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## **Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) of Bihar Education Project**

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### **Abstract**

*SarvaShikshaAbhiyanEducation for All Movement), or SSA, is an Indian Governmentprogramme aimed at the universalisation of primary education "in a time bound manner", the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 (estimated to be 206 million children in 2001) a fundamental right (Article- 21A). The programme was pioneered by former Indian Prime MinisterAtalBihari Vajpayee. It aims to educate all children between the ages 6 to 14 by 2010. However, the time limit has been pushed forward indefinitely. The purpose of this paper is to examine the government policy of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan by assessing the current state of elementary education from class-I to class-VII in the state of Bihar (BH). The main focus of this study is to analyze the impact of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan on quality of elementary education. To examine the effectiveness of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan infrastructure facilities and learning skills of students are measured through secondary data. The SarvaShikshaAbhiyan has a positive effect on infrastructure facilities. But this scheme has failed to improve the quality of elementary education rather it is deteriorating.*

*Keywords: Bihar, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Education Policy, Bihar Government*

### **Introduction**

As an intervention programme, it started on 2002 and SSA has been operational since 2000-2001. However, its roots go back to 1993-1994, when the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched, with an aim of achieving the objective of universal primary education. DPEP, over several phases, covered 272 districts in 18 states of the country. The expenditure on the programme was shared by the Central Government (85%) and the State Governments (15%). The Central share was funded by a number of external agencies, including the World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID) and UNICEF. By 2001, more than \$1500 million had been committed to the programme, and 50 million children covered in its ambit. In an impact assessment of Phase I of DPEP, the authors concluded that its net impact on minority children was impressive, while there was little evidence of any impact on the enrolment of girls. Nevertheless, they concluded that the investment in DPEP was not a waste, because it introduced a new approach to primary school interventions in India. The Right to Education Act (RTE) came into force on 1 April 2010. Some educationists and policy makers believe that, with the passing of this act, SSA has acquired the necessary legal force for its implementation. The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), popularly known as Bihar Education Project (BEP) is an organization dedicated to achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the State of Bihar, India. Launched in 1991 with the purpose of bringing about quantitative and qualitative improvement in the Elementary Education system in Bihar. Primary education has been focus area during the implementation of BEP & DPEP-III programmes till 2001-02 and was subsequently extended to Elementary level with the launching of programmes like SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) and National Programme for Education of



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Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL). Being the State Implementing Society (SIS) of these prestigious programmes, the project emphasizes on the education of deprived sections of society, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Minorities, Girls of Bihar.

The goals of the BEP quintessentially is "to bring about a driving force in the State of Bihar through educational reconstruction as a change in the educational situation will then bring improvement in all spheres, and the atmosphere of despair, cynicism, and violence will give way to a firm determination to deal with the environment, social, cultural and gender issues"

### **Objectives**

1. Universalization of Elementary Education, as a composite programme of Universal Access, Universal Enrolment, Universal Retention and Universal achievement
2. Drastic reduction in illiteracy
3. Modification in the educational system to serve the objects of equality for women & their empowerment
4. Inculcating Equity & Social Justice in educational endeavors.
5. Relating education to the working & living conditions of the people.
6. Laying special emphasis on all educational activities on science and environment.

Our experience has further reinforced our "belief" in the "framework" and "specific objectives" of BEP. We now more firmly hold that in order to achieve "tangible" results under any programme of UEE, it will have to be formulated and implemented within the "contours" of the stated "framework" and "specific objectives" of BEP.

It is, thus, obvious that the goal 'social reconstruction through education' for which BEP strived all these years, lay in a distant future where immediate tangible achievements were small milestones. The strength of BEPC remained in the processes through which the goals were attempted to be achieved rather than the quantitative target realization alone.

### **Allocation of Resources as per Approved Plans and Fund Flow**

1. The allocation of resources will depend on the following: preparation of District Elementary Education Plans and their appraisal; commitment of the State government with regard to the State share; performance of the State government regarding resources made available earlier; institutional reforms in States to facilitate decentralized management of education and as per RTE requirements; reports of supervision teams regarding the quality of programme implementation; and availability of financial resources in a particular year. The actual allocation of resources will depend on all these factors. It is likely that districts with poor infrastructure will require more resources.
2. However, the release will also be performance linked. If an educationally backward district does not utilise the resources in the manner intended, it is unlikely to continue to receive a priority.



