

IDSJ Working Paper 164

Engendering the Education Landscape

Insights from Policy and Practice

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February 2013

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February 2013

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Printed at : Kumar & Company, Jaipur

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The paper focuses on analyzing the education landscape through a gender lens to map the significant changes and lessons learnt both at the policy and practice levels. It critically examines how gender has been interpreted in policy and addressed within government flagship initiatives in the specific context of the State of Rajasthan. It argues that the primary focus at the implementation level has been on bringing gender parity in numbers and a lesser focus on examining the unequal gender relations and transforming existing inequalities through education. In the emerging context of Right to Education Act 2009, the paper makes a case for giving centrality to the interconnections between quality education and gender equality.

1.0 Introduction

As the target date for Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches in 2015, there is accelerated activity in various quarters to assess how far countries have travelled in ensuring the mandate of Education for All. Both these international declarations have stressed on providing equal opportunity for quality education to boys and girls and towards bridging gender gaps in education in primary and secondary education by 2005 and ensuring gender equality at all levels of schooling by 2015. In laying out these goals, governments and international agencies have pledged that no country engaged in this effort would be hindered by a lack of resources (UNESCO 2012).

The reasons for promoting girls education are well-known and well-established. There has been a recognition within the global community that educating girls and women is an imperative, not only as a matter of respecting a basic human right for half the population, but as a powerful and necessary first step to achieving the broader goals of EFA. Development literature also outlines the wider social and economic benefits that education brings, including the specific advantages that education of girls and women bring (UNESCO 2003/4; Jha 2010).

In the Indian context, the National Policy for Education 1986, set the background for 'Education for Women's Equality' and laid down several milestones for progress. The efforts to translate the international consensus and the national policies into practice have unfolded a range of initiatives and processes which have increasingly dominated the education landscape. However despite progress made in getting more children to school, there are still wide gaps in educational opportunities between boys and girls and the progress towards achieving gender equality in education has been slow.

The global gender gap Index ranking for India was 114 and it continues to hold one of the lowest positions in the Asian rankings (Hausmann et.al 2009). While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling. Increased female enrolment is, however, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children across the states. Govinda and Bandhopadhyaya (2010), also note that the overall difference in the enrolment ratio between boys and girls continues to be at around 10 percentage points. The situation is even more disturbing at the upper primary stage where the enrolment rate for girls falls below 60 per cent. Particular attention in this regard is required in four states, namely Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The factors contributing to poor participation of girls in education is fairly well substantiated by research based evidence (Ramachandran 2003; Nambissan 2004; Jha and Jhingran 2005). The intermeshing of gender relations, location (rural/urban, remote areas), poverty, social disadvantage/discrimination, early marriage and poor quality schooling loads the dice against girls in both urban and rural areas and hampers their education. The interplay of socio-economic inequalities and gender relations creates a complex web that promotes or impedes girl's ability to go through schooling.

The present paper focuses on analyzing the education landscape through a gender lens to map the significant changes and lessons learnt both at the policy and practice levels. Firstly, it examines the various policy initiatives in the education sector to understand how gender has been interpreted within these policies. Secondly, it critically analyses how gender concerns have been addressed and mainstreamed within government flagship initiatives in the specific context of the State of Rajasthan. The paper argues that efforts towards mainstreaming gender in education have largely focused on enhancing access and achieving gender parity in numbers. Schooling environment and classroom practices have not focused on critical examination of unequal gender relation and challenging structures that perpetuate gender subordination.

2.0 Policies on Education : An Overview

The main policy text and framework that has informed and guided educational planning in India over three decades has been the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. When the NPE was announced it was seen as a 'far reaching document', a departure from routine policy pronouncements. The NPE was structured around the themes of education for equality, educational reorganization, technical and management education, reorienting the content and process of education, teacher training and management of education and resources. The policy called for removal of disparities in education and programmes for education of girls and women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other educationally backward sections and areas.

The NPE laid stress on 'Education for Equality' by removal of disparities and equalising educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. The policy states that 'education will be used as an agent for basic change in the status of women and also as a means of transforming existing inequalities. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women.'

(GOI 1986: 6). It placed gender equality through education as a social and political commitment of the State and has continued to guide advocacy efforts for women and girls education.

As a resultant of NPE, several initiatives committed to girls' education gained momentum in different States in the late 1980's and early 1990s. These included the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (1987), Shikshakarmi Project (1987), Mahila Samakhya (1989), Bihar Education Project, Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (1990), Lok Jumbish (1992). Later, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) set the goals for reducing gender disparities in enrolment, retention and learning.

In the context of Rajasthan, the two significant interventions post-NPE that contributed extensively to the understanding of education processes for the most marginalized and disadvantaged especially girls include the Shikshakarmi Project (SKP) and the Lok Jumbish Project (LJ). Both these programmes also demonstrated the importance of building up women's capacities and skills and giving them positions of responsibility within the wider education intervention.

