



## **ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION AMONG CHILDREN IN SLUMS: CHALLENGES AND WAYS OUT**

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### **Abstract:**

Education is one of the most crucial instruments for the development of a fair, just and egalitarian society. Education enhances the individual's personal growth, economic development and social effectiveness, which is indispensable in the information driven age. In modern democratic societies, education is the most potent tool that can transcend the barriers of social prejudices and exclusion. Access to quality education by socio-economically weaker and vulnerable sections of the society needs to be examined thoroughly to identify the areas of concern. In spite of the high aggregates in urban areas, the fact that slums continues to be deficient in the public provision of education which negatively impacts their participation. It is in the light of this context that the present paper makes an endeavour to analyse the scenario of primary education among children living in urban slum areas of the country.

**Key Words:** Educational policy and legal provisions, quality of education, schooling facilities, out of school children and urban slum children.

### **Introduction**

By 2040-50, it has been estimated that urban population in India will constitute almost a 50 per cent share in the total population of the country (United Nations, 2014). Though as per 2011 census the share of India's urban population to its total population is still at 31 per cent, urban India has grown at a pace of five times since 1961 in context of population. India is experiencing a crucial phase of transition, from predominantly being a rural country to one where most of the people aspire to live in cities. In 2011 census it has been highlighted that the net decadal addition to the country's population during 2001-11 was more in urban areas than in the rural areas, thus marking the inception of a demographic shift. While the number of people living in urban India is increasing rapidly, equally alarming is the rise in the number of the urban poor. Standing at no less than 76 million, the exponentially increasing size of the urban poor cannot be ignored. Slums have witnessed a consequential increase in urban population due to natural growth factor and the incapability of migrants to find place in cities to live other than slums. In 2011 census it has been documented that nearly 13.7 million slum households live amidst inadequate basic amenities, poor health facilities, improper educational opportunities, insecurity as well as insufficient incomes. Today, slums are located throughout urban areas in the country, with 63 per cent of statutory towns being home to these dwellings.

Slum dwellers are continuously struggling with the challenges arising from rapid migration of people in large cities, high-density slums, informal and squatter settlements, severe shortage of housing and basic civic amenities, degradation of environment, pollution, poverty, malnourishment, illiteracy, unemployment, crime and social unrest. This illustrates that children residing in slums experience poor sanitary conditions, get unsafe drinking water, live in congested space, eat in unhealthy and smoky kitchens, and lack of privacy on daily basis. All these conditions results into a negative impact on the cognitive performance, behavioural development as well as scholastic achievement of the children.

As per 2011 Census, out of 377 million urban Indians 32 per cent are children below 18 years of ages and around 10 per cent are children below six years. Although the demographic dividend of India is often claimed as the key to the future growth of the country, an annoying truth is that more than 8 million children below six years of age live in slums. The state of the world's children report (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2012) presented a gruesome picture of Indian slums stating that 'the children living in around 49,000 slums in India are invisible'. Children residing in slums are not only deprived of basic amenities but are also not recognised as an indispensable segment by our urban planners and developers. For the children living in slums, the experience of urban life is one of poverty, exclusion and marginalisation. While growing up in informal settlements and impoverished neighbourhoods, children are deprived from essential amenities and social protection to which they have a right.

Rapid urbanisation in India has resulted into the emergence of several concerns and questions with respect to the adequacy and quality of basic facilities to address various rights of the children, especially those who reside on the margins of urban centres. These rights are not only preserved in the constitution of India but

have also been enshrined in various legal initiatives that have gained importance over the last decade and a half. Children's right to free and compulsory education, guaranteed by the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009, is one such right. Children growing up in urban settings are usually believed to have an educational advantage. They are considered to be better off across a set of statistical indicators, more likely to avail from early childhood programmes, more likely to get enrol in and complete primary and secondary school. However, EFA global monitoring report 2010 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2010) stated that in reality urban inequities thoroughly undermine children's right to education. In urban slum areas wrecked by poverty, early childhood programming is generally noted for its absence. This is deplorable because the initial years have a profound and enduring effect on the rest of a person's life.

Primary education is usually more easily available in urban areas than in rural areas but remains away from the reach of many children growing up in poverty- especially in slums, where there is sometimes little or no public schooling. Parents have to often face the situation where they have to decide whether to pay fees for their children to attend overcrowded private schools or withdraw their children from school altogether. Children residing in poor urban neighbourhoods are among the least likely to attend school. In a survey conducted in Delhi it was found that children living in slums had a primary attendance rate of 54.5 per cent in 2004-05, compared with 90 per cent for the city as a whole (Tsujita, 2009).

Banerjee (2014) observed that children in urban slums face diverse education related problems and these problems range from difficulty of access to schools, attitude of teachers towards these children, and low quality of schooling, to inadequate living conditions and lack of proper support at home. Apart from this, there are also problems of persistent risk of demolition and displacement, harassment from police and other authorities, and constant threat of exploitation and abuse. The danger of displacement is particularly an essential issue, as it is directly linked with the child's legal right to live in an urban area and the issue of identity proof and citizenship demanded by the state when one claims this right. This paves the way to another set of questions that spin around the relationship between access to school and identity of urban slum children, as determined by the state. This is not solely an administrative issue, there are few continuing processes of agreement of citizenship between the state and the urban poor children with no identity proofs of the kind as demanded by the state. This issue poses a problem in calculating the true number of children living in slums.

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the rationale of the study. This paper is broadly divided into four sections. The first section has dealt with the review of policy framework and legal provisions for education in India and its impact on education of urban slum children. The second section is concerned with the trends in urban schooling on three indicators- access, equity and quality and these three indicators had been analysed in terms of preschool education, growth of schools and enrolment at primal level, flagship schemes and learning achievement surveys with focus on urban slum children. The third part has analysed the challenges of schooling that are being faced by children living in slums. This section is further divided into four sub-sections – out of school children, provision of reservation in private schools, low attendance rate and social distance between teachers and schools. The last part is devoted to addressing the issue of education and suggesting solution for improving the educational status of children living in urban slums and this is followed by a conclusion.

#### **Educational Policy and Legal Provisions:**

The Constitution of India in its original form labelled education as a state subject. However, after the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment education became a subject of concurrent list which authorises the central government to legislate for education. Further, India is signer to several international covenants such as Jomtien Conference Declaration (1990), United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (1992), United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000), Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) Charter for Children, which strengthens the country's commitment to making education a reality for all children. These legal provisions and obligations to world community were evident in the National Policy of Education 1968 and 1986 (revised in 1992).

The Education for All (EFA) declaration (1990) is a relevant case in point because it was after this declaration that Indian government initiated an unprecedented large scale programme for education with the aid and support of international funding agencies. This declaration was signed by 155 countries and nearly 150 non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations to achieve the goal of making primary education accessible to all and remove illiteracy by the end of the decade. It had more implications for the developing countries, especially for India. The post-1990 phase also witnessed a significant shift in economic policy such as structural readjustment and modifications in funding patterns of education and rising up the funding of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), transferring the responsibilities from state to private partners and small-scale projects for deprived children through civil society and philanthropic organisations.

The demand for 'education for all' in India gained momentum during the 1990s, which resulted in some serious policy reformulation and legal provisions such as the reformulation of National Policy in 1992, the flow of external aid to primary education under District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). However, the projects and interventions arising from these policy announcements were primarily directed towards rural India,

hence, were unable to serve the needs of urban poor children. DPEP was chiefly supported by the World Bank, which had advised that in the beginning programme should focus on villages where the female literacy rate was below the national average. Under DPEP and later on under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), decentralisation and community participation was encouraged. But, the concepts and strategies of community participation were evolved around a deep-embedded idea of village structures. The programmes thus ignored the fact that urban settings are contrary than what is envisioned under various schemes.

