

# Children Inclusion from Marginalised Communities: With Special Reference to India

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## ABSTRACT

The Right to Education Act, 2009 and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (Amendment) 2012 in India guarantee free and compulsory education to all children of India between the age group of 6 – 14 years. Yet, 8.1 million children are out of school. Moreover, 40% children drop out of school before completing 8 years of education. A national award-winning NGO named LAMP (Liberal Association for Movement of people) has been working to ensure that children from all the marginalized and excluded communities attain their Rights to Education, in line with Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 to achieve universal primary education, the Education for All (EFA) goals and international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In India, net primary school enrolment for 6 to 14 year olds is 98% but is only 58% for 11 to 14 year olds. Only 70% of children who are enrolled to attend school regularly. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are two groups of people who have been historically excluded and oppressed in social, cultural, economic and political affairs.

As a first step in the exercise of bringing children from marginalised communities into school a careful mapping of these children -who they are and where they live - will have to be undertaken systematically.

Exclusionary practices mostly begin even before a child reaches the school premises. A Dalit/Tribal/Muslim child especially girl, for instance, traveling through an upper caste village on her way to school may face harassment on his/her way that could well discourage him/her, and dissuade his/her parents from sending him/her to school.

There are many active civil society groups like LAMP and others that have gained substantial experience and knowledge of working with these children. Active involvement of these groups must be sought to enable their inclusion in the education process.

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## 1. Introduction

The Right to Education Act, 2009 and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (Amendment) 2012 in India guarantee free and compulsory education to all children of India between the age group of 6 – 14 years. Yet, 8.1 million children are out of school. Moreover, 40% children drop out of school before completing 8 years of education.

A national award-winning NGO named LAMP (Liberal Association for Movement of people) has been working to ensure that children from all the marginalized and excluded communities attain their Rights to Education. The main objective of the LAMP with the support of the FICE-India to dedicate itself to tackling the exclusion of all marginalised groups from education in a strategic manner, in line with Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 to achieve universal primary education, the Education for All (EFA) goals and international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

LAMP believes that poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion are inextricably linked. Therefore, we have adopted equity and inclusion as core principles, intrinsic to a rights based approach, to establish an egalitarian and democratic society.

Inclusion is the process of ensuring that all are able to participate fully in all spheres. Inclusion is a development issue. The process of inclusion is not just about improving access to services, but also supporting people – including those who are discriminated against and marginalised – to engage in wider processes to ensure that their rights and needs are recognised.

Ultimately the groups who are marginalized need to be integrated into the political system in order to uphold their rights of access to all the resources. Equity and inclusion are therