



Where Do We Stand Today? Towards Achieving “Universal Primary Education” in India: A Millennium Development Goal-2

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

Education is a key indicator in how a country is developing. “No country has ever climbed the human development ladder without steady investment in education” (1). The achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE), which is the second of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the subject of one of the Education for All (EFA) goals, requires that every child enroll in a primary school and completes the full cycle of primary schooling. For this to be achieved by 2015, every child in every country would need to be currently attending school (2, 3). The year 2014, being the penultimate year for the MDGs, acquires significance in assessing realistically India’s progress in meeting the various targets under the MDG-2 as well as to take a stock of the areas where the progress is not up to the expected level. Indicators like Net enrolment ratio (NER), Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach Grade 5 and youth literacy rate determine the actual progress towards the targets of MDG2. NER has improved from 83% in the year 2000 to 95.92% in 2007-08 which increased steadily and stood at 98.6%, 98.3% and 99.89% in 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively. The District Information System for Education (DISE) data

further shows cent percent primary education for all children aged 6-10 years ahead of 2015. The results from DISE report 2011-12, shows a steady increasing trend over the years in the estimate of the indicator ‘ratio of enrolment of Grade V to Grade I’ from 78.08 in 2009-10 to 86.05 in 2011-12. The youth literacy rate has been increased from 61.9% in 1991 to 76.4% in 2001 and the trend shows India is likely to achieve 100% youth literacy by 2015. The increase in literacy rates in various fronts during 2001 - 2011 is corroborating the conclusion of on-the - track movement of youth literacy (2, 3).

Over the years, India initiated a wide range of programmes for achieving the goal of UPE through several schematic and programme interventions. Among all, Mid Day Meal Scheme is the most successful and world’s largest school feeding programme reaching out to about 12 crore children in over 12.65 lakh schools across the country (2). “Many other social benefits result directly from an extension of primary education and indirectly from behaviors associated with higher levels of education where primary education provides the base” (4). Though India made remarkable progress towards achieving MDG 2 targets, the con-

tinuation of the present endeavor into the future is of importance. Revitalizing the existing mechanisms and initiatives for better coordination and enhancement of the collective efforts is necessary for the momentum to go on into the future.

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