The 86<sup>th</sup> amendment in 2002 inserted Article 21A in Indian Constitution which introduced free and compulsory basic education for children between six to fourteen years of age as a fundamental right and was later supplemented by legislation in 2009 known as RTE Act 2009. However, there are some unusual implications of the Act that have been observed during last few years. For instance, the Act bestows a right to the child to get admission in class I at the age of six but it does not exclude a child of five years to get admitted in school. Before the passing of the Act, in case of non-availability of pre-school facilities in urban slums, primary schools served to educate children between four to five years of age. However, after passing of the Act, school authorities especially of government schools begun to interpret the Act that a child below six years of age cannot be admitted in class I. This hinders the access to education for younger children. Under article 45 of the 86<sup>th</sup> amendment the state endeavours to provide early childhood care and education for all children, until they complete the age of six years. However, urban areas are still lagging behind in terms of government early childhood care facilities. A report indicated that only 13 per cent of all Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) projects are situated in urban areas (UNESCO, 2006).

Since 1990s, the privatisation of education has been an ever increasing phenomenon, evident in the growing number of private schools. According to Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) 2014-15 data, private school accounts for 22.74 per cent of the total number of schools in India (National University of Educational Planning and Administration [NUEPA], 2015). Poor parents have developed unprecedented mistrust towards the government system. Tooley (2009) claimed that masses have lost their faith in government schools. Simultaneously, the classes in urban government schools are reportedly overcrowded. The learning levels are declining and no accurate data is available on school dropouts in urban areas. Contrary to villages, neither is there any proper record of children enrolled in urban schools nor the school teachers are acquainted about the catchment area of the school. The prevailing scenario of education in the country reveals that educational opportunities and attainment for the urban slum children are much lower than the affluent classes. Rapid growth of private schools and inadequate attention towards urban government schools has intensified multi-dimensional impoverishment, including educational deprivation, in urban areas. Tushita (2009) asserted that children in urban slums are most likely to attend government schools rather than to low-fees private schools. Thus, there is an urgent need to strengthen government schools in urban slums. Researchers in education are continuously highlighting the experience of exclusion and discrimination within the schools in urban settings. Yet the policy makers still concentrate on outcomes rather than on processes and experiences of education.

#### **Access, Equity and Quality: Trend Analysis:**

The fundamental element of access is the provision of school in the proximity of the child, and encompasses all the social and systematic hindrances. Once a child has acquired access to school close to home, the issues of equity and quality are to be achieved at the academic level. Equity means the state's obligations to provide equal opportunity to every citizen to learn in a classroom surrounding which is devoid of discrimination. Quality of education to every citizen should be ensured through training of teachers, development of student-friendly curriculum framework and appropriate pedagogy. However, these two components- equity and quality- are not separate from one another. These three indicators of education have been discussed below in terms of preschool education, growth of schools and enrolment at primary level, flagship schemes and learning achievement surveys.

#### **Preschool Education:**

Children under the age of six years go through the most rapid phase of growth and development, in terms of both physical and intellectual capacities. They make sense of and experience the physical, social and cultural dimension of the world, learning progressively through their own activities and their interactions with other children. The initial years of a child's life are generally a phase of paramount growth, maximum vulnerability and utmost dependence on adults. At this stage, care by a responsible, nurturing and trained adult in a clean, hygienic and secure environment is detrimental to laying the foundation stone for health, personality and learning capabilities.

The National Policy of Education 1986 (revised in 1992) suggested consolidation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which is contemplated to prepare all children for primary education supplemented with some child care and nutritional support. The concept was to holistically assist children from economically weaker sections where mother is working outside to support family financially and the responsibility of taking care of younger children rests with an elder sibling. The identification of ECCE's role in successful attainment of primary education puts on the state an extraordinary duty to provide it to all the

children. ICDS network is one of the providers of ECCE in India, which is one of the world's largest programmes for ECCE. However, this programme is mainly oriented towards rural areas and large swathes of urban population still remain unreserved. While it has been claimed that the children living in urban areas stand better chances to have access to preschool programmes, analysis of available secondary reports and data reveals that there is a gap in ECCE in urban areas, as also poor representation of urban slums under ICDS.

