

Rural India's Challenges in Achieving "Education for All": A Micro Analysis

ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the schooling pattern in rural areas and attempts to identify the target groups for policy interventions and recommendations. The current attendance in school, dropouts, never attendance, and completing grade 5 for older children (11-17 years) were analysed. Further, the multi level analysis is carried out to understand the linkages of facility variables and schooling pattern, to arrive at more refined policy conclusions. The analysis reveals that, within rural area special focus needs to be given in bringing girl children, children belonging to under privileged sections of the society such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to schools. The quality of education and participatory learning approaches are important in keeping children in school, else we may end up with universal enrolment and not universal primary education as outlined in the Millennium Development Document.

Introduction:

Seventy two per cent of India's total of 1029 million persons live in rural areas (Census of India, 2001). The Millennium Development Goals clearly specified the Education targets that are to be achieved at different time points. This includes universal primary education to all children and at least five years of schooling to all children there after. Recently released Census of India 2001 literacy rates show wide disparity between the rural and urban areas, and also between males and females both in rural and urban areas. The gender differentials are very substantial in rural areas, and is coupled with overall low levels of literacy is a challenge in achieving the education goals. Keeping this in mind, an attempt has been made to (a) study the schooling pattern in rural areas, and (b) to identify the target groups for policy interventions and directions.

Data and Methodology

The second National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2) data set is used to study the above objectives. We have analysed the pattern using simple bi-variate tables. The current attendance in school, drop outs, never attendance, and completing grade 5 for older children (11-17 years) were analysed. Further, the multi level analysis is carried out to understand the linkages of facility variables and schooling pattern, to arrive at more refined policy conclusions.

Results

In this paper, we have analysed the education data for children age 7-17 years from rural areas only. Sixty eight per cent of the children age 7-17 years are currently attending school, 13 per cent dropped out of school and the remaining 19 per cent have never attended school. The gender differentials are substantial with 26 per cent girls never attended school compared with 12 per cent of boys. It is interesting and important to note that, having a literate adult female in the household tremendously increases the change of smaller children attending school in comparison to having a male adult literate in the household. Substantial caste/tribe differentials in schooling is also noticed, this differential can be explained and attributed to the facility variables; the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities live in remote areas and therefore have limited access to schools. Similarly, having an *anganwadi* centre (early childhood development centre) within the village is also having a positive impact on level of schooling.

We have also analysed the differentials in schooling pattern among the states of India. Less than once per cent of children age 7-17 years from rural Kerala have never attended school compared with 36 per cent children from rural Bihar.

There is a positive association between ever attending school and completing grade 5. However, the drop out rates are higher for many states having higher ever attendance compared to those having less ever attendance. Therefore, more focus is to be given to keep children in schools where the enrolment rates are high.

Conclusions

To achieve the education goals outlined in the Millennium Development Goals and agreed by the Government of India, more focus needs to be given to the Rural Areas.

With respect to educational achievements, rural India is behind 10 or more years when compared with urban India. The analysis reveals that, within rural area special focus needs to be given in bringing girl children, children belonging to under privileged sections of the society such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to schools. This can be achieved only by ensuring special schools for girls, managed by female teachers and also by having teachers from diverse communities. The quality of education and participatory learning approaches are important in keeping children in school, else we may end up with universal enrolment and not universal primary education as outlined in the Millennium Development Document.