The Shikshakarmi project was started in 1987 as an innovative educational intervention to address factors sustaining the educational backwardness in the State of Rajasthan. The stated objective of the project was - to revitalise primary education and expand its outreach to the remote villages in the state by addressing problems affecting primary education, i.e., teacher absenteeism, low enrollment and high dropout rate especially of girls. The crucial innovation in SKP was identifying local women and men (with some minimal qualifications) called Shikshakarmis (education workers/ SKs), who after systematic training could teach children in the defunct primary schools and ensure that all children become a part of the educational process. The strategies that evolved within SKP to increase the participation of girls in the educational process included- appointment of Mahila shikshakarmis (MSK/Women teachers), setting up of Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (MPK/Training Centres for Women), starting Angan Pathshalas (Courtyard Schools), appointment of Mahila Sahyogis (Women Escorts) and setting up the Mahila Task Force. The project through its different phases gave an impetus to girl's education. The emergence of a cadre of Mahila shikshakarmis (women teachers) in a feudal State was a significant step as it facilitated the entry of women in the public domain to participate in the education processes (Rajagopal 1999).

Similarly, the Lok Jumbish project was also a State initiated endeavor with an announced agenda of promoting gender equality - both as an objective as well as an all pervasive strategy. The Adhyapika Manch (Forums for women teachers), Balika Shikshan Shivirs (Residential camps for adolescents), Women's Residential Institute for Training and Education (WRITE) and training women's groups were key strategies to address issues of gender inequality. The assumption running through LJ management was that shifts in gender attitudes have to be created and nurtured at all levels of the planned intervention (Jain 2003).

Many learning's from the above projects were incorporated in subsequent national initiatives i.e. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The DPEP launched in 1994 also focused on girls and children belonging to socially deprived and

economically backward sections of society. The impact of DPEP on a range of performance indicators suggested that disparities in enrollment and retention were reduced the most in those districts with the lowest female literacy levels (Little 2010). However Jha, (2010) stresses that while DPEP brought the notions of gender review of textbooks, gender sensitisation of teachers and other such interventions into the discourse, it did not succeed in making gender an integral aspect of all interventions including those meant for quality.

2.1 National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005

Another significant policy initiative with far reaching implications has been the drafting of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005. The framework reiterated that gender had to be recognised as a crosscutting issue and critical marker of transformation and that there was a need to understand heterogeneous gendered realities. The position paper on 'Gender issues in education' clearly articulates that " when education is viewed in terms of its transformative potential as a social intervention that works towards examining social realities, then it becomes the single most powerful process for redressing the inequities of gender. It can facilitate the forging of new values and forms of society that would enable both women and men to develop human capacities to their fullest. An empowering education shares with gender a common project- presenting images of that which is not yet- thereby moving from the given to realizing new ways of imagining the future" (National Council for Education, Research and Training 2006).

In Rajasthan earlier attempts at curriculum reform post NCF -2005 did not bring about major changes. The exercise of curriculum development and textbook revision was taken up as a routine activity and several forms of resistance came up (Diwan 2009). A review of textbooks carried out revealed that the efforts to weave in a gender perspective in the textbooks had only led to 'token 'shifts. Most of the textbook writers were male. Only the textbooks of Hindi and English language had been authored by women writers. The under representation of women was also clearly evident in all the textbooks across subjects. There had been very little effort to depict women in non-traditional roles and portray them as capable of making choices. Men continued to dominate the texts both as writers, protagonists. The textbooks were replete with traditional meanings of masculinity and femininity (Rajagopal 2009).

The Government of Rajasthan in 2010, decided to adopt NCERT textbooks at the upper primary stage and higher stages of schooling and renewed efforts towards curricular reform in accordance with NCF, 2005 and RTE Act 2009 were initiated. The tasks of revising curriculum, textbook development for elementary schools and teacher education curriculum were initiated by State Institute of Education, Research and Training (SIERT) in Rajasthan. A steering committee has been constituted by the State to closely monitor the textbook reform process, drawing on national and state level expertise. While several consultations have been organized, it needs to be reiterated here that the reform process must not view gender in isolation from other hierarchies and asymmetries within society. A gender just curriculum ought to have the potential to engage with and challenge received knowledge about fixed gender identities and needs to be critical to the content of different subjects.

Some of the new textbooks have been put into circulation in the academic session 2012-2013. While these efforts are expected to enhance the quality of education in the schools, it should also entail that teacher training focuses on making classroom transactions gender sensitive.

2.2 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009

The passing of the Right to Education Act has been heralded as a significant step for realising the goal of providing education of quality for all those children who continue to be left out of mainstream education. The RTE Act provides a justiciable legal framework that entitles all children between the ages of 6-14 years to an education of reasonable quality, based on principles of equity and non-discrimination. This legislation lays down a time bound agenda to address some of the long pending gaps in the educational system. It is hoped that the public delivery system would respond to the needs of these children with a fair degree of sensitivity and responsibility. With the coming of the RTE the education discourse has moved from education being of instrumental value to education as a right and entitlement.

The RTE in different sections makes reference to gender and girls' education both explicitly and implicitly. According to Jha (2010), despite the fact that the RTE does not include gender concerns explicitly, the commitments made under the Act are significant for promoting gender equality in education provided they are interpreted and acted upon with sincerity and a sense of urgency. The Act for the first time provides a child's perspective in defining rights and articulating the norms of a single school. A number of general provisions ensured under the Act have special significance for girls. The absence of overt gender reference puts greater responsibility on all those involved in making it a reality, to consciously use it to promote gender equality.