**Growth of Schools and Enrolment at Primary Level of Schooling: Urban Versus Rural**

Urban schools are often considered to be better than rural schools in terms of quality, general governance, quality of education and human resources, etc. However, various government reports and surveys present a different picture and indicate that these notions are ill-founded. Countrywide data specifically focused on educational status of children living in urban slums is lacking. Therefore, data in this section is mainly sighted from urban and rural analytical reports on elementary education 2015-16 (NUEPA, 2016). As per these two reports, only 48.53 per cent of primary schools in urban areas have received School Development Grant as against 75.89 per cent of primary schools in rural areas. Further, only 1.71 per cent of primary schools in urban India have been provided with Learning Material Grant which is below than 2.21 per cent in rural India. In the same reports it has been revealed that 39.99 per cent of primary schools in urban areas have been inspected during the previous academic year as compared to 50.42 per cent in rural areas.

Crowding is also a big issue of concern in urban schools than in rural schools. In the aforementioned reports it has been documented that the percentage of primary schools having a pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) above 30 is higher in urban areas (26.06 per cent) than that in rural areas (25.91 per cent). As against 757,723 rural primary schools, there are only 211,840 urban primary schools in India. The growth in number of schools in rural area is accompanied by corresponding growth in total number of enrolment. The total number of enrolment in rural primary schools (97,434,173) is much higher than the urban schools (31,688,442). A comparative trend analysis of enrolment from 2010-16 in urban primary schools with rural primary schools shows that the total enrolment number is significantly higher in rural areas (Table 1). On the aspect of gender parity, 48.81 per cent girls were enrolled at primary level in urban schools which is slightly lower than the 49.49 per cent of rural schools. While growth in rural enrolment could be explained by better access to schooling in rural areas, the gap in urban areas does give rise to valid concerns regarding the lack of focus on schooling in urban India. Furthermore, the situation of education in slums needs to be investigated closely so as to seek insights into the condition of urban slum children. The total number of teachers at primary level in urban areas (399,530) is much lower than the number of teachers in rural areas (2,198,437). Not surprisingly, the utilisation of a primary school building as shift schools to accommodate more students is higher in urban areas (5.88 per cent) than in rural areas (0.95 per cent). On the positive side, the percentage of female teachers is much higher in the urban primary schools (71.97 per cent) than in the rural schools (42.95 per cent). Urban schools are much more equipped than rural schools in terms of infrastructure such as separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water facility, electric connection, boundary walls, etc.

Table 1: Comparative analysis of enrolment in urban primary schools with rural primary schools from 2010-16 (in numbers)

Year	Urban Primary School	Rural Primary School
2010-11	28,102,313	107,100,267
2011-12	29,998,924	107,100,343
2012-13	30,971,793	103,800,292
2013-14	31,164,531	101,257,370
2014-15	31,442,053	99,058,549
2015-16	31,688,452	97,434,173

Source: Elementary education in urban India: Where do we stand? - Analytical report and Elementary education in rural India: Where do we stand? - Analytical report by NUEPA and GOI, 2010-11 to 2015-16.

There are serious issues concerning the capacity of teachers. The tendency to deploy less paid and relatively less qualified teachers with usually unsecure job in the schools is on the rise. This can be referred to as a kind of ad-hocism which negatively impacts quality of education. The low quality of teachers training hardly caters to the needs of teachers in the complex urban scenario. The large number of migrant children in urban area requires multilingual teaching, but related training is restricted to tribal areas. The problem is not only about the availability of teachers in the urban schools, but also of the deployment of teachers.

**Flagship Schemes:**

The modifications in the educational policy and legal provisions have led to an increase in the enrolment in schools. The goal of RTE 2009 Act and SSA is to provide equitable education of satisfactory quality to all the children in the age group of six to fourteen years. Universalisation of education includes the goal of acquiring social parity. In the urban scenario, parity will be achieved when the urban deprived children have an equal access to education like other children. Increase in trend of enrolment and schooling facilities being provided by the government points out at our progress towards social parity. However, analysis of trends shows that these schemes have limited impact on urban children in general and urban slum children in

particular. This could be due to the fact that focus of these schemes is much more on rural population than the urban. Although these schemes have the potential to fulfil the needs of urban poor but several opportunities are being lost in the established inertia where the educational policy are not conducive to urban needs.

The increasing trend of enrolment in primary schools in urban areas as reported by various government surveys does not presents a clear picture of education in urban India. These surveys do not pay attention towards the corresponding growth in the population of urban deprived children. However, the limited available data is sufficient to demonstrate the negligence towards urban slum children. There is an evident lack of dynamism to strengthen the availability of schooling in urban areas.

