

Understanding Human Development in India

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1986-87. The year of the National Policy of Education. The year of the 42nd round National Sample Survey. The damning NSSO indictment – 69.23% females in rural areas six plus never enrolled in schools in rural India. Drop-out rate for SC girls in Bihar and ST girls in Andhra Pradesh at primary education level in rural areas 100%!!

Clearly, the first four decades of independent India seems to have failed miserably in improving school participation more so in rural areas and among girls.

2014. NSSO 71st round. It also marks a decade and a half of implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for Universal Elementary Education. No difference in Net Attendance Ratio of girls and boys up to elementary school level (Class- VIII) in rural and urban areas, 99% children enrolled in schools, primary school within two kilometres of 99% households and upper primary schools within two kilometres for 86% households in rural or urban areas. Universal school participation has become a reality. The challenge of quality and learning remains daunting as a large number of those who enrol and attend schools are not able to attain learning and writing competencies commensurate with their schooling years. The late thrust on primary education and literacy shows up in the large number of households without any literate member above age 25 in the Socio Economic Census 2011. It also reflects in rising but still low number of graduates and higher secondary pass in rural areas as per SECC.

The last decade and a half has been a significant one for human development. Besides Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(2001), the National Rural Health Mission(2005) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (2005 onwards) was rolled out, besides a concerted thrust on rural roads under the Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). This 15 year period also coincides with a phase of high economic growth and relatively faster increase in per capita incomes in rural areas as compared to urban areas (ICE 360 study 2013-14). Increases in per capita incomes of poor households leads to some disposable incomes with households, so

necessary for better participation in schools or access to health services.

The improved participation of girls in elementary schooling, the increase in incomes, besides the strengthening of the primary health care system under the National Rural Health Mission and the role of the demand generating Community Health Worker, the ASHA, shows improvement in a large number of health and nutrition indicators. Infant Mortality Rate that was stagnating around 60 for a few years (2003-05) is down to 40 in 2013. Total Fertility Rate is significantly down from 2.9 in 2005 to 2.3 in 2013. Underweight children are down from 42.1% in 2004-5 to 29.1% in 2013-14. While these improvements are not significant globally, compared to where we were only a few years ago, the declines mark a significant improvement from where we were on primary education in 1986-87 or in health at the turn of the century. The financing for elementary education improved a little with SSA though funding under NRHM was only a marginal improvement in GDP terms in the public expenditure on health. Clearly, even a modest increase in public expenditure for education and health has significant consequences for improvement in gender equality in schools and in health indicators. Quality challenges require even greater thrust on removal of governance deficits and deficits in institutional development and the professional development of teachers and health workers.

The last one and a half decades have also been the period of women's reservation in Panchayats. Slowly but surely, women's empowerment is visible in many rural areas in the collectives of women under the Mahila Samakhya or the Self Help Groups under the National Rural Livelihood Mission. Literacy among women has grown at a faster pace during this period. Since the gap was large, there is still a long way to go. Many elected women Sarpanches are shedding their dependence on their husbands. There is a major social transformation taking place in rural areas with regard to women's role in society.

What needs to be done to improve the global human development rank of India? How can the process

be speeded up? While India is too diverse a country for any one common solution for all regions, there are a few priorities that need to be addressed in all States and UTs.

Firstly, credible public systems ought to be the focus of attention. This calls for reforms in public recruitment and public management. We need more managers than magistrates. There has to be a zero tolerance to interference in public systems. Schools cannot be seen only as election booths, and teachers and health workers as election agents. We need to devise transparent ways of selecting the ideal teacher and health worker. In fact, there is a case for incrementally developing a teacher or a health worker in remote rural areas.

Secondly, convergence in all the initiatives at the gram panchayat level with the institutional involvement of organizations of the poor, such as self-help groups and village organizations, is needed as human development does not lend itself to narrow departmentalism. Education, literacy, health, skills, livelihoods, sanitation, water, housing, nutrition, farm and non-farm livelihoods, women's empowerment, social justice, etc. has to be part of a common action for Mission Manav Vikas – human well-being has to be the end all of all initiatives for sustainable development.

Thirdly, there has to be a time-bound commitment towards adequate financial provisioning by Central, State and Local Governments for human wellbeing. Financing has to be timely to be effective and efficient. Health and education sectors require the countervailing presence of good functional systems. Public health challenges require public systems of institutional support and care.

Fourthly, accountability among elected representatives can come through a countervailing institutional role for community organizations like the women's self – help groups. This will also create the countervailing presence of organizations of the poor like SHGs/VOs that can challenge the monopoly exercise of authority by the elected *sarpanch*.

Fifthly, partnership with people and professionals are necessary for any public service. The use of information technology provides a rare opportunity for accountability and transparency. The private sector can actually engage with public systems to make schools, health facilities, skill initiatives, farm and non – farm livelihood efforts give better outcomes.

Sixthly, stateservices for management of human development programmes have to be adequately strengthened with new skill sets. Public management reforms for human development need crafting of institutions for development and regulation. We have to develop better teachers and health workers and skill them more effectively. Teacher training institutions and health workers/nurses skill development institutions have to become centres of excellence that facilitate the learning of skills for quality. Building institutional capacity for good teachers and health workers will help meet not only our domestic needs but also the insatiable global need for such workers. Education and health workers have unlimited global demand in spite of the role of IT and the internet. Thrust on these two sets of institutions (teacher training and health workers/nursing) has to be more central to our global eminence quest.

Seventhly, it goes without saying we will need to ensure very high rates of economic growth to be able to do all that we have outlined above. Growth in incomes of households improves their ability to participate in the schooling process and in seeking health care services.

Higher Education – Meeting the Challenge

Gross enrolment in Higher Education is a function of Secondary-Higher Secondary completion. It is also an aspiration of households struggling to get out of poverty. Democracy raises aspirations of the poorest households as access to learning is not barred by accidents of birth – at least in theory! Gross enrolment in higher education captures the gaps of gender and social inequalities in India. Participation of women, tribals, dalits in higher education continues to lag behind the other more privileged sections, in spite of all the initiatives for positive discrimination and affirmative action for the under privileged.

The question of quality is the single most challenge of higher education as the phenomena of educated but not employable is beginning to question the growing rates of gross enrolment in higher education. The very significant expansion of the private sector over the last few decades has increased the opportunities for access, especially for those who could afford. However, challenges of quality, equity and employability remain as relevant for these institutions as for the publicly funded institutions.

As India enters the phase of 'massification' of higher

education, with GER crossing 20 percent, clarity on a few policy issues is necessary. First, there is a need to understand the higher education, skill, employment linkage better as further expansion and improvement must address the skill issue. The massification phase across the world has focused more on the skills challenge. This calls for a well-defined credit framework for skills as part of the higher education system. Second, higher education will have to address the challenge of choices for students. This calls for a teacher led movement for choice based credit framework. Teacher led so that the concerns of academics are discussed and deliberated at the institutional level, faculty found to meet the emerging needs, and flexibility accepted as a principle of engagement with students over an agreed framework. Choice-based credit framework has to be driven by the academic world and it cannot be a prescription for unity where diversity will actually be the strength.

Third, expansion must factor the fact that there is a sense of elitism about higher education and it may be easier and preferable to strengthen many existing public institutions rather than try to start new ones. An institution takes decades to flourish. China's Project 985 where 39 universities were given the funds and flexibility to become world class, is a lesson to emulate.

The quality of leadership makes or mars a higher education institution. There is no going away from a rigorous search-cum-selection process for leaders of higher education institutions. Along with responsible autonomy, professional and academic led selection of University leaders holds the key to excellence with equity.

The challenge of quality requires a framework based on a continuum of accreditation, quality assurance and regulation. A 'standalone' system of regulation becomes arbitrary and unpredictable unless the regulation is backed with the evidence of quality and excellence, captured through a well-defined process of accreditation. The same parameters ought to apply to public and private institutions when it comes to setting minimum standards. Minimum setting of standards based on objective accreditation processes is the finest way to clear the crisis of fair regulation.

Higher education requires academic freedom to experiment and innovate. Universities must have the freedom to frame what they teach and how they plan for their curriculum and courses. Conformism

must be skeletal, with academics having the freedom to add meat to the courses. Duration of courses may also be a function of flexibility as long as minimum standards are prescribed. Regulatory bodies like the UGC and AICTE need to respect academic and institutional freedom in curricular matters. There is a case for these regulators to learn from the best practices across the world.

Mainstreaming skills requires engagement with the school system and setting up of Community Colleges that provide a bridge for vertical mobility of those with skills. Graduate and Post graduate courses in skills are a way of encouraging the emergence of Ph.D Plumbers and Carpenters. India needs them to respect skills and to develop the notion of learning beyond just the white collar thrust. The faculty profile of Tamil Nadu is a very interesting insight to its development. It is the only State where a range of vocational skills providing institutions (Teacher education, para medics, polytechnics, medicine, nursing, etc.) have replaced simply the pursuit of general BA, BCom, B.Sc. courses. This is needed in our Central Indian region where skill based expansion with excellence holds the key to reaping the demographic dividend. Skills in the higher education space are not only about Make in India. It is equally about the needs of the services sector, the teachers, the health workers, the nurses, etc.

