Out of School Children: Case Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Education brings wide-ranging benefits to both individuals and societies. It is considered so important to individual development that the right to primary education is legally guaranteed in most countries of the world. Moreover, international human rights conventions also recognise the right to education. This right has been established by a succession of UN Conventions, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which acquired the status of international law in 1990. According to Article 28 of the Convention, governments have the responsibility of making primary education compulsory and available free to all. Education is also recognised as crucial to human development. Indeed the Education for All (EFA) movement and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have led to greater attention paid to educational participation and completion. Universal primary education is Goal 2 of both EFA (Jomtien, 1990; reaffirmed in Dakar, 2000) and the MDGs, adopted by UN Member States in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000; UN, 2003).

Development is a central imperative in today’s globalized world. But achieving sustainable all-round development for society requires certain fundamental pillars in place. Education is one such pillar without which any future growth is inconceivable. To imagine growth with large parts of world bounded in illiteracy is just impossible. More so, in today’s information based society, where education is the key to a whole world of opportunities. Not only that, a whole host of issues in fields of healthcare, economic opportunity, women empowerment and community building can be traced to a lack of proper education. Education thus prepares children to participate in their society and in the global economy. It is the basis for reducing poverty and inequality, improving health, enabling the use of new technologies, and creating and spreading knowledge.

With the education imperative in mind, the United Nations also adopted education as one of the eight objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) defined by the United Nations. Goal 2 of the MDG, “Achieve universal primary education,” is also the most fundamental. Other MDGs of poverty reduction, gender equality and healthcare can only be sustained when today’s children grow up to be
educated citizens. The goal of universal primary education also is the only goal that has a 100% target—a fact that emphasizes the importance of the goal.

In the context of international goals and commitments, the number of out-of-school children is one of the most frequently cited education statistics. It is therefore crucial that the aspect be studied in its weight and significance. It is important to clearly recognise that the final goal is not only to get children in school but to ensure schooling results in good learning outcomes.

**EDUCATION SCENARIO IN INDIA**

In the context of India, education has been considered as one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality. It is equally the key to enhance India’s competitiveness in the global economy. Therefore, ensuring access to quality education for all, in particular for the poor and rural population, is central to the economic and social development of India. Elementary Education in India is the foundation on which the development of every citizen and the nation as a whole hinges.

The Government of India has initiated a number of programmes to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) among which the flagship programme of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) is the most recent one. It has aimed at achieving universal primary education by 2007 and universal elementary education by 2010. Achieving universalisation means achieving universal access, universal enrolment, universal retention and universal quality of education. The 86th Constitution Amendment Act affirms that every child, between the age group of 6 and 14 years, has the right to free and compulsory education.

However, while the government has made substantial investments to achieve these goals, several challenges remain to be tackled. Making primary education available for all in India has been one of the major challenges for the government. The quality of elementary education in India has also been a major cause of worry for the government.

**OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN**

India is the country with the largest number of children out of school. India has more children of school age than China and at the same time relatively low attendance rates, in spite of recent increases in primary and secondary school participation. Data from a Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) show that the primary school attendance rate has increased by more than one percentage point annually since the beginning of the decade. In 2000, 76 percent of all children of primary school age (6-10 years) were in school. By 2006, this value had increased to 83 percent (see Table 1). The attendance rate of girls increased by 9 percent over the 2000-2006 and the attendance rate of boys by 6 percent. School attendance rates also grew in urban and rural areas, and across all household wealth quintiles. However, close to 17 percent of all children of primary school age continue to be out of school.
Table 1: Children of primary school age out of school (million), India 2000 and 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Change 2000 to 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>-5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>-7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorest 20%</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second 20%</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 20%</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth 20%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richest 20%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>-8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following figure shows the composition of the group of children aged 6 to 10 years that are out of school. Although girls only account for 48 percent of the total number of children in this age group, they make up 54 percent of the children out of school. Rural children are disproportionately more likely to be out of school than urban children. Most strikingly, children from the poorest quintile make up almost half of all children out of school. 48 percent - 10 million of the 21 million children out of school - live in the poorest quintile. 74 percent of all children out of school live in the two poorest quintiles.

Figure 1: Children of primary school age out of school by sex, area of residence, and wealth quintile, India 2006

Experiences and research studies reflect that many children never go to school or drop out of school for a range of socio-economic, political and cultural reasons which are listed below:

- Children living in rural/remote areas – tribal areas, those who live on the village peripheries, especially belonging to dalit communities who are forced to live in segregated/isolated habitations, primitive tribes and socially ostracised communities
- Children in urban slums and on pavements
- Children from very poor households
- Children from migrant families – new migrants/seasonal migrants

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1 Data sources: India MICS 2000, India DHS 2005-06.
2 Data source: India Demographic and Health Survey 2005-06.
Children engaged in paid and unpaid work – daily/seasonal
Older girls who take on household responsibilities
Children in difficult circumstances – like orphans, children of sex workers, migrant labour, those infected/affected by HIV/AIDS
Children with special needs
Children from households where parent/s are alcoholic/violent

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various articles, news reports and research studies have taken up the issue of out of school children in India and abroad. Experiences reflect that many children never go to school or drop out of school for a range of socio-economic, political and cultural reasons. Some of the reviewed articles, research studies have been listed below-

In an article written by Usha Jayachandran for the Economic and Political Weekly, ‘How High Are Dropout Rates in India?’, the author suggests that it is interesting to look at the composition of out-of-school children in the 5-14 age group, in terms of the proportions who are “never enrolled” and “enrolled but currently not attending school (dropouts)” respectively. Providing data for the dropout rates as actually being quite low as per the 52nd round NSS data, the author argues that the possibility arises that a substantial proportion of out-of-school children are “never enrolled” rather than dropouts, contrary to what is often assumed. She says that “the possibility itself has been corroborated by the 52nd round NSS data”.

**Table 2: Percentage of Out-of-School Children (Currently Not Attending School) 5-14 Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Out of School Children (5-14 years)</th>
<th>Dropout (enrolled but currently not attending school)</th>
<th>Never Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of “never enrolled” children among out-of-school children (5-14 years) is as high as 82 per cent in rural areas and 60 per cent in urban areas. For the author, thus, the main challenge of universal elementary education appears to be to ensure that every child is enrolled in school at an early age.

The NSS data presents the reasons given by parents for children in the 5-14 age group for dropping out of school viz-

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3 Plan Education Strategy 07, extracted from Why are Children Out of School? – A summary of the study ‘Participatory Approach to Identify Reasons for Exclusion Among Out of School Children’, conducted in four states of India, Plan India, New Delhi, 2009
4 Source: Author’s calculations from NSS 52nd round data; Usha Jayachandran, How High Are Dropout Rates in India?, Economic and Political Weekly, March 17, 2007
“Child not interested in studies” accounts for the highest proportion of dropouts both in rural and urban areas and for both male and female children.

“Parents not interested in studies” affect the female child more in rural and urban areas. Inability to cope with the demands of schooling has a somewhat equal effect on boys and girls in rural and urban areas and is one of the important reasons for dropping out.

A larger proportion of female children in urban areas drop out because of the need to work for wages/salaries to supplement the family income. Similarly, a higher proportion of male children vis-à-vis female children drop out to participate in other economic activities in rural and urban areas.

A higher proportion of female children dropout to tend to domestic duties as compared to male children in both rural and urban areas.

And finally, financial constraints are seen to affect dropout relatively more in urban areas as compared to rural areas.

The website of Developed Nation Network Trust\(^5\) takes up the issue of drop out children in discussing the education scenario of India. In the reasons for ‘why do India's children drop out of school?’, it states numerous points:

Contrary to popular sentiment, the non availability of schooling facilities seems to account for only 10 - 15% of India's out-of-school children.

A much larger percentage of children are never enrolled in school simply because, according to reports, they and/or their parents are "not interested".

A large percentage of children are unable to take advantage of nearby educational facilities because they are needed at home to participate in the basic tasks of the household economy. Many children who are not in school are instead working eight hours or more daily; moreover, these children are not earning any significant income, as they have been relegated to tasks such as caring for their siblings, or tending grazing cattle, rather than being involved in jobs that would permit them to earn wages.

A considerable proportion of urban dropouts cite "failure to pass examinations" as their reason for discontinuance of education.

In the article, ‘Issue of school dropouts in Mumbai’, written by Sharmila Govande for Meri News, many reasons for dropout have been enlisted. Govande states that the “onset of puberty resulting into engagement and marriage, household chores mainly looking after children, financial crisis at home are very common reasons for high dropout rate among girls. For boys, the main reasons for dropping out are financial crisis, inability to give good results in the school examinations and the need to be productive and contribute to the family income.” She goes on – “Another very important cause for dropping out is the belief that education is unnecessary and of no use. The quality of education (both content and methodology) is very poor. The

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\(^5\) Website of Developed Nation Network Trust [www.developednation.org](http://www.developednation.org)
curriculums do not equip children with various skills that they require to enter the world of responsibilities. Practical learning is missing from our education system.”

Finally, the study conducted by Plan India, ‘Why are Children Out of School? – A summary of the study ‘Participatory Approach to Identify Reasons for Exclusion Among Out of School Children’,” presents the factors keeping children out of school in four states across India – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Delhi. For Uttar Pradesh, the factors that keep children out of school are stated as – (a) unfriendly teachers, (b) burden of work – domestic chores and sibling care for girls, farm work and cattle grazing for boys, (c) use of abusive language and corporal punishment in schools, (d) lack of sports equipment and recreational facilities in school, and (e) schools are far off. Accounting for Bihar, the children speak out their reasons for not wanting to go to school – ‘teachers do not notice us in class’, ‘we have to contribute to cleaning and in repair work at school’, ‘for the same fault punishment to us is harsher’, ‘when we return home, we have to take care of important chores’. Finally, the experiences of Delhi and Uttarakhand provide the following notes for why schools don’t attract children:

Schools lack basic infrastructure: They don’t have benches, drinking water and toilets.

Inhibiting school atmosphere prevents learning: Rude behaviour of teachers, poor quality of teaching and shortage of learning material is most common.

Curriculum is uninteresting and difficult: Subjects like mathematics and science most difficult to learn.

Lessons are conducted in unfamiliar language: In most government schools, Sanskrit is taught while students desire to learn Urdu.

Selective religious scriptures taught: Curriculum includes teaching of only Hindu scriptures like the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Corporal punishment: Children gave this as a prominent reason for not attending school.

No time for namaz: A leading cause of exclusion among children attending madrassas.

### METHODOLOGY

The rationale of the research study is to sustain the motivation of the out of school children (studied in the research) and to facilitate the creation of an enabling environment that allows them to join school. As part of the action undertaken after conducting the research, the facilitation of school admissions for these children is the key rationale.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To get a deeper insight into the circumstances of the identified children and their reasons for not going to school or for dropping out of school.

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6 Why are Children Out of School? – A summary of the study ‘Participatory Approach to Identify Reasons for Exclusion Among Out of School Children’, conducted in four states of India, Plan India, New Delhi, 2009
To subsequently undertake appropriate measures and actions in permeating reasons for exclusion from school; to facilitate the admission of motivated children in neighbouring schools.

**Research Design**

This study is descriptive in approach as it proposes to illustrate the situations of children who are out of school. Efforts have been to bring forth their voices and an understanding of their circumstances in the absence of an enabling environment for their participation in formal education provided by the school.

**Method of Research**

The research study employs the multiple case study method of research, which is based on an in-depth investigation of a multiple individuals, to explore causation, in order to further identify the underlying principles of the issue of ‘out of school’ children. The method thus involves in-depth, longitudinal examinations of five particular instances: cases. As a result, the researcher attempts to gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance (going ‘out of school’) happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively while undertaking the follow up action.

**Data Collection**

It was decided to limit the number of case study subjects to five in order to maintain the quality of the research work. The five case study subjects of the research were formerly known to the researcher. Interview Schedule and Participatory observation are the main tools used in data collection.

**CASE STUDIES**

**Case I:** Inderpal Singh

Age: 14 years

Inderpal is a 14 year old boy who lives with his parents, his elder sister and younger brother in Aruna Nagar. His father works as a gurudwara servant and mother is a housewife. His brother and sister and studying and he has 2 other sisters who are married. Inderpal was initially studying in Sarvodaya Bal Kanya Vidalaya School but due to a prolonged visit to his native village in the event of his grandfather’s demise led to his drop out from school. He happened to miss four months of school while he was enrolled in class IV, because of which he could not clear the stated class. Once he returned, his attendance for the following classes was insufficient and hence he dropped out.

However, his mother informed the researcher that it was not the factor of the visit to the village that led to the child’s dropping out of school. Rather it was the inappropriate and violent attitude of the school teacher that led to this. She said that Inderpal had stopped going to school much before they left for the village. She personally went to meet the teacher to request him to not ill treat her son but to no avail. Instead, he further mocked her son. In trying to prevent the child from dropping out of school, his father also gave him many beatings but the boy was determined to not return back to school as he was too scared. It has been 4 years since he dropped out but now he longs to go back to school.
Parental pressure and the frequent taunts from all his relatives and family members also add to the child’s turmoil. The family realizes that the child now gets bored at home, with nothing to do all day. For now, the boy spends his day watching television, playing cricket in the street and sleeping. The parents realize the importance of education and want him to go to school where he can study and make friends. The child’s maternal uncle had once come to take him for work, but the child’s father refused for this, saying that he would continue with his studies. Inderpal wants to go to a school where he can play cricket, football, go on swings. He also emphasised on his desire to have good teachers who teach well and are cordial to students.

His two older sisters have been married off and the third one is also going to be married soon. The family’s savings have been kept aside for the weddings of the three daughters. The two boys of the family are the only support of their parents. Their father is already very old and would not be able to support them for long. It is very important for the two boys, especially the older one, Inderpal, to be educated and earn well. He is extremely keen on returning back to school and does not mind starting from where he left off even though his friends are now in higher classes.

Case II: Ashish Kumar

Age: 8 years
Ashish resides in Aruna nagar with his mother and 2 brothers. His elder brother is a student and the younger brother is a drop out as well. As Ashish’s father passed away and his school fee was high, his mother could not keep up with it and hence had to pull him out of school. Even the boy was uninterested in going to school due to various reasons such as bullying by peers and not being able to wake up in the morning.

Ashish was studying in Nehru Vihar School and is certain that he does not want to go back there. He stated that his teachers would end up eating the students’ lunches in that school. Ashish instead wants to go to Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya at Magazine Road, the ‘chowki wala School’. This is because he believes that good children study in that school and also because all his friends study there. He promises to not even run away from that school on any day. He also wants to go to school for the sake of his mother – so that she feels good and secure about her children and their future; so that nobody can say anything to them when they grow up. The mother is very keen on sending the child to school.

For now, he just keeps sitting idle at home. When asked about his ambition, he said that he wants to become like his maternal uncle who goes to office. However, he does not know the sort of office he goes to.

Case III: Aman Kumar

Age: 7 years
Aman is Ashish’s younger brother and was studying in Prakash Kothia School before he dropped out. Corporal punishment caused Aman to lose his attraction to school. He described about a lady caretaker in
school who would hit students with a stick in case she felt they were disobeying her. Also, the financial constraints of the mother were another reason for him to drop out.

Aman wants to go back to school, although a new one, as soon as possible because all his friends go. Whenever Aman visits them at their house, their mothers ask him if he is going to school or not. They then tell him to study, to learn to read and write, so he can grow up to get a job, a pay and a wife. For now, Aman spends his day going for a jog with his friend and the rest of the day he plays, watches television and eats meals in between.

Aman said that he loves to study. He always wants to study and learn new things. When he grows up, he wants to become a tailor like his father. He states clear aspects of what he wishes for in his school. He wants to go to a school where one gets free lunch in school and also where the teachers do not beat up children.

**Case IV:** Kaptaan

Age: 5 years

Kaptaan resides in Aruna Nagar with his father and 4 elder brothers and sisters. He has not been enrolled in school as his father missed the deadline for the admission form submission last year. Kaptaan is very keen on joining school. The parent is very keen on enrolling Kaptaan in a school. However, he is clear that he does not want Kaptaan to join the M.C.D. School of Aruna Nagar as children fight and beat each other there. He prefers Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya – ‘Chowki Wala School.

Even though he isn’t going to school, Kaptaan attends regular tuitions as his father does not want him to lag behind from others. Apart from this, he spends his day playing outdoors and sleeping. He attends the tuition classes that are run in the community at the rate of Rs. 50 per month. However, he wants to attend a regular school like other children where he can play and make new friends. His ambition is to become a policeman when he grows up.

**Case V:** Abhishek Singh

Age: 5 Years

Abhishek stays in Aruna Nagar with his parents and 4 brothers and sisters. His elder siblings are all enrolled in schools. However he could not be admitted last year due to absence of a birth certificate or any other proof of identity. This goes for the entire family. Though the other children had somehow procured admission earlier, the systems had changed and Abhishek could not be admitted to school last year. If he would have a birth certificate, he would have been enrolled in school in the previous year and would have at least been going to Nursery and learning something. Currently, Abhishek cannot even hold a pencil properly.

The child, though passively, says that he wants to go to school. The parents are really keen on sending him to school but are restricted by the absence of birth certificate. They cannot put Abhishek in a private school
as they do not have the resources to pay the fee. Therefore, enrolling him in a government school is the only choice for the family, which cannot be attained without the essential birth certificate. For now, the child spends his day in the usual activities of play, television watching, sleeping, and roaming around in the community. He is also noted as sitting amongst his older siblings when they study and trying to look at their work. The older siblings, however, are not able to give him much attention.

CONCLUSIONS
The issue of out-of-school children needs to continue to be a high priority within the Education for All agenda and for the world community. Without bold and sustained action on this issue, global commitments to universal primary education will not be realized if current trends continue, leaving millions of children out of school and denied their right to education in 2015.

Appropriate follow up action was undertaken keeping in mind the situations, circumstances and needs of each child. The nearby schools were approached and support from the Department of Education is sought. Income poverty, poor health and nutrition, disability, gender, ethnicity, child labor, migration, geographical disadvantages, cultural factors and situations of fragility and conflict contribute to limiting access to school and excluding children from a proper education.

Despite dramatic improvements over the last decade, progress towards achieving universal primary education has been slowing down over the last couple of years. **In 2011, 57 million primary school-aged children were still out of school** and many others have dropped out of the education system.

We recognize the need to strengthen school systems to include the most marginalized and hardest-to-reach children and overcome the barriers that prevent them from attending, staying, and finishing school.

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