3. The expenditure on elementary education of a State / UT has to be maintained at the level of expenditure in 1999-2000-the year of commencement of SSA in the State. The State share for SarvaShikshaAbhiyan has to be over and above the expenditure already being incurred at the 1999-2000 level in a particular State. SarvaShikshaAbhiyan will not substitute State funding for elementary education. In fact, it is expected to encourage States to invest more on elementary education alongside a higher allocation by the Central Government. The State level Implementation Society for SarvaShikshaAbhiyan will certify that the level of investments are being maintained in the State, at the time of seeking further allocation of resources from the Central Government. The NLM will also monitor expenditure on elementary education. TSG will provide professional support for regular monitoring of expenditure on elementary education.
4. For procedure for Release of Funds, SSA is conceived as a partnership between the Central and the State/UT Governments. The procedure for release of funds incorporates this idea of a partnership. Under the SSA programme, the districts had prepared their proposals through a community owned Pre-Project phase, broadly based on the Framework for Implementation. The State level Implementation Society for SarvaShikshaAbhiyan forwarded these proposals to the National Mission of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan for release after appraisal by a joint team. The Central Government released the funds directly to the State Implementation Society. The State Governments were required to give written commitments regarding their contribution towards the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan.
5. After preparation of the District Elementary Education Plans, the perspective as well as the Annual Plans will be jointly appraised by a team of experts constituted jointly by the National and the State level implementation Society. The Governing Council of the National SarvaShikshaAbhiyan Mission has empowered the Project Approval Board under the chairmanship of the Secretary of the department to approve the Annual Plan on the basis of the appraisal report, the recommendation of the State Implementation Society, the availability of Central Plan funds, and the commitment of the State government regarding financial resources . The recommendation of the State level Implementation Society must also be accompanied by a commitment of the State government to transfer its share to the State Society within thirty days of the receipt of the Central contribution, as per the approved sharing arrangement. The release of the first instalment to the State/UT will be processed after receipt of these written commitments. The appraisal and approval of Plans should be completed in time for the first instalment, to meet the proposed expenditure of the first six months, to be released by 15 April.

There would be two instalments each year: one in April for expenditure between April and September and the second in September for expenditure between October to March. The Government of India would release an ad-hoc grant in April every year. (Ref. PAB decision of 88th Meeting held on (6.12.2006) This will be subsequently adjusted based on the approval of AWP&B for the Year. The second installment will be based on the progress in expenditure and the quality of implementation. The utilisation certificates from the districts to the States should be submitted as and when the funds are utilised but before the release of further installment. The Utilisation Certificates from the State to the National Mission for



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funds released in the previous year would become due at the time of the release of the second installment in the subsequent year

### **The Worrying Status of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan Implementation in Bihar**

Historically, Bihar has been a major centre for learning and education. In recent years however, owing potentially to population explosion and poor governance, the status of education in the state has been steadily deteriorating. A symptom of this is Bihar's low expenditure on the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) — the centre's flagship scheme for elementary education and programmatic vehicle for implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009; the state spent Rs. 5,229 crore on the program in 2012-13, which fell to Rs. 4,613 crore in 2013-14 before rising to Rs. 5,913 crore in 2014-15; as a proportion of the total funds that had been approved for the program, these figures stood at 51%, 68% and 76% respectively (SSA portal). The question that arises then is how these numbers impact the implementation of the scheme on the ground.

In order to gauge the impact of these fund flows on public service delivery, the Accountability Initiative (AI) regularly conducts PAISA (Planning, Allocations and Expenditures, Institutions Studies in Accountability) surveys, which track government money to the last mile. As part of the survey for SSA, schools are marked on measures of infrastructure, grant receipts, salary flows, presence and functionality of School Management Committees (SMC), delivery of entitlements – all critical indicators of the scheme's implementation.

