

SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAAN (SSA) SCHEME BRIEF

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive plan to provide free education to all children in the age group 6-14 years. It was launched in 2001 with an initial outlay of Rs.7,000 crore. This brief presents the salient features of the scheme and highlights its impact on elementary and primary education to date.

BACKGROUND

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the government's flagship programme to provide universal access to elementary education for children 6-14 years old. The scheme aims to improve enrolment, retention, and the quality of education to enable children to achieve grade appropriate levels of learning. It also aims to eliminate gender differences and gaps between different social categories.

SSA was initiated in 2001 following recommendations from the state education ministers' conference in 1998. Although the 86th Amendment to the Constitution enacted in 2002 made elementary education a fundamental right, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act that operationalised the provision of free and compulsory education was not passed by the Parliament until August 2009.

Funding The costs for SSA are shared by the centre and states in the ratio 85:15. In 2004-05, the central government imposed an education cess of 2 percent on all taxes to mobilise additional funds for SSA and the Mid Day Meal Scheme. In 2008-09, this surcharge was increased to 3 percent.

How does it work? The National Mission for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister has overall responsibility of the programme. It comprises of a governing council, which is the apex policy planning body for elementary education and the executive committee, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), which carries out all the functions of the Mission in accordance with the policies laid down by the governing council. The Mission coordinates with State Departments for Education and the Village Education Committees (VECs), created by the State Education Departments to manage the educational affairs of villages. Implementation at the district is overseen by the District Collector, Magistrate or the Chief Executive Officer of the zilla parishad. Social science institutes of national stature have been given the work of monitoring in states and union territories.

Ministry	Ministry of Human Resource Development
Department	Department of School Education and Literacy
Sector	Education
Goal	Universalise elementary education
Output/ Scheme Indicators	Enrolment Age-Level enrolment Attendance and Retention
Funding	Shared by centre and states
Year of Inception	2002
Expiration date	2010, extended to 2012
2009-2010 Budget outlay	Rs.13,100 crore

Table 1: SSA at a glance

Providing free and compulsory education is critical for reducing economic and social inequalities as well as inequalities of opportunity. Following a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of India that the Right to Education derived from the Right to Life, the 86th Amendment of the Indian constitution inserted a new article that deems education to be a fundamental right of all citizens.

In addition, provision of free and compulsory elementary education and elementary childhood care and education for children under the age of 6 were inserted as clauses in Directive Principles for State Policies, which are guidelines for the design of policies that establish a social, economic and political democracy. To date, however, only elementary education has been made free and compulsory.

MoHRD is also responsible for the implementation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme, a scheme that supports the effort to increase primary school enrolment and attendance rates by offering meals to improve the nutritional levels of children. The rationale is that children would be sick less often and be able to concentrate on lessons. Parents would also be incentivised to send the children to school. Recognising the importance of pre-school childcare in enrolment and retention at the elementary levels, SSA targets the 6-14 age group and relies on the Integrated Child Development Services scheme for the development of children 0-6 years old.

PROGRESS

SSA was launched with the goal of universalising primary education by 2007 and elementary education by 2010. These deadlines have been extended to 2012. At the time of SSA's commencement in 2001 there were 3.40 crore out-of-school children between the ages of 6-14. Four years after the launch of SSA with more than 85 percent of the funds utilised, 40 percent of the children (1.36 crore) remained out of school (CAG 15 of 2006).

Access The SSA guidelines stipulate that at least one primary school, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), or Alternative Innovative Education (AIE) centre must be created within one kilometre of each habitation throughout the country. However, this facility was not available in 9 percent of habitations surveyed in 14 states (CAG 15 of 2006).

Objectives of the SSA programme

- Ensure that all children are in school (Education Guarantee Centre, Alternate School, 'Back-to-School' camp by 2003, since revised to 2005)
- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007
- All children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010
- Universal retention by 2010

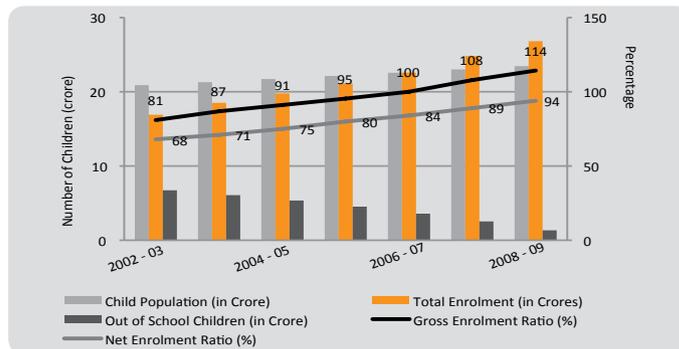


Figure 1: Child population, Enrolment and Out of school children

Source: www.indiastat.com

Coverage The proportion of children enrolled in school has climbed over the period 2002 to 2009 (Figure 1), even as the child population increased. The ASER surveys (2005-2008) show that there has been a significant drop in out-of-school children over the four years 2005-2008, which does not necessarily translate into regular attendance. Additionally, the net enrolment ratio has improved only marginally more than gross enrolment ratio, indicating the need to focus on ensuring that children enrol in levels corresponding to the right age¹.