**Quality of Schooling in terms of Achievement Surveys:**

The repercussion of slow growth in numbers of schools, improper teacher’s distribution and inadequate schooling facilities is obvious and it reflects in term of quality of education. The quality of education can be measured by various indicators, and learning achievement is among one of them. Selected achievement surveys shows that there is an increasing decline in learning levels among urban children as compared to their rural counterparts, especially the achievement level of students of government schools in urban areas is a matter of concern.

Comparison of National Achievement Survey (NAS) findings of class III and class V between round 1 Baseline Achievement Survey (BAS) conducted during 2002-05 and round 2 Mid-term Achievement Survey (MAS) conducted during 2005-08 highlighted stagnancy in the learning achievements of urban children (data from round 3 of the achievement survey conducted during 2012 is not used for comparison, as this round used a different methodology and therefore, not comparable with the previous one). Trend in NAS indicates that the improvement in learning achievement of urban children is relatively lower than their rural counterpart (Table 2 and 3).

NAS round 3 for class V (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2014) documented that rural boys scored significantly better than their urban counterparts, whereas urban girls scored significantly better than their urban boys in environmental science (EVS). Likewise, rural children scored significantly better than their urban counterparts and urban girls scored significantly higher than urban boys in mathematics. The overall learning achievement indicates *status quo* or feeble decline in government school children of urban areas. These learning achievement surveys reflect that classroom processes and student’s learning are issues of serious concern.

Table 2: Class III mean achievement in mathematics and language

Subject and Gender	Urban		Rural		Total	
	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS
Mathematics						
Boys	58.49	61.40	58.56	62.36	58.54	62.16
Girls	58.56	60.82	57.70	61.85	57.95	61.62
Total	58.52	61.10	58.14	62.10	58.25	61.89
Language						
Boys	63.30	67.78	62.81	67.69	62.94	67.71
Girls	64.45	68.20	62.84	67.90	63.31	67.96
Total	63.87	67.99	62.82	67.79	62.12	67.84

Source: NAS baseline round 1 (2002-05) and mid-term evaluation round 2 (2005-2008) by NCERT

Table 3: Class V achievement in mathematics, language and EVS (Comparison between Round 1 BAS and Round 2 MAS)

Subject and Gender	Urban		Rural		Total	
	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS	Mean % BAS	Mean % MAS
Mathematics						
Boys	47.36	47.51	46.72	48.83	46.90	48.54
Girls	47.29	48.23	45.54	48.42	46.09	48.37
Total	47.32	47.88	46.15	48.63	46.51	48.46
Language						
Boys	61.36	61.73	57.95	59.85	58.94	60.27
Girls	61.89	62.91	57.37	59.58	58.79	60.35
Total	61.63	62.33	57.67	59.72	58.87	60.31
EVS						
Boys	51.69	51.56	50.14	52.32	50.59	52.15
Girls	51.21	52.40	49.43	52.18	49.99	52.23
Total	51.44	51.99	49.80	52.25	50.3	52.19

Source: NAS baseline round 1 (2002-2005) and mid-term evaluation round 2(2005-08) by NCERT

**Challenges of Schooling in the Urban Scenario:**

This section deals with some of the problems related to the schooling of urban slum children. To begin with, the question is how the existing policy and legal framework creates multi-dimensional problems for children living under difficult conditions in slums. The state of the world’s children report (UNICEF, 2012) stated that more than half of the world’s population including over a billion children now resides in cities and towns. It also stated that many children are blessed to enjoy the benefits that urban life offer, however, still there are too many that are denied access to essentials such as clean drinking water, healthcare, electricity and education even they may live in proximity to these services. Too many are dragged into exploitative and dangerous work instead of being able to go to school. And, too many face a continuous threat of displacement, though they already live under the most challenging environment- in dilapidated dwellings and informal overcrowded settlements that are vulnerable to disaster and diseases.