The districts of Purne and Nalanda in Bihar have been covered by the survey since 2011. Unlike the surveys conducted in 2011 and 2013, the most recent one conducted in December 2015 had a small sample size and was not statistically representative. In the following sections, however, comparisons are made across the 3 survey years in order to establish a comparative picture; these numbers must be studied with this caveat in mind.

The most recent survey found schools to be lacking in critical infrastructure; 53 of the 60 schools surveyed in Nalanda and Purne (30 in each district) did not have sufficient classrooms. On Right to Education (RTE) indicators such as presence of a boundary wall, playground, toilets and library books as well, the districts performed poorly. Of particular concern was the lack of open and usable toilets, given the current government's emphasis on sanitation as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission. Though the presence of toilets in the schools surveyed in 2015 was much higher than the district averages for 2011 and 2013, the districts failed in ensuring usability. In Nalanda in December 2015, only 40% of the schools visited had open and usable girls' toilets, while for the boys this proportion was even lower at 30%. In Purne, these numbers stood at 60% and 50% respectively.



% schools with	Nalanda			Purnea		
	2011	2013	2015	2011	2013	2015
Complete boundary wall	45	31	47	21	25	50
Playground	41	30	37	41	22	57
Girls' toilet	35	56	80	37	49	90
Open and usable girls' toilet	29	28	40	30	32	60
Boys' toilet	27	51	73	32	44	80
Open and usable boys' toilet	24	22	30	28	29	50
Library books	77	67	30	37	29	60
Library room/shelf	4	5	0	4	2	7

Source: PAISA Surveys - 2011, 2013, 2015

Schools also receive grants for day to day operations and general maintenance; the School Management Grant (SMG) is meant to be utilised for infrastructure upkeep, while the School Development Grant (SDG) is for school operation and administration. When questioned on these in the most recent PAISA survey, it was found that a little over 3 months before the end of the financial year, only 3% of the schools visited in Nalanda and 23% of those in Purnea had received both grants.

This low rate of receipt may possibly be indicative of a growing problem; the PAISA survey conducted in 2009-10 had found that a majority of the grants in Nalanda had reached schools by the second quarter. In 2012-13 however, over 80% schools in Nalanda received their grants in November. In Purnea too, timing of grants worsened from 2009-10 to 2012-13, with the latter seeing most grants reaching schools in December-January. When a majority of the funds come in during the final quarter, the schools are hard pressed to spend them before the end of the year. Such situations lead to quick and easy expenditure in areas which may not necessarily be of priority to the schools.

In contrast, the state improved when it came to receipt of textbooks and uniforms, as is visible in the table below. These entitlements are critical, as they are a source of supporting student retention in schools. This is of particular importance in a state like Bihar, where student drop outs are extremely high.

District	% Beneficiaries that received uniform (in kind or cash) entitlement				% Beneficiaries that received textbook entitlement			
	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16 (until Dec 2015)	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16 (until Dec 2015)
Nalanda	46	39	62	86	83	-	93	81
Purnea	47	39	31	81	62	52	71	62

Source: PAISA Surveys – 2011, 2013, 2015

In the case of panchayatshikshaks however, who form an overwhelming majority of the teaching cadre in the state, salary flows were found to be extremely problematic. In FY 2015-16, 80% of



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the shikshaks in the schools visited in Nalanda, and 95% in Purnea, reported a delay in receiving their salaries. Importantly, over 70% of the teachers in Purnea reported delays of over 3 months.

Community participation too remained extremely poor. Of the multiple ways through which the government interacts with schools, a key channel of communication is the SMC. The SMC, which is comprised of parents, teachers and locally elected representatives, is responsible for preparing a school development plan (SDP), which is meant to assist planning at higher levels of government (block and district). Though the PAISA survey conducted in 2013 found SMCs in nearly all the schools surveyed in both districts, only 30% in Nalanda and 24% in Purnea had reported making SDPs at the time. This number did not vary significantly for 2015 sample for Nalanda, where only 37% schools reported making an SDP. The schools visited in Purnea, however, showed considerable change with over 70% schools reporting SDP formation.