Investment on education When the Constitution was adopted in 1950 policymakers agreed on the importance of providing free and compulsory education and made investments to improve the state of education in the country. However, it was not until 2000 that a centrally sponsored scheme was initiated to achieve this. The rationale for the central funding is to ensure equity in the provision of elementary education across states.

Approximately Rs.57,000 crore has been allocated to SSA through union budgets from 1999-2000 to 2009-10. However, release of

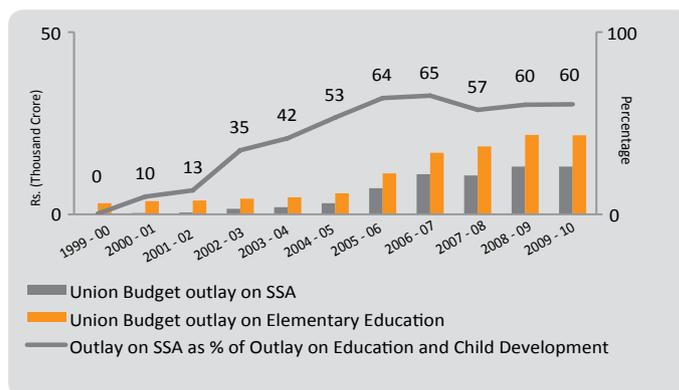


Figure 2: Budget outlays on SSA

Source: Union Budget 2000-2009

grants from centre to states has lagged behind budget outlays. The scheme has also spent less than originally planned since the budget approved by the Project Approval Board was less than what had been originally estimated for the activities listed. Budgetary allocations on the SSA scheme (Figure 2) started with Rs.10 crore, or 0.11% of

1 Gross enrollment ratio = Enrollment of primary students of all ages expressed as a percentage of the relevant school-age population. Net enrollment ratio = Enrollment of students of the official age expressed as a percentage of the relevant school-age population.

outlay on all levels of education taken together². While allocations are based on appraisal of plans prepared by State Implementing Societies, actual expenditures fall short of total funds available to states, indicating a disconnect between state plans and states' implementation capacity. In addition to the funds being employed by the central and state governments, the Government of India received a fund of approximately Rs.4,700 crore (USD 1 billion) from the World Bank's International Development Association, the Department for International Development (UK) and the European Commission (EC).

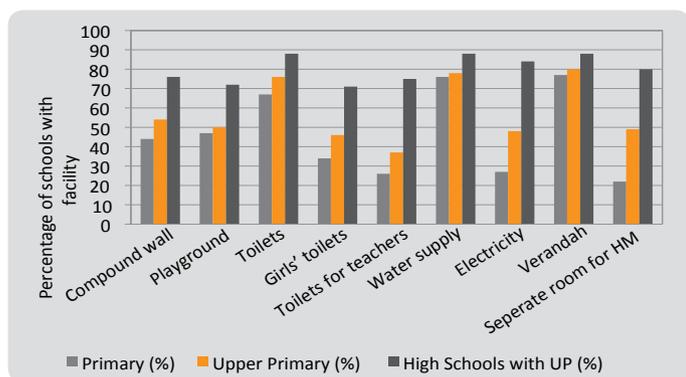


Figure 3: Infrastructure Facilities undertaken under SSA provision for civil works

Source: CAG report 15 of 2006

Development of school facilities Elementary education is predominantly a state responsibility. With funds being injected into the sector through central government funding, states are now able to use the additional resources to finance infrastructure facilities, appoint teachers and provide teacher training. However, the actual achievement of SSA has fallen short of physical and human resource targets, especially in key areas such as classrooms, distribution of textbooks, teacher hiring and teacher training. Figure 3 demonstrates the percentages of primary, upper primary and high schools with upper primary classes that have various infrastructure facilities provided within school premises.