The progress towards making the education system RTE compliant within the stipulated time period of three years continues to be challenging. To cite the case of Rajasthan, State rules have been notified and the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) has been set up. The role of SIERT as an academic authority has been declared. The State has piloted Comprehensive Continuous Evaluation (CCE) in select schools and has initiated curricular reform. School Management Committees have been constituted in all schools. A Child Tracking Survey was also carried out in 2010 to map the out of school children in the state. The official estimate of out of school children now stands at about 1.2 million children in Rajasthan with the percentage of girls being 12.98 per cent (Government of Rajasthan 2011)

However, two years after the promulgation of the RTE Act, several crucial issues like teacher recruitment and appointment, age appropriate admissions and special training for out of school children, improving quality and reservation of seats for economically weaker and socially disadvantaged children and monitoring of RTE are areas which need to be addressed systematically and with a gender perspective.

Evidence from the field suggests that information regarding RTE continues to be partial. Teachers are not fully aware of the details related to their duties and responsibilities. While School Management Committees (SMCs) have been constituted in all the schools, the involvement of SMC members (especially women), in the school governance continues to be limited. The

participation of parents from the most disadvantaged groups is also negligible (Institute of Development Studies, 2011).

While RTE provides for free education to all children, its success in achieving gender equality would be visible only if there were concerted efforts from all quarters on removing gender discrimination at all levels. In the absence of coordinated efforts even a well intentioned legislation may not help children from disadvantaged and marginalized groups especially girls to complete their schooling cycles. It is evident that the institutional structures would need to gear up to the paradigm shifts envisaged and demands raised by RTE.

The various policy directives discussed above have envisioned the need to bridge the gender gaps at different levels of schooling and make educational processes egalitarian. However several challenges persist. In a social context where cultural practices and attitudes are biased against the girls ensuring gender and social equity in education is difficult. It is also evident that schooling processes have not been able to influence deep seated gendered beliefs and practices leading to transforming traditional gender relations. The major challenge is how to deliver gender just quality education given the diversity of conditions under which elementary education is provided and demanded in India and the State.

3.0 Addressing Gender Inequality: Evidence From the Field

The State of Rajasthan, the largest state in India is situated in the northwest of the country. It is characterized by several pan Indian features i.e -a caste based hierarchical social structure, high degree of gender inequality, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, low literacy and high infant mortality rates. It also forms part of Eight Empowered action group states alongwith Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Orissa and has been traditionally identified as a state ranking low on human development.

The Census of India, 2011 shows that the overall sex ratio in the State improved from 921 to 926 over the last decade. This is the highest recorded for the state since 1901 though it continues to be below the national average of 940. On the other hand, the extent of gender inequality and discrimination against the girl child is borne out by a steep decline in child sex ratios. The Census figures also reveal an alarming drop in sex ratio in the 0-6 age group from 909 in 2001 to 883 in 2011. This decline of 26 points is an extremely distressing trend. This consequently would have a direct impact on the number of girls entering the pre-primary and primary schooling systems in the State in the next few years.

3.1 Literacy and School Education

The literacy and education profile of Rajasthan has been changing, albeit at a slow pace. Gender disparities are sharply evident in the entire education continuum. The Census, 2011 indicates that there has been an increase in the number of literates in the State between the inter census period. The overall literacy rate grew from 60.41 percent in 2001 to 67.06 per cent in 2011. The male and female literacy rates have also improved from 75.70 per cent to 80.51 per cent among men and 43.85 per cent to 52.66 percent among women respectively. However, the state

continues to be below the national average and rates third from the bottom with respect to overall literacy.

Rajasthan has recorded the lowest female literacy rate which is also far below the national average of (65.46 per cent). While the gender gap in literacy at the national level was recorded at 16.68 per cent, Rajasthan continues to show high male-female differentials in literacy at 27.85 per cent which is also the highest gender differential among the states. There are still 17 districts in Rajasthan, where female literacy is below 50 per cent.

In the context of school education, the state has primarily followed an agenda based on national policies and programmes, with a few state specific programmes-mainly the Shikshakarmi Project (1987), Lok Jumbish (1992) and Rajiv Gandhi Pathshlas (1990). Following the national mandate of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), there has been considerable expansion in the number of schools in the past two decades and official claims indicate that all habitations have been provided with a primary school. However, according to the report of the Planning Commission (2010) in terms of accessibility to upper primary schools in the neighborhood of habitations, it was observed that 50 percent of villages in Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had only single primary schools and no upper primary schools.

The State Elementary Education Report Card (2010-2011), notes that there are a total of 105190 schools functioning in the state. Of these 78,460 are government schools. The total number of teachers working in the state in government schools is 271733 (194731 male and 77002 female). Out of the total government elementary schools only 44.46 percent schools have women teachers. The percentage of women teachers goes down sharply when we move from elementary to secondary education. 28.75 percent of secondary schools do not even have one woman teacher and most of these schools are located in the rural areas.

The total enrollment in these schools is 714 million children (35,70058 boys and 35,63761 girls). The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is reported to be 116.01percent at the primary level and 76.9 percent at the Upper Primary level. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at the primary level is 87.3 percent and 55.0 percent at the upper primary level (State report Card 2010-2011). High GER at the primary level however, indicates the presence of overage and under age children. The NER gives a clear indication that a lot of ground needs to be covered. (National University of Education Planning and Administration 2010, accessed at <http://schoolreportcards.in>)

In Rajasthan, girls constitute 46.17 percent of the total enrolment in rural areas at the elementary stages. Even though the state government has put in place various incentives to promote education of girls i.e. free textbooks, transport vouchers, scholarships, the gender gaps at 8.22 percent at the elementary level continues to be challenging. The gender gap among Scheduled Caste (SC) is 8.38 per cent and among Scheduled Tribe (ST) is 9.59 per cent. The gender gap among Muslim minority is 9.96 per cent. According to the Annual Survey of Education Report the proportion of girls in the age group 11-14 years who are not in school has reduced from 19.6 per cent in 2006 to 8.9 percent in 2011(Pratham 2011).

There is also ample evidence to show that dimensions of caste, class, location intersect with gender leading to multiple forms of disadvantage. Ramachandran (2003) points to the supply

side factors that push girls out of school. On the demand side, participation in household chores, concerns about safety, and social norms that promote early marriage for girls are powerful contributory factors. While there is evidence of growing parental interest in education in the state, there is a distinct gender difference in the educational aspirations for boys and girls.

Yousouf et al (2007), note that in large part, Dalit and Adivasi girls in both rural and urban schools in Rajasthan usually dropped out of school by the end of middle school, if not earlier. After leaving school they largely confine themselves to household chores and although their dropping out can be linked to their impending marriage and the concomitant lack of schooled skills required for their future lives, most Dalit parents spoke of how they might have continued with their daughters' schooling if there were a single-sex school for girls available. Nambisan (2010) in her study of rural and urban youth also argues that caste and gender identities intersect to make the schooling of Dalit girls relatively more at risk than that of boys.

Samson et al (2008), point out that high proportions of girls in the 11-14 and 15-18 years were never enrolled in Rajasthan. Late enrolment was common so a considerable proportion of those enrolled in school were overage. This reduced the likelihood that they would even complete class VIII, with social norms favoring both their withdrawal from school post puberty as well as early marriage.

As seen above a combination of political, economic and social processes and factors are at work which deny rights to girls and undermine their ability to have a qualitative and gender just educational experience. The education system works against them with its inability to locate a within a reasonable distance, to provide female teachers and ensure transport facilities and security. In addition, the persistent critique of poor quality education suggests that there is an urgent need for addressing all aspects of quality relating to educational administration, planning, implementation, learning, monitoring and evaluation from a gender perspective.

3.2 Addressing Gender in Flagship Programmes

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), is the flagship programme for universalizing elementary education in India and is being implemented in partnership with the State Governments. It aims to transform schools to function effectively in all its quality processes. Bridging the gender and social gap is one of the four goals of SSA. It aims to target the 'hardest to reach' girls through residential schools, mid-day meals and other incentives to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

The two gender specific programmes initiated within SSA to address gender gaps are the: National Programme for Education of Girls for Elementary Level (NPEGEL), launched in 2003 and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme started in 2004. Several other strategies like gender sensitive pedagogy, separate toilets for girls, bridge courses for older girls, recruitment of 50 per cent women teachers and an innovation fund per district for need based interventions for ensuring girls' attendance and retention have also been visualised to enhance participation of girls. The establishment of a Gender Cell within SSA to monitor issues related to gender and girls education is also envisaged and gender coordinators appointed in the field.

According to official reports there are still nine districts in Rajasthan namely - Ajmer, Barmer, Bhilwara, Jaisalmer, Jalore, Pali and Sawai Madhopur where the gender gap in enrolment is more than 10 per cent at primary level and more than 20 per cent at the upper primary level, which is above the national average (Government of Rajasthan 2010). These nine districts spread over the State have diverse geographical and social contexts. Many of these are also districts where women's literacy is below 50 percent. The supply and demand side factors for the continuing gender gaps in these districts include:

- Lack of schools especially UPS within the vicinity leading to poor access -This is particularly so in the desert districts and tribal districts where habitations are scattered.
- Huge gap in teacher availability - All the districts have a gap between sanctioned posts and availability of teachers.
- Lack of female teachers that influences girls participation in schools.
- In the remote desert areas lack of transport facilities deters girls from accessing schools located at a distance from their homes. The Transport voucher provided by the State government is inadequate in these situations.
- In some districts with higher tribal concentration(Sirohi) language is a barrier as children are not familiar with Hindi, the main language of instruction.
- Weak support systems and monitoring.

3.2.1 Demand side Factors

- Continuing apathy towards girls education in certain communities due to traditions and cultural norms (Muslim minority and other SC/OBC groups)
- The practice of child and early marriage among certain caste groups continue.
- Migration of parents due to lack of livelihood opportunities leads to prolonged absence of children from school as they accompany the parents.
- Children from itinerant groups are excluded from education as parents are constantly moving from one place to another.
- There is a negative perception of government schools among the local community - The lack of meaningful teaching learning activity in the schools reinforces these perceptions.
- The involvement of children in domestic work and child labour inhibits regular schooling. Both young girls and boys go to Gujarat (from Sirohi) to work in the B.T cotton fields.
- Gender roles and responsibilities continue to keep girls out of schools Opportunity costs force parents to withdraw girls from schools
- Traditional practices like female foeticide especially in Jaisalmer district has a negative impact on girls identity and their education.
(Institute of Development Studies, 2010)

The SSA has been making special efforts in these districts to bridge the gender gaps. Some of the strategies are discussed below:

The Transport voucher scheme was introduced statewide in 2010, to facilitate access of girls to upper primary schools. Under this provision, a sum of Rs 1000 per annum (Rs. 5 a day) is provided

to girls who have a school attendance of 200 days. According to official data a total of 37,622 girls have benefitted from this scheme. (Government of Rajasthan 2012). While there is no comprehensive analysis to inform us of the impact of these vouchers on enabling access of girls to upper primary schools, field evidence suggests that the availability of transport vouchers has helped girls to access schools that are at a distance from home. But, flexibility in implementation is called for, given the local contexts especially in the desert districts.

Other activities have included Padba Ka Helo, special campaign for education of girls; Academic Melas and a campaign called "School Chalen Hum", (wherein girls are rewarded an amount proportionate to their actual attendance), have been organized in 2 blocks each of gender focused districts (Government of Rajasthan 2012). Many of these efforts have motivated parents to enroll their girls in schools. However these activities have to be implemented in a sustained manner to enable girls to complete their schooling cycles.

3.2.2 Promoting Access: Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

Another initiative to promote educational access of poor disadvantaged girls is the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalayas (KGBV). These centers have been started in those identified Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where, the rural female literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is more than the national average.

According to official reports, there are a total of 17,402 girls enrolled in the 200 KGBVs functioning in the State. About 400 KGBV teachers have been given training on gender sensitization, life skills education, health and hygiene, condensed course and 96 percent girls have transited to Class IX. It is evident that this scheme has been able to create access to schooling facilities among the disadvantaged girls. According to the district functionaries- "there is always a rush for admissions in the KGBVs. We try to identify girls who have never attended school or are drop outs and belong to poor families". Many girls who have gone back after studying in the KGBVs have motivated their siblings and relatives to enroll in the KGBV. In a few districts NGOs have also been partnering with SSA and providing inputs in the KGBVs.

Tulsi was married when she was two years old. Her father was a daily wage labourer in Tonk. No one in her family had studied beyond fifth grade. Before joining the KGBV she used to take cattle for grazing, fetch water and cook food at home. Because of all these tasks she could not attend school regularly and the teacher also used to beat the children with a stick. So she dropped out of school. A teacher in the village suggested that she be sent to a KGBV and she was given admission in 6th grade (adapted from Ripples of change, Sandhan, 2011)

However, there are several issues that need sustained attention to strengthen the KGBVs institutionally. A recent SSA report indicates that 7.4 percent seats (1388 seats) in the KGBVs are lying vacant. There is under utilization of funds (46 percent) and post of 174 full time teachers is vacant (Government of Rajasthan 2012).

Field evidence collected during monitoring of SSA in 27 KGBVs across eight districts shows that of the total girls enrolled in these KGBVs, 28.48 per cent belong to SC and 41.09 per cent to ST, 24.18 per cent to Other Backward Castes (OBC), 3.01 percent to Muslims and 4 percent girls were from forward castes. The overall attendance of girls was 80 percent. The attendance of SC girls was higher than other caste groups, but the representation of Muslim girls continues to be lower than other caste categories (Table 1). The National evaluation of KGBVs (2007) also noted that in Rajasthan, eight KGBVs that were located in minority dominated blocks had only 5 percent of girls from this community (Government of India 2007).

Table 1: Category-wise enrollment and attendance of girls in KGBVs

Name of district and no of KGBVs covered	Category-wise enrollment of girls						Category wise attendance of girls					
	SC	ST	OBC	MIN	GEN	Total	SC	ST	OBC	MIN	GEN	Total
Ajmer(4)	67	24	210	26	8	335	54	15	157	18	5	249
Baran(3)	57	141	53	-	-	251	51	111	45	-	-	207
Bikaner(3)	163	-	105	7	23	298	138	-	81	6	19	244
Chittorgarh(3)	80	34	66	10	26	216	65	29	56	2	22	174
Dungarpur (4)	1	378	3	2	1	385		334	2		1	337
Jaisalmer (3)	124	44	38	6	33	245	100	37	34	6	26	203
Pali (4)	163	119	79	19	2	382	124	99	63	17	1	304
Pratapgarh (3)	7	215	8	0	0	230	5	132	6	0	0	143
Total	662	955	562	70	93	2324	537	757	444	49	74	1861
Percentage	28.48	41.09	24.18	3.01	4.00	100	81.11	79.26	79	70	79.56	80.07

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate number of KGBVs covered in the districts.
Source: IDSJ, SSA Monitoring reports (2011).

The evidence collected also suggests that though efforts have been made to identify girls who are drop outs or never enrolled, from poor and disadvantaged households, the identification and enrollment process continues to be problematic. It was found that girls have shifted from regular schools to the KGBVs, or were enrolled in the KGBV as the upper primary school (UPS) was located at a distance from their village. Some had earlier also attended the residential bridge courses for out of school children. Many of these girls did not belong to poor households and had parents working in the government sector. For E.g. in a KGBV in Jaisalmer district, out of 95 girls who were enrolled, 10 girls shifted from regular schools, 18 girls had a UPS in their village where they had completed their primary levels; twelve girls belonged to the same village and four girls had their fathers in government service. In a KGBV in Pratapgarh of the 29 girls enrolled in Class V, five girls had attended the six months bridge course, eight girls had a UPS in their village, and two girls were daughters of government teachers. In a KGBV in Dungarpur, there were six girls who on completing their primary levels had joined a nine month bridge course and subsequently sought admission in the KGBV (Institute of Development Studies 2012). It is evident that the block/district functionaries often face local/political pressures for enrolling girls into the KGBVs. There is a need to closely monitor the admission into the KGBVs to ensure that the girls who have been excluded get a chance to join the education stream.

Both shortage and a high turnover of staff members is a recurring problem in the KGBVs. This impacts the quality of teaching and learning processes in the KGBV. An analysis of academic levels in 27 KGBVs revealed that girls were finding it difficult to read the prescribed textbooks and write according to the desired levels. It was also observed that the teachers used traditional

methods of instruction with heavy dependence on the textbooks. There was little use of supplementary teaching learning materials in the classroom. The main focus in most of these KGBVs has been on completing the academic course and a lesser focus on providing girls an environment for creative learning and empowerment. In contrast, the KGBVs where support from NGOs has been elicited, they have demonstrated ways of combining formal learning and self-empowerment processes.

During discussions with KGBV girls, it was felt that they all live with fears and diffidence among them. This makes them uncomfortable and inhibits them to express themselves freely. It is important for them to know the cause of their own fears and hesitation. For this it is essential to reflect on their social norms, customs and cultural practices. Issues of weak economic status, caste stratification - belonging to the so called backward and lower castes, and the status of being a 'girl' - all these have a bearing on the 'do-es' and the 'don'ts' imposed upon them. These form the base of their behavioral framework that is strongly enforced specially upon girls. These restrict their thinking and exposure and lead to accepting a status of subordination. Over a period of time girls begin to internalize this subordination as their destiny (Sandhan 2012).

It is clear that KGBVs need to be strengthened to evolve as institutions of learning for children with diverse backgrounds, majority coming from poor backgrounds and facing multiple disadvantages. There is a need for providing an enabling environment for girls coming from deprived and poor situations so that they can learn comprehensively with a positive self-image and confidence.

3.3 NPEGEL: Model Cluster Schools

The NPEGEL was formulated for the education of underprivileged disadvantaged girls from Class I to VIII as a separate and distinct gender component plan of the SSA. It provides additional provisions for enhancing the education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level through more intense community mobilization, the development of model schools in clusters, gender sensitization of teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials, early child care and education facilities and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, work books and uniforms for girls. The scheme is to be implemented in educationally backward blocks where rural female literacy is less than the national average and the gender gap is above the national average. The Model Cluster Schools (MCS), at the cluster level were opened in all selected districts/blocks where the scheme is operational. It was envisaged that the resources provided in the MCS are to be shared with girls 'in' and 'out' of school in the entire cluster. Some of the resources that have been provided to the MCS schools include Bicycle, Sewing Machine, Sports kit, Computers. Vocational training and Meena Manch are other activities that are organized in the MCS.

In Rajasthan, there are a total of 4710 NPEGEL schools, which are being developed as model cluster schools for implementing the programme and carrying out the activities envisaged for the enhancement of girls' education. These schools have been provided with additional wherewithal in terms of space and infra-structure facilities to create the necessary ambience and academic environment therein in order to attract and retain girls in the classrooms till they

complete their elementary education cycle. According to official data, 4116 Ma-Beti Sammelans (Mother daughter meet) have been organized and 12,275 girls have benefited from the Vocational Training programmes organized in the MCS (Government of Rajasthan 2012).

Field observations indicate that the situation of MCS is uneven in terms of quality and experience. The approach seems fragmented and there is a gap between the pronounced agenda and activity at the school level. First and foremost the teachers are not clear about the mandate of the NPEGEL. The distribution of bicycles, sewing machines and computers is uneven and these resources have not been shared with the other schools in the cluster. The vocational training has focused on stereotypical skills like sewing, tailoring and beautician courses and no effort has been made to introduce non- traditional skills. Activities related to gender have not been mainstreamed and have remained add-on instances (Institute of Development Studies, 2011).

A recent study of NPEGEL schools indicates that there has been only a marginal increase in the enrolment of girls in MCS. In the 250 MCS covered in the study, activities specially required under the NPEGEL have been neglected in a large number of schools. No vocational activity has taken place in 106 out of 250 schools. Only Aao-Dekho-Seekho activity has been organized in 76.8 percent NPEGEL schools. It is an activity which contributes to the enhancement of awareness among girl-students of non-NPEGEL schools (SPRI 2012).

It is clear that the NPEGEL scheme needs to be revisited in the light of RTE. A number of NPEGEL interventions relating to provisioning for the model cluster school are now part of the RTE commitments for all schools. The process of revisit could involve national, state and district levels (Government of India 2012). In addition ensuring girls access and their meaningful participation in schooling, requires sustained and coordinated efforts. This also necessitates that strategic dialogue is carried out with all the actors- teachers, parents and community members.

