engaged in other domestic or productive activities. Girls are less likely to be sent to school than boys because of a lower value placed on their education by parents, communities and society as a whole. Other reasons include the social practice of seclusion after puberty due to fear of girls being sexually or physically harassed; preparing them for marriage, and so on. An interplay of factors causes lower enrolments among SC and ST children – poorer access to and provisioning of schools in areas where they live (particularly tribal areas); low value ascribed by their communities to formal education that is out of context and unrelated to their socio-economic futures; and social stigma and discrimination against them within schools, to name a few. Muslim children who have studied in religious may be similarly apart from the mainstream. Amongst the poor, the costs of schooling (clothes, transport, books, materials, etc.) and of ‘wages foregone’ are important additional factors underlying low enrolment and attendance.

Overall, the NSS 64th round gives the major reasons for children not continuing in education as: financial constraints, ‘completed desired level,’ ‘parent not interested,’ ‘non-interest’ in studies, and ‘unable to cope.’ At least the last two reasons point to learning-related problems – children who are weak in their studies may get insufficient attention in school to assure their progress. The Social Assessment asserts that demand for secondary education exists across all social groups and locations, including disadvantaged ones, and that it would be responsive to interventions. The recommendations of the SA are reflected in the Equity Action Plan below.

The RMSA Framework

The RMSA Framework that would be supported by the Project integrates a number of equity dimensions. For example, the vision for the program includes: (i) making a secondary school available within 5 kilometers of every habitation (i.e., geographical equity); (ii) providing access to economically and educationally-backward groups, girls and disabled children and marginalized groups such as SC, ST, OBC and educationally backward minorities (EBM, who are largely Muslims); and (iii) ensuring universal access to secondary education by 2017 and universal retention by 2020.

Its specific goals include “delivering secondary education of satisfactory quality to all irrespective of gender, socio-economic, disability and other barriers.” To improve access – i.e., achieve universal secondary education, the Framework proposes the following strategies: expansion of existing schools; upgrading of upper primary schools, particularly Ashram schools (which are located in Tribal areas); and opening new schools in underserved areas based on

school mapping. There is a provision to relax the 5-km norm in hilly areas, difficult terrain, and sparsely-populated areas. To improve equity further it proposes to: increase the availability of free boarding facilities for SC, ST, OBC and minority students; provide residential facilities, toilets, uniforms, books and cash incentives for girls; provide merit scholarships; improve facilities for differently-abled children; expand open school and distance learning facilities. Quality improvements, which could also help to improve equity in attendance and learning achievement, include: improving classroom facilities, labs, libraries, computer rooms; appointment of additional teachers, in-service training, and providing residential facilities for teachers, especially women. Communities are expected to make monetary contributions for most of the physical infrastructure created, with the notable exception of toilets and drinking water facilities. An important quality measure, which clearly also addresses equity, is to have bridge courses for students who have completed Class VIII.

Girls. The RMSA Framework states that the “Education of girls is the primary focus” of the program. To facilitate this, community mobilization (especially among educationally-backward groups) “to overcome cultural barriers,” women’s participation in the SMDCs, and the incentive schemes (to address economic constraints) are key instruments. A national incentive scheme provides a cash deposit to girls from SC/ST communities or those from special girls schools (under the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vikas (KGBV) scheme) who pass Class VIII and enroll in Class IX. The deposit can be collected by the girl when she reaches the age of 18 years. Other interventions include: boarding facilities and grants, transport (bicycles, bus passes), safety measures, and recruitment, accommodation and allowances for female teachers.

Socially-disadvantaged Groups. The RMSA also has a special focus on SC/ST/OBC/EBM children. The Framework calls for the participation of their representatives in plan formulation, and for the plans to specify how they will benefit these groups. The plans must have context-specific interventions for SC/ST children, which could include: Ashram schools, hostel facilities, SC/ST community organizers, teachers’ assistants, language teachers, special incentives, and so on. A number of measures are also suggested for EBM children. The Framework also recalls that the National Curriculum Framework “has suggested contextualization of pedagogic processes and creation of (an) ethos which enables all children to succeed irrespective of their social backwardness or gender.” To bring this about, the relevant resource agencies are expected to develop locale-specific supplementary materials to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, and teacher training is expected to improve pedagogy for this purpose.

Reform Context. These improvements are to take place within a context of reforms in the sector, including decentralizing management to improve accountability and performance; rational personnel policies; improving professional and academic inputs at all levels, including strengthening national and state resource institutions and allied tertiary education institutions. In addition to RMSA, the Government of India has a scheme to support NGOs to integrate disabled children into schools, and another to increase girls’ hostels in rural areas. Many equity-enhancing ‘incentives’ such as scholarships, clothes, textbooks and notebooks are funded by state governments (rather than the Central Government) and follow state norms, while the setting up of schools and recruitment of teachers follow RMSA guidelines. Thus, to improve equity, state and district managers must synergize the ‘school’ and ‘student’ provisioning schemes, making both cash and kind available in a timely manner, to ensure the effectiveness of RMSA.

School-based Planning. The specific measures to be implemented in each district are supposed to be based on extensive village and household visits, discussions held in gram/ward sabhas, and

plans prepared annually by schools, specifically the School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs), with the participation of teachers, PRIs, NGOs, parents from disadvantaged groups, women, and so on. School plans are to be aggregated at the district level, and district plans at the state level. State and district plans must set targets for attendance, retention, transition, and learning achievements, including separate targets by social groups, gender, and rural/urban areas. All activities in the plans are required to have a gender focus and to be gender-sensitive. These plans are to be appraised at the state and national levels. Implementation of the plans – down to the school level - is also to be monitored by state/national teams. The Secondary Education Monitoring Information System (SEMIS) is being strengthened to obtain good quality data from the school-level up.

Project Goals and Design for Equity

The Project aims to help India *achieve increased and more equitable access to good quality secondary education*. Hence, equity is essential to achieving the Project's Development Objective. The Project will support all activities in the RMSA Framework aiming at improving quality, equity and accountability, including a new Innovations Component under RMSA. As described above, the RMSA Framework aims to reach disadvantaged groups with specific interventions, identified in the district and state plans, and some special programs. Some specific activities proposed for financing are: construction of new schools and expansion/renovation of existing ones; appointment of additional teachers, in-service teacher training, building the capacities of local resource institutions, carrying out student assessment, provisioning of schools with libraries, labs, computers, etc., building the capacities of SMDCs, and monitoring, evaluation and research. The Innovation Component under RMSA will provide grants competitively to support innovations for piloting, as well as scaling-up of successful pilots. Equity is an important consideration in its guidelines for proposal preparation and selection (see below). Further, the Project is directed at geographic equity – even though it would cover the entire country, it is expected that resources would be provided 'disproportionately' to disadvantaged states and districts.

Against the above backdrop, the actions that would be especially important to ensure that equity is achieved in RMSA are described below.

Strengthening the performance of School Management and Development Committees. The process of setting up SMDCs would be aligned to the system outlined in the Right to Education Act, 2010. Wherever schools include both Elementary and Secondary sections, a single SMDC would be set up to develop and monitor the school. Where the Secondary School is a separate institution, mechanisms governing the SMDCs at the Elementary level would inform the functioning of the Secondary school SDMC, i.e., a common system would be followed by SMDCs at the elementary and secondary levels. Specific training and inputs would be organized for SMDC members to build their capacities to assist, monitor and enhance the quality of the school. Training modules on improving equity and gender equality would be developed in addition to those aimed at improving management and monitoring of the school. These modules may be developed by appropriate NGOs in collaboration with the NCERT or SCERTs. In states where the Mahila Samakhya program is present, it would be involved in the development and transaction of this module.

Raising Community awareness of Girls' Education. The project would encourage community campaigns, efforts with women's groups and associations, and community strategies that address

either demand-side constraints or supply side factors to improve girls' enrolment, retention and learning. Such efforts are expected to provide a more supportive environment for girls' secondary education, and may build on similar efforts in primary education. Similar efforts may be undertaken to support the schooling of other excluded groups.

Ensuring inclusion in the District Plans. It is expected that the District Plans would be formulated by key stakeholders, notably the SMDCs, at the school level. As described above, the Plans are expected to focus on ensuring the enrolment, attendance, transition and learning of girls and hitherto excluded groups. To achieve this, the SMDCs would be formed early in the Project period and receive the appropriate training to gather the necessary data, carry out household visits and village consultations, and prepare equitable plans. They would also be informed of the various equity enhancing provisions of the Central and state governments to ensure that these are included. Training of SMDC and PRI members would thus build their capacities and interests in planning, as well as their stakes in RMSA interventions. In Year I of Plan preparation under the Project it is expected that at least 50 percent of schools would prepare their Plans, which would be aggregated into the District plans; in Year 2, 80 percent, and by Year 3, all 100 percent of schools would do so. Similarly, those who appraise the District and State Plans would need to be oriented in the approaches and activities that would help to bring about equity.

Convergence of Schemes to Enhance Equity. As mentioned above, there are several Central and state government schemes that are intended to enhance enrolment and continuation in secondary education. These may be managed by the Education departments or other departments (e.g., Tribal Affairs/Welfare), and are variously targeted – for example, scholarship schemes are available for girls, SC/ST, BPL, or meritorious students. There have been various discussions within the government and between the government and the development partners about consolidating or bringing the various secondary education centrally sponsored schemes under a single umbrella – as has been done for primary education under SSA. The earliest this could be formally achieved is in the 12th Five Year Plan. Before then, there is an opportunity for consultation with the States in order to identify existing good practice and how the convergence might take shape.

Curriculum Reform and Teacher Training. There is a need for curricula and teaching processes to support equity – i.e., to assist students who have weak educational achievements. The project would support reviews and revisions of curricula that result in contextualization of content and culturally-sensitive textbooks, preparation of guidance tools for teachers to transact curricula for students who are culturally or linguistically unexposed to the contents of textbooks, etc. Pedagogical innovations that bring learners 'own worlds' into the classroom to familiarize them with concepts, terms that are largely in English, etc. To improve these approaches they need to be included in guidelines for curriculum reform in the teaching of all subjects in a manner that is suitable for each subject. Teacher training (in-service and pre-service) would strengthen teachers' abilities to impart 'alien' or difficult concepts in each subject, as a means of improving the performance of weak students. Training would also directly address equity by including a module on understanding equity and equality, relevant laws and students' rights and entitlements (i.e., non-discriminatory practices). To achieve equity in retention and completion children's experience of schooling is important, and teachers' behaviors and performance are critical to this experience. (Even enrolment in Classes IX and X is affected by experience up to Class VIII.)

Development of Equity and Quality Indicators. There is a need to develop indicators of quality in RMSA, particularly those that promote equity. The indicators could be quantitative and qualitative, relate to process and include 'markers of change,' and must be robust. It is proposed to pay special attention to equity issues, indicators and tools in the process of developing quality frameworks, which would be done by NCERT and NUEPA through regional and national workshops in the early stages of the project. The TSG could organize these workshops in collaboration with state governments, NUEPA and experts. NUEPA would develop appropriate tracking mechanisms as part of the secondary education monitoring system, and carry out trials before incorporating these within the system. Follow-up actions would be planned at the workshops.

Understanding Equity Issues and Solutions Better for RMSA. There is a need to improve our understanding of the issues underlying inequities in secondary education, and effective approaches to addressing these. The RMSA would undertake cross-sectional and longitudinal, quantitative and/or qualitative studies on specific related topics, involving NUEPA, NCERT, qualified university departments, research institutions and individuals. These would be interdisciplinary studies, large-scale or micro studies on specific topics such as:

- Understanding attitudes and problems related to participation in SE among marginalized groups, including the reasons for children not transiting from elementary to secondary education, dropping out or not completing SE;
- The impact of marriage practices, work, migration on young women's/men's participation in SE;
- SE teachers' understandings of gender, caste, class and community and how these impact their performance as teachers;
- SDMCs composition, roles and performance in promoting equity and quality in SE;
- The nature of classroom/school practices that are experienced by learners within SE.

Information Provision and Grievance Redressal

To enable broader public oversight of project activities, project information including plans, targets, physical progress, expenditure, project outcomes, and grievances will be disclosed through state-level websites. At the school level, display boards will post data on students, benefits from special schemes including those for special groups, names of SMDC members, actions to be taken for school improvements, and financial information, among other items, for the benefit of students, parents and community members (i.e., in the local language or languages). These mechanisms (as well as the Grievance Redressal mechanisms below) will be evaluated by mid-term (on a sample basis for each state) to assess their effectiveness.

The SMDCs are the frontline in addressing parent or community grievances, and can take issues to the Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samitis if necessary (elected village and block level bodies that oversee school education). At the district level, the District Magistrate/Collector oversees RMSA and is responsible for addressing grievances. The RMSA Framework calls for a Grievance Cell to be constituted at every District Program Office where complaints can be filed. The Grievance Cell will scrutinize the complaints, conduct special audits/investigations if

necessary, and send periodic reports to the State Project Director regarding grievances lodged and action taken. All the grievance redressal mechanisms would include respected people who are not part of the educational system so that issues related to teachers, school administrators, and higher levels officials can be brought to them.

Although the above actions will be stressed by the Bank in its implementation support activities, it would not be possible to monitor all of them. Hence, a few specific actions that can be monitored have been selected and included in the **Equity Action Plan** below.

Equity Action Plan

Area of Action	Equity Action	Responsibility	When	Monitoring Indicator and Plan
Community involvement: School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs)	Train SMDCs to strengthen their performance in ensuring all children attend school and monitoring teacher attendance Disseminate information on the roles and responsibilities of SMDCs	State and district levels	Throughout project	State level reports on progress of training and related SMDC activities
District and State Plans	District and state Plans include annual targets related to equity and identify how these would be achieved District and State Plans include coverage, targets, methods of convergence and monitoring of other schemes (in education or other departments) that support secondary education attendance and completion	District, state and national levels	Annually throughout the project period	Appraisal reports on District and State Plans Achievements by states/districts on Detailed performance Indicators listed below
Teacher appointments	New teacher appointments would favor those areas which have had a paucity of teachers in the past	District and state level	Periodically throughout Project	National and state reports provided to DPs' six-monthly implementation support missions
In-service teacher training using new pedagogical techniques	Training would cover "weak" teachers, and pedagogical techniques would include teaching of "weak" students (poor performers)	District and state level education authorities for ensuring weak teachers are trained; NCERT, SCERT and other training institutes (for pedagogy)	Throughout Project	National and state reports provided to DPs' six-monthly implementation support missions

School construction	New secondary schools, and primary schools upgraded to secondary would be preferentially located in underserved areas (disadvantaged districts and blocks) based on school mapping and SEMIS data	State level	Action throughout project; annual reports	Reports on locations of new and upgraded schools with indication of 'disadvantaged status' of district/block
Monitoring, Evaluation and Research	Development of SEMIS with the appropriate gender, social, economic, geographic disaggregation of data Research studies on topics relevant to equity	System developed at national and state levels; data provided by schools and aggregated at higher levels	Throughout project	Data on students disaggregated by gender and social/economic groups in SEMIS annual monitoring reports Data on schools shown by districts
Student Assessment	Collect, analyze and report data by gender, social (SC, ST, OBC, General) and economic categories, and school location.	National level and 10 states	2012	Availability of report with such disaggregated data.
Innovations Component under RMSA	Although equity is included in the criteria for selection of proposals (for 15 out of 100 marks), the number of 'winning' proposals that address equity would be the basis for knowing whether the innovations component under RMSA is addressing the issue through innovations/piloting/scaling-up	TSG Innovations Unit	Throughout the project period; six-monthly reports	Reports of innovations undertaken and completed, with the results

Monitoring

The Project's Key Performance Indicators include the Gender Parity Index. Its Results Framework also includes Detailed Performance Indicators on Outcomes and Processes, which are accompanied by annual targets for each of the five years of the project. These include:

- Number of girls per 100 boys enrolled in secondary school (grades IX and X)
- Number of girls per 100 boys completing grade X
- Share of SC in secondary enrolment
- Share of SC in secondary completers
- Number of SC girls per 100 SC boys enrolled
- Share of ST in secondary enrolment
- Share of ST in secondary completers
- Number of ST girls per 100 ST boys enrolled
- Proportion of schools with adequate number of girls' toilets.

In addition, the Results Framework includes several indicators each for availability of physical facilities, availability and quality of teachers, management capacity including SMDCs, and

accountability and governance of schools. It also proposes several relevant “special purpose studies” which could employ techniques to obtain information disaggregated by gender, social and economic groups and so on – particularly those on learning achievement and SMDCs. Monitoring of student learning outcomes would also capture the performance of students in the ‘General category’, thereby identifying the proportion of ‘weak students’ in this group as well. Finally, there is also a specific study proposed on the ‘impact of equity-related activities on improving the participation and learning of girls and students from SC, ST and the Muslim minority.’ Details of the targets, sources and frequency of reporting on these indicators are given in the Results Framework table of the Project Appraisal Document.

On the basis of experience with implementing equity-related actions and program achievements, the RMSA Framework would be strengthened during the project period. The definition of equity may be made more specific and the interventions that successfully assist in the achievement of equity may be promoted and the successful allied schemes brought under it as is already being proposed for the XII Plan. The objective would be to make clearer how equity can be brought about.

Implementation Arrangements

At the national level, an officer in the RMSA Mission will be responsible for facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the Equity Plan and other equity-related actions of the project, assisted by appropriate experts from the Technical Support Group (TSG). Similarly, at the state level, inclusion of equity-related actions and targets in the district and consolidated state plans, and implementation of these actions will be facilitated and monitored by a state-level officer, supported by the TSG. The state and national level Equity officers would be qualified social scientists with experience of implementing equity-related programs, and a commitment to doing so in RMSA. At the district level, the District Project Coordinator would have overall charge of planning and implementing these actions, and would carry out regular monitoring. At the school level, all schools are required to establish SMDCs that will be responsible for all RMSA activities – planning, implementation, data collection and monitoring. States have the flexibility to decide on the composition of their SMDCs within the guidelines issued by MHRD to ensure representation of parents, women, disadvantaged groups, school officials, and local panchayats.