These findings are regularly presented to block and district level government officials with the purpose of highlighting the impact of administrative inefficiencies on schools at the ground level, along with discussing potential avenues for action. Though this is a crucial first step in improving service delivery, the process of change can be extremely slow and difficult. As Lant Pritchett very aptly stated in his paper 'Is India a Flailing State' (2009) – "India, with its multitude of reform efforts is struggling on the path to reforms that lead to the effective implementation of rules, but they are far from out of the woods."

### **SSA envisaged to achieve universal elementary education programme is lagging in Bihar**

The SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) envisaged to achieve universal elementary education programme is lagging in Bihar with 1,896 eligible habitations yet to see schools, a latest Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report said. It also said Bihar could not avail the benefit of Central assistance and state share to the tune of Rs 19,279 crore for implementing the SSA. The CAG report for the financial year 2012-13 tabled in the Bihar Legislative Assembly on Tuesday mentioned that in six "test checked" districts, 206 new primary schools shown as opened to cover eligible habitations were non-functional in absence of teachers. The report said the state failed to achieve universalisation of primary education as 9.5 lakh children were still out of school as of March 2013. It also noted that interventions for coverage of school children in the "test-checked" districts were carried out without basic data, proper evaluation and cases of fake mainstreaming were also noticed. Criticising the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) of 59:1 in Bihar, the CAG said it worsened from 53:1 in 2008-09, and was far behind the prescribed norms of 40:1. Despite availability of funds, only 56 per cent of new school buildings, 60 per cent of additional classrooms and 26 per cent of headmaster's room could be completed during the eight years in the state. The report talks about lack of basic facilities like drinking water, toilets, electricity, boundary walls, playground among other things in nine to 68 per cent of schools in the state. The auditors noticed short-supply and delayed supply of text books in the "test-checked districts". Besides, 110 schools out of 996 surveyed never received any books during 2008-13. Around 43 per cent post of teachers remain vacant in and the student dropout rate of 36 per cent, despite implementation of SSA for over a decade indicates its "unsatisfactory performance" in the state,



## **Towards a Rights Based Framework**

The role of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) for strengthening the social fabric of democracy through provision of equal opportunities to all has been accepted since the inception of our Republic. The original Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution mandated the State to endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to age fourteen in a period of ten years. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986/92, states: In our national perception, education is essentially for all Education has an acculturating role. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit - thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution

With the formulation of NPE, India initiated a wide range of programmes for achieving the goal of UEE. These efforts were intensified in the 1980s and 1990s through several schematic and programme interventions, such as Operation Black Board(OBB), ShikshaKarmi Project (SKP), Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP), Bihar Education Project (BEP), U.P Basic Education Project (UPBEP), MahilaSamakhya (MS), LokJumbish Project (LJP), and Teacher Education which put in place a decentralised system of teacher support through District Institutes of Education and Training, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Currently the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) is implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in partnership with State Governments for universalising elementary education across the country.

Over the years there has been significant spatial and numerical expansion of elementary schools in the country. Access and enrollment at the primary stage of education have reached near universal levels. The number of out-of-school children has reduced significantly. The gender gap in elementary education has narrowed and the percentage of children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes enrolled is proportionate to their population. Yet, the goal of universal elementary education continues to elude us. There remains an unfinished agenda of universal education at the upper primary stage. The number of children, particularly children from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections, who drop out of school before completing upper primary education, remains high. The quality of learning achievement is not always entirely satisfactory even in the case of children who complete elementary education.

The Constitution (Eighty –sixth Amendment) Act, 2001 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. The need to address inadequacies in retention, residual access, particularly of un-reached children, and the questions of quality are

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the most compelling reasons for the insertion of Article 21-A in the Constitution of India and the passage of the RTE Act , 2 0 0 9 in the Parliament.

Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010. The title of the RTE Act incorporates the words free and compulsory. Free education means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. Compulsory education casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age group. With this, India has moved forward to a rights based framework that casts a legal obligation on the Central and State Governments to implement this fundamental child right as enshrined in the Article 21A of the Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of the RTE Act.

## Conclusion

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** is Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. SSA is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide.

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