3.4 Addressing the Hidden Curriculum

The mandate of universalizing elementary education necessitates extending meaningful education to the most deprived and those facing multiple disadvantages. While both boys and girls could be having equal access to education the processes of education might not necessarily be equal. The hidden curriculum that operates within the classroom has been fairly debated within the educational discourse and there is evidence to show how classrooms continue to be spaces wherein gender differences are maintained and reiterated. These are commonly manifested in seating arrangements, attitude of teachers and task delegation.

In a study carried out in elementary and secondary schools in the State, it clearly emerged that that classrooms have failed to provide an environment where gender differences are minimized and a healthy cross-sex interaction between boys and girls is promoted. This manifests itself in myriad ways inside the classroom. Firstly in most co educational schools sex segregation was the accepted social norm. Girls and boys sat separately, an aisle acting both as a physical as well as a symbolic divide between them. The teachers felt that mixed seating arrangements could lead to transgression of norms of social distance and they may have to face the ire of parents.

There was also a clear gender difference, in the responses of girls and boys within the classroom. It is evident that girls tend to protect their own physical spaces from boys who are often aggressive in their interaction with girls and tend to ridicule them. The non-participation of the girls in the classroom are reflective of the socialization patterns where girls internalize a subordinate position vis a vis men/boys. The allocation of routine tasks to children by the teachers continues to be gendered and stereotyped. In most schools girls were given the tasks of cleaning, washing vessels, serving food, fetching water, though there is a hierarchy in who does what, based on caste affiliation. In Rajasthan it is common to find girls from the disadvantaged groups(dalit/adivasi) carrying out cleaning tasks whereas tasks like serving food and water is carried out by forward/OBC caste girls. The pervasive presence of gender and the constant legitimization of gender distinctions are visible in everyday school practices (Rajagopal 2009).

Even though there have been some efforts to make curricula gender-sensitive in Rajasthan these can be considered initial attempts as they have remained largely at the level of removing stereotypes or increasing visibility and have not looked at gender in terms of social relations. It is clear that viewing gender in isolation from other hierarchies and asymmetries within society results in such tokenistic revisions. A gender perspective is not about adding a lesson on women's status or on women's empowerment, or making women visible in the text. It is important to recognize that unless a gender perspective is incorporated, the children will continue to absorb the biases and reproduce these ways of thinking into future.

3.5 Gender friendly Infrastructure

Improving school infrastructure has been a major focus area in SSA. These have included construction of additional classrooms, toilets, boundary wall, and ramps along with provisioning drinking water facilities. Among the 'gender friendly' strategies for improving girls participation in schooling is the provision of girls toilets. While separate toilets for girls have been constructed in 92 percent schools in Rajasthan, the availability of functional toilets continues to be a concern.

The SSA monitoring reports note that 'though separate toilets for girls have been constructed in schools it was found that they could hardly be used as they were unclean and unhygienic. Most toilets were being used by boys as urinals. Out of 160 schools surveyed, water in toilets was available only in 20.6 percent schools. Only 31.8 percent schools reported that toilets were cleaned though not on a regular basis. No incinerator facilities were found in the surveyed schools. Many of the newly constructed toilets were also kept locked by teachers (Institute of Development Studies, 2012).

The issue of clean toilets has been constantly debated at all levels in the state. The lack of a sanitation programme and the indifference of the teachers and educational administration also create its own dynamics. The non-availability of clean toilets is particularly relevant in the context of girls in the older age group. There is a definite need to focus on building an environment where cleanliness and hygiene is appreciated as a positive value.

3.6 Teacher Availability and Role of Women Teachers

The role of teachers is singularly important in influencing the schooling outcomes. While there

is a continued focus in SSA on enrolling girls in schools, the issue of teacher deficit especially women teachers, has been a recurrent concern. While efforts towards teacher recruitment have been initiated in the State more recently there is a need to ensure that the gender gap among teachers is addressed. As discussed earlier, currently only 44.46 percent schools have women teachers. Although the relationship between women teachers and girls' enrollment is more than a simple cause and effect as there are many factors that prevent girls from attending school, it is apparent that the absence of women teachers may inhibit regular participation of girls in schooling particularly, at higher levels. It is also evident that there is a sense of discomfort among parents if there is no woman teacher in the school. In a traditional and conservative context the presence of one or more female teacher may also ensure protection for girls from unwanted attention from boys or male teachers, and even from sexual abuse and exploitation.

3.7 Gender Awareness Training

One of the activities carried out by the Gender Cell in SSA has been gender training of teachers and other functionaries. However, the work on gender sensitization and awareness building has had limited impact. There is no discernable change in institutional behavior, attitudes and practices vis -a-vis teachers, head teachers, educational bureaucrats and administrators. The trainings do not seem to have equipped the teachers with the right kinds of skills and attitudes to transform the classrooms into gender equal spaces and deal with dominant gender ideologies. As Mohammed (2009) notes "Gender sensitivity awareness sessions can only be successful in fracturing stereotypes if they feed into a process of school wide rethinking about norms of schooling. Any attempt to break stereotypes while the entire organization remains firmly entrenched in an authoritarian masculinist paradigm just echoes the futility of the spate of reforms in an education system. Tinkering with a system may result at best in a semblance of change". It is necessary to integrate gender and social equity concerns into the very fabric of teacher training programmes - making it an inherent part of the analysis and also sensitization of teachers to the situation of children who are doubly disadvantaged (social group as well as gender). A group needs to be constituted to develop a training module for SSA with a focus on identity formation, gender and socialization.