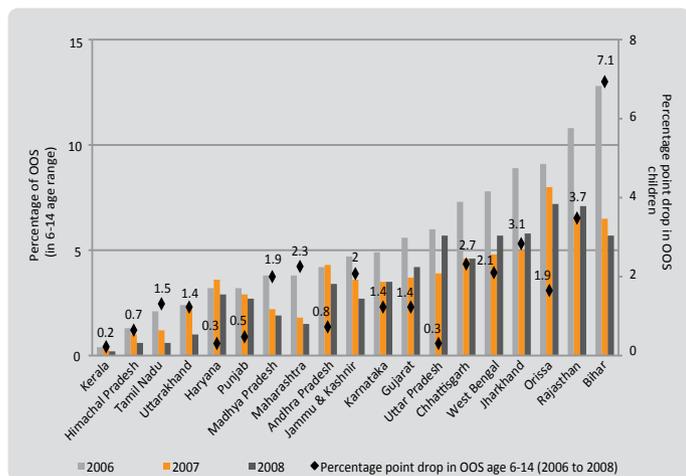


Figure 4: Percentage of Out-of-School Children (OOS)

Source: ASER 2008

2 MoHRD is responsible for elementary and secondary education, adult literacy, university education, technical education, minority education, scholarships, etc.

State performance Two of the poorest Indian states, Bihar and Rajasthan, showed the sharpest declines in the percentage of children out-of-school (Figure 4). Bihar, in particular, saw the largest drop of 8.9 percent in out-of-school girls in the 11-14 age group, which is usually the most difficult group to keep in school. It has consistently reduced out-of-school children in the same period. Though Rajasthan saw reduction of almost 5 percent in out-of-school children in the initial years, the percentage of truant children has crept back up. The top five recipients of central funds, Bihar, UP, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan received 50 percent of the total central outlay. These states, however, accounted for 70 percent of out-of-school children in 2005, implying the performance of the scheme in these states was not commensurate with the allocations.

CHALLENGES

Lack of attention to priority groups Educational outreach to disadvantaged groups and disabled children has been relatively limited, and the gender parity index remains poor in several states. SSA includes a grant of a maximum of Rs.50 lakhs per district

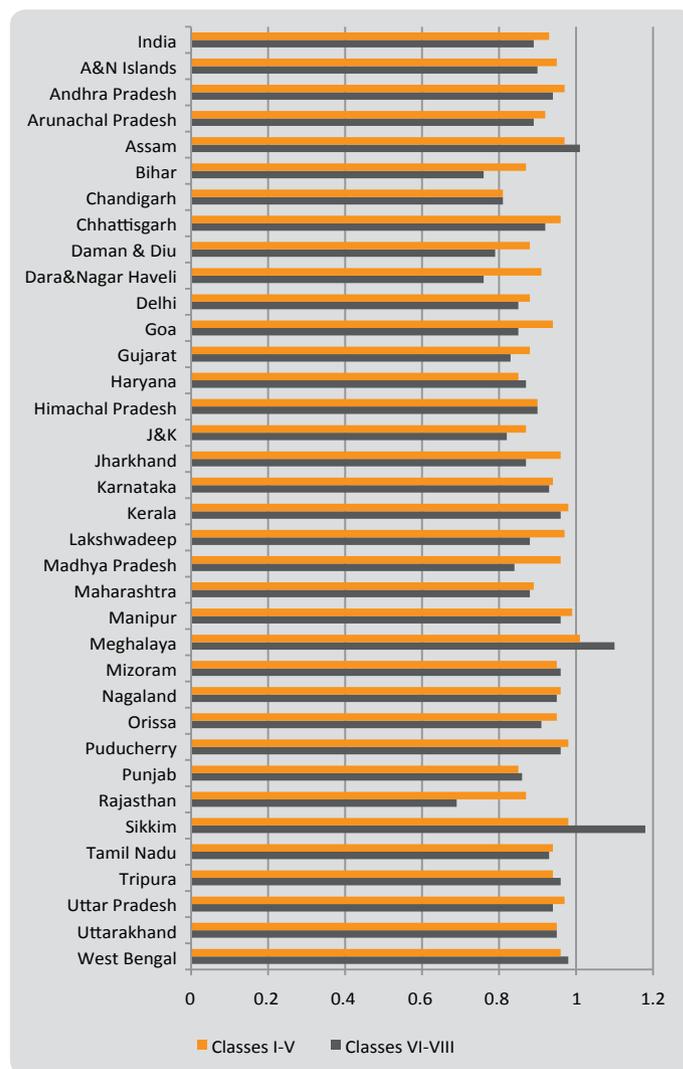


Figure 5: Gender Parity Index

Source: Elementary Education in India, DISE 2007-08 flash statistics, National University of Educational Planning and Administration

for designing and implementing innovative activities for girls' education, early childhood care and interventions for children belonging to SC/ST communities. The scheme also includes a provision for free textbooks up to Rs.150 per child for girls and SC/ST children. However, there were several states that did not provide free textbooks, some which provided cash in lieu of books, and many which provided them to ineligible students from the general and Other Backward Caste (OBC) groups. Approximately 7.5 lakh children did not receive free textbooks while 47.5 lakh ineligible children received them (CAG 15 of 2006).