Public investments must also go up as there are a large number of public institutions with excellence whose replication, setting up of new campuses, demand based expansion in States and abroad, will go a long way in taking the excellence issue forward. Just as we facilitate the setting up of Private Universities, we ought to find ways of encouraging institutions like the Shri Ram College of Commerce, Lady Shri Ram College, St. Stephen's College, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, AIIMS, IITs, NITs, IIMs, etc. to set up branches in many States. Similarly, public investments to remove gaps in physical infrastructure, faculty, governance deficits, ought to be attempted in reviving public universities in the State sector. There is no going away from a zero tolerance to corruption in the selection of educational leaders like Vice Chancellors and Principals through a Search Committee system that is transparent and competent. Leaders will make a difference if their excellence, integrity and academic contribution are widely acknowledged. Individuals do matter. Financing of State Universities must necessarily be accompanied by the much needed removal of governance deficits. An organic

relationship should be developed between Central Universities and Institutions (IITs, AIIMS, etc.) and State Universities and institutions. Central institutions must play a pace setting role and should be organically linked to State Universities and institutions. State Universities have land as a resource and it is indeed a big resource. Adequate investments in infrastructure, human resources, equipments, and management can transform them into thriving learning centres of excellence if accompanied by institutional governance reforms.

While simplifying the processes of setting up Private Universities and institutions, we need to change the management structure of educational institutions from mandatorily being not for profit registered societies to even being institutions registered under the Companies Act, with provision for reinvesting profits into the education sector. This would require a new law to answer issues decided in the Unnikrishnan case. Schools and Colleges are being bought and sold at high premium, but unfortunately, they are all not-for-profit registered societies generating surpluses but not making profits. This leads to fudging of accounts. Also, banks do not lend money for setting up educational institutions as they are set up on a not for profit framework. This leads to investors in education bringing in either their own/company's surpluses (Azim Premji, Shiv Nadar) or arranging funds through donations. It also leads to underhand capitation money, black money and corruption based savings getting invested in education as educational expansion is not bank funded. Encouraging educational entrepreneurs requires a shift to permitting educational institutions under the Companies Act so that they can actually make a profit and the enterprise becomes financially viable in the eyes of banking institutions. We need many more educationist entrepreneurs who can create institutions of excellence. We can always insist on the profits being ploughed back in education sector for some years.

Developing skills and school finishing life skills and competencies are indeed our biggest challenge, given the large youth population that is unemployed, under-employed, or employed with lower order skills and competence. This requires a societal effort to provide opportunities as flexibly as possible, in the private or the public system, to acquire skills that can be tested and certified and that industry or the service sector recognizes for purposes of employability. A framework of well-

crafted autonomous institutions on the same principles as outlined above will need to be set up for accreditation of vocational training providers, setting up of curriculum, testing acquisition of skills and competencies, interfacing with industry and trade, engaging in manpower planning and forecasting, multi-skilling, etc. Developing robust institutions is India's greatest challenge.

Good national educational institutions should be encouraged to develop twinning arrangements and partnerships with provincial educational institutions, to handhold and support, to build capacities and professionalism. Similarly, partnerships with foreign universities ought to be within an evidence based framework with a strong nucleus of national institution and faculty, engaging with a globally renowned institution. In addition there must be a thrust on getting good faculty from these global institutions as otherwise partnerships will have limited value. The architecture of regulation of universities ought to be reformed to allow greater evidence based innovations that promote expansion with excellence and equity.

It is time we thought through ways of retaining good human resource in the teaching profession. We need to see the evidence and develop frameworks that encourage the best minds to go back to teaching. Flexibility in eligibility conditions for teachers as Adjunct faculty, without compromising quality, can enable an interchange from industry to teaching and vice versa. Tamilnadu does that with its public health cadre very effectively. Besides higher emoluments, housing, an enabling environment, research support, will all encourage individuals to go for a 'reverse sabbatical' to educational institutions. A liberal policy for Adjunct Faculty that promotes industry-academia movements and generates inter – disciplinary thought processes, ought to be encouraged. Practitioner insights in educational institutions are of immense value. There is also an urgent need to weed out the incompetent, who got in through connections and takeovers, and not merit. Public systems need this major reform in public recruitment and service condition to enable a weeding out of deadwood. This will require new laws as otherwise they will attract the provisions of security of service enshrined in case laws. It is time we re-visited the right of individuals to survive at the cost of public exchequer with non-performance. Society gets adversely affected if we let it be. If we want

educational reforms to transform India, let us not put governance deficits on the back-burner. They are at the core of public systems, their perceived inefficiency and their development failure. We need to craft credible public systems and for this, we must go by the evidence to reforms public recruitments and public management.

Education reforms are the most sustainable way to transform India and to translate the large young population into a demographic dividend. With a commitment to raise public expenditure to six

percent GDP and by facilitating large scale private sector investments in expansion with excellence and equity, India can overtake China's rates of educational expansion over a ten year time frame. It is the best opportunity for a young India, an India that can provide the largest workforce to the world. High rates of sustainable economic growth and human well-being hinge on our ability to use education as the vehicle of national transformation. It is the only route to an inclusive India.

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