3.8 Fostering Community Engagement

The main platform for community engagement in SSA is the School Management Committees (SMCs). The RTE Act also gives immense importance to SMCs and clearly outlines the functions to be performed by the SMC. Field interactions suggest that issues related to girls' education are not a priority in these meetings. Although provision has been made in these committees for inclusion of fifty percent women and members of disadvantaged communities, in reality they are excluded from the decision making process. Many members are unaware of their membership in the SMCs.

Discussion with teachers and SMC members in various districts and analysis of SMC registers, also point out that the participation in the SMC meetings is low with average attendance of 6-10 members only. Mostly male members participate in the meetings. Women, PRI members and/or the education experts rarely participate in the meetings (Institute of Development Studies 2012). It is evident that in order to influence the worldview of parents and community, a long

term, respectful and deeper engagements is required on issues of quality and equity. Strengthening ties between the community and school systems can help to streamline and synergize efforts in reducing the negative trends in girls' education and arriving at local solutions.

3.9 Learning from Civil Society Efforts

The role of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and civil society organizations has been recognized as important, especially in reaching out to the hardest to reach - i.e., girls. Several local NGOs and International NGOs (INGOs) have been addressing the issue of girls education in the State. The approaches have ranged from working in partnership with government, to directly working with communities managing own schools and introducing pedagogic practices. However many of these initiatives have been on a smaller scale, and in particular districts/areas. The Government of Rajasthan also launched the Rajasthan Education Initiative (REI), to promote public-private partnership in the field of education in 2005. The REI aims at supporting the State efforts in achieving equitable access, enrolment and retention of children in schools, reducing gender disparities, addressing geographical and physical imbalances, promoting skill development and enhancing learning levels through Information and Computer Technology (ICT) and non-ICT interventions in collaboration with REI partners.

The NGO experiences validate that they can play a catalyst role in addressing educational needs of poor and disadvantaged children. For eg: the experience of Bodh Shiksha Samiti clearly shows that continued and a sustained relationship with community members can help in circumventing barriers to girls schooling and providing equitable educational opportunities to both boys and girls. Given the long standing experience of working in desert districts of Rajasthan, Urmul Trust has also shown that Balika Shivirs (Girls camps) with a focus on accelerated learning can help large number of girls to make a transition to the formal schools. These bridge courses have now come to be accepted as a viable intermediary strategy to get children especially girls back to school. The experience of Educate Girls Globally (EGG) in Pali district has also demonstrated that introduction of creative learning techniques, formation of Bal Sabhas (Children's forums) in all the schools can help in promoting leadership of girls. Girls have also become agents of change after realizing the value, necessity and benefits of education (EGG 2010).

While many of these initiatives have contributed to reducing the gender gap, the cumulative impact of the various initiatives in bringing about systemic reforms in the mainstream, is yet to be assessed in a systematic manner.

4.0 Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has argued that though there has been continued emphasis in the policy regime on making the education system gender sensitive, in practice this has primarily been translated into 'getting more girls in to schools'. While gender parity represents the first step towards achieving equality of outcomes for the sexes, any assessment of progress towards gender equality in the context of the international commitments of EFA and MDGs, would also entail assessing how the multiple strategies have contributed to breaking stereotypes and altering gender relations.

There is little evidence to show that this has happened within the framework of flagship programme like SSA in the state. The current emphasis is on supporting the gender specific interventions within SSA, rather than on mainstreaming gender in all aspects of SSA. Gender continues to be viewed as an isolated category focusing on girls and women. As a result, the focus on gender has primarily lent itself to ensuring that more girls are enrolled in school rather than bringing about shifts in schooling environments and pedagogic practices. Schools are not yet ready to provide the institutional space wherein gender stereotypes and notions of femininity and masculinity are challenged. The gendered nature of school environment and classrooms itself further contribute to the reproduction of gendered identities.

The various mid-term reviews of SSA have also raised similar concerns regarding inclusion of equity and gender in all areas of SSA implementation. Inputs on gender and equity are isolated from inputs in other components. Most critically equity is not seen as an integral component of quality. This is evident even in the programme structure where in most cases the gender coordinator has few opportunities for integrating their interventions with pedagogy and other areas. This weakens the implementation and impact of different strategies.

In the new and emerging context of RTE, it is vital that the interconnections between quality education and gender equality are given centrality. It is imperative that there is a clear articulation of integrating a gender perspective in the education system among education administrators, teacher training institutes, SMCs and teachers. School ethos and culture cannot be changed without developing a shared vision of gender equality and working collectively towards that vision. Education programmes need to provide the space for developing critical consciousness about women's rights, and information on how to negotiate the justice chain. Finally, for education to play an 'interventionist' and 'transformatory' role, there is a need to delve into the 'fundamental issues' and propagate an alternate perception of girls education, which would help them to meet the challenges of complex forms of regulation and dominant gender ideologies.

Note

1. See, Ramachandran (2003); Govinda and Bandhopadhyay (2008) for detailed discussion on gaps in education.

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