Attendance and Dropout The average attendance in primary schools in the country was 74.2 percent among boys and 75.3 percent among girls with Madhya Pradesh having the lowest attendance of girls at 63.5 percent. The percentage of out-of-children who had dropped out of school (54.9 percent) was higher than that of children who had never attended school (45.1 percent) (Figure 6). This can be attributed to a variety of reasons including children being beaten by teachers, students not liking the activities, and students unable to cope with studies and events in school (CAG 15 of 2006).

Teacher absenteeism and deployment The SSA guidelines specify that the teacher-student ratio should be maintained at 1:40 in primary and upper primary schools and at least two teachers for every class in these schools. Many states violated this with ratios ranging from 1:60 to 1:130, while other schools were on record as having several teachers and not having a single student enrolled (CAG 15 of 2006).

Under-served habitations The SSA norms indicate that every habitation must be served by at least one primary school or an EGS centre. However, there were no schools in 11 percent of habitations, of which 10.2 percent and 12.2 percent were rural and urban habitations, respectively (CAG 15 of 2006). Moreover, the SSA guidelines specify that a school must be provided in each habitation subject to a minimum population of 300, or 200 for scheduled caste habitations. Consequently, scheduled caste and upper caste populations attend different schools and this, contrary to bridging gaps in social categories, further exacerbates them. Moreover, smaller schools are unable to invest in infrastructure

and other facilities. Smaller schools also have fewer teachers which results in schools combining grades to share common classrooms³.

Upgrading skills and infrastructure SSA provides for 20 days of training for all teachers every year. However, 53 percent of the teachers did not receive any training (CAG 15 of 2006). With respect to infrastructure, funding for repairs and maintenance is only available to schools with buildings of their own and can only be released on receipt of a proposal from the school committee and contribution from the community. Yet, these stipulations were frequently violated and the amounts utilised exceeded authorised levels (CAG 15 of 2006).

Financial irregularities Financial irregularities amounting to Rs. 472.51 crore in 14 states/UTs were observed, including non-adjustment of advances, loss of interest on funds kept in current account, excess payment of contingent grant, purchases made beyond delegated powers and non-refund of un-utilised balances (CAG 15 of 2006). Additionally Rs.99.88 crore from SSA funds were diverted for meeting expenditure not covered under the scheme.

Learning The ASER survey for 2008 revealed trends in learning from 2005-2008 for four sub-groups of children: boys and girls aged 7-10 and 11-14. The percentage of children who cannot identify letters displayed a decreasing trend over the period while the percentage of children who can read at least Standard 2 level text increased.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Review processes should include monitoring the status and distribution of free textbooks, infrastructure development plans that target converting temporary structures to permanent ones before spending on maintenance and upgrades, assessment of teachers and their skills. Ensuring community contribution and enhancing the role that local communities play could improve the implementation and monitoring of the scheme.

This scheme brief was prepared by Satyarupa Shekhar with support from Jay Chaudhuri as part of CDF's Centrally Sponsored Schemes initiative, which is supported by the IFMR Foundation.

3 Jacob, V, Kochar, A and Reddy, S. 2008. School Size and Schooling Inequalities. WP354: November 2008. Stanford Centre for International Development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.education.nic.in

Website of Ministry of Human Resource Development, the principal authority on elementary, secondary and higher education, and literacy

www.ssa.nic.in

The official website of the SSA scheme

www.education.nic.in/plan/niepa.asp

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration is an autonomous organisation set up and wholly funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to undertake and promote research in educational planning and administration

www.worldbank.org

The World Bank's website provides country-level information

www.dise.in

Software designed and developed by NIEPA for data collection, computerisation and validation for quality control of school statistics

www.cag.gov.in

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India audits schemes and undertakings at the behest of the principal authority. The CAG report 15 of 2006 summarises the audit of the SSA scheme.

www.asercentre.org

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is an evaluation of government education programmes that are facilitated by Pratham, the leading NGO in the sector, and conducted by a local organisation or institution in every rural district