In India, these problems are further exaggerated due to a high proportion of out of school children, high percentage of dropout, shrinking school timing due to double shift, poor PTR, students and teachers attendance, and inadequate infrastructural facilities. The state policy and programmes are not responding to urban deprived children because of difficulties in tracing them as they belong to floating population such as slum and pavement dwellers, children living on railway platforms, street and working children, etc. Frequent displacement and relocation of urban slums also causes difficulties in tracking them. In most of the educational programmes such as ICDS, SSA community participation is a critical element. Whereas, in urban centres the concept of community is quite different. Due to diverse communities in urban areas the community participation and mobilisation deeply rooted in educational programmes requires a different strategy and should be constituted so as to involve a large range of education providers in urban areas.

For a better understanding of the problems related to education in urban context, issues can be broadly divided into three categories: (1) issues of out of the school children; (2) issues of children in the school; (3) issues of reforms in school system in urban context. These issues are discussed below so as to recognise the challenges which are being faced by urban deprived children.

**Out of School Children:**

Equity and social justice are in themselves a strong argument for providing basic education to all. Despite of several efforts to provide basic education to all the children, a sizeable proportion of the population of children in India remains out of school. An All India Survey of out-of-school in the age group of six to thirteen years was commissioned by Educational Consultants India Limited (EdCIL) and Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the survey was conducted by Social and Rural Research Institute (SRI)-IMRB International. As per the National Sample Survey (SRI-IMRB International, 2014) 36.80 per cent of the children in urban India are living in slums. Out of the total proportion of children living in slums 2.34 per cent are out of school. This is less than the previous round conducted in 2009 (SRI-IMRB International, 2010), in which 3.74 per cent slum children were found to be out of school. Although the percentage of out-of-school children in urban areas has gone down, their absolute number has increased from 2009 to 2014 (Table 4).

Table 4: Estimated number and percentage of out of school children in the urban slums (2009-14)

Year	Estimated number of out of school slum children	Percentage of out of school slum children
2009	136,565	3.74
2014	19,860,602	2.38

Source: All India Survey of out-of-school children of age 6-13 years and 5 age 2009 by EdCIL and SRI-IMRB International, 2010 and National Sample Survey of estimation of out-of-school children in the age 6-13 in India 2014 by EdCIL and SRI-IMRB International, 2014

Tsujita (2009) in the study of urban slums in Delhi found that the ratio of children who never attended schools to total children is 31.50 per cent. It was also observed that only 2.2 per cent of those children were found to be engaged in paid work in the previous 365 days. This means that most of the children who never attended schools were neither employed nor attended schools. The proportion of girls who never attended school was 32.90 per cent, slightly higher than that of boys. Reasons for never attending schools were financial constrain, underage and parents’ negative perception about education. This study reported that a high ratio of overage and dropout exists among urban slum children. Being overage was often the result of late admission in schools, which was caused by both demand side (rural to urban migration) and by supply side factors (lack of school capacity to admit all children, short duration of admission, birth certificate requirement, etc). Financial problems were one of the main reasons for not admitting children in schools.

**Provision of Reservation in Private Schools:**

A strong demand for English and poor quality of education in government schools provide appropriate conditions for the mushrooming of private schools. However, high fees and cultural differences in the private schools are critical barriers for urban slum children to access these schools. The numbers of private schools in slum areas are increasing to cater the needs of economically weaker sections. However, majority of the parents

in slums still prefer to send their children in government schools, as the fees of private schools is quite high. Since the inception of RTE Act 2009 the issue of twenty five per cent reservations for economically weaker sections is one of the most debated issues. Schools are not only hesitant to give admissions to poor children, but have also adopted several techniques to segregate economically weaker section and non-economically weaker section students. These schools are merit-based schools and so they feel that running joint classes for both the categories may affect the performance of the schools.

The issue of segregation of children is an important issue that requires attention. It is quite upsetting that along with indifferent attitude towards the difficult condition of children, schools tries to segregate the children within the schools by holding extra classes. Quite often these children are taught by another set of low paid unqualified teachers in the evening shift. Although under SSA there are provisions for reimbursement of fees to private schools, there is need to make scheme more favourable for children through orientation of teachers towards the life in urban slums. Support from schools is mandatory for such children.

#### **Low Rate of Attendance in Schools:**

For quality education it is essential that teachers should be available in schools to teach. At the same time, it is imperative that students should remain in class while teaching is going on because lapse in the process of learning on account of students' absence adversely affect their learning. In a study commissioned by MHRD on attendance of students and teachers conducted in twenty states of India in 2006-07 (EdCIL, 2009) it was reported that in urban primary schools overall attendance rate was 71.20 per cent. The reasons identified for low attendance were parents' poverty, involvement in income generating activities, students' illness or some health problems, parents' indifference towards the education of child, students' lack of interest in studies, participation in social or religious functions, inability to attend school due to illness of other family members, being engaged in household chores, etc.

It was observed that the low rate of attendance in school negatively impact the students' achievement, repetition rate and dropout. The remedial measures suggested in the report for improving attendance rate were: (1) there should be improvement in school environment, teaching-learning in classrooms and in schooling facilities; (2) parents should be made aware about the importance of education and sending their wards to school instead of involving them in household chores or income generating activities.

#### **Social Distance between Teachers and Students in Urban Government Schools:**

Some studies have reported that social distance between teachers and students in urban areas is quite wide. Teachers have low academic expectations from certain sections of children and treat them in a negative manner. Chugh (2003) in a study conducted on urban slum children in Delhi revealed that discriminatory attitude of teachers' is the most important cause of their dropout. Students complained about the indifferent and rude behaviour of teachers towards them. The study observed that the teachers had the required qualifications but lacked the necessary commitment and competence. Children who dropped out recognised that teachers were more interested in private tuitions than teaching in classrooms. The impassiveness of teachers made these children disinterested in studies and school activities and finally pushed them out of the school. There needs to be a continuous development and better understanding of the strengths and backgrounds of the children as well as the role of education in the process of social change.

#### **Addressing the Issue of Education among Children in Slums: The Way Forward**

The peculiarity of the problems faced by the children living in slums requires a new set of policies to preserve their rights. It is possible only through research-based advocacy for children residing in slums. As most of the government programmes like ICDS, SSA are largely oriented towards rural areas, there is need for separate urban strategies to establish public funded pre-schools and schools with carefully designed learning curriculum and trained teachers to cater the needs of children living in slums. These strategies must take into account the complex reality of slum life pattern and challenges.

The urban slums largely constitute of floating population, and there is no national-level system for tracking children in migration. This issue requires to be addressed through an institutional tracking and mapping of these children at regular time period. There is a need for providing training to teachers on multi-lingual teaching approaches and also providing supplementary support to address the pedagogical requirements of the floating population, dropout and out of school children in urban slum areas. Further, slow growth of educational facilities and quality of education in government schools is an issue of major concern. Allotment of lands for building new schools should be facilitated through a central policy. Lack of space in urban centres can be addressed through a strategy for vertical development of the school space with adequate security and comfort measures. An educational cell should be established under the department of education in each urban centre, mainly to facilitate the monitoring of the progress of its execution. This cell can also serve as source of convergence between various educational providers to address the issue of lack of coordination among them.

There needs to be special focus on children residing in slums as they are highly vulnerable to dropout from school. For addressing this issue parents' indifferent attitude towards education needs to be changed and they should be made aware about the significance of education and encouraged to send their children to schools, instead of engaging them in income generating activities. Further teachers in schools should be sensitised about

the background, needs and strengths of these children. Children residing in slums under difficult circumstances not only need bridging in schools but also require support to sustain them in schools. For this both bridging and support classes requires to be incorporated in educational planning.

**Conclusion:**

It is quite evident that there is negligence in providing public educational facilities in urban areas especially to deprived children. It might be a consequence of scattered approach towards the schooling of urban children at different stages. The growth in population of urban slum children is not in sync with and thus does not indicate the growth of enrolment at various stages of schooling. Access to public schooling is pivotal in improving their participation in schooling. Along with establishment of government schools, enhancing the quality of education and schooling facilities needs to be prioritised. Educational policy and legal provisions should be formulated in such a manner that they cater the needs of urban slum children. Further, addressing the issue of diversity of slum population through pertinent steps such as sensitising the teachers about cultural diversity, making provisions for teachers in different languages, etc. can play a critical role in improving the educational status of children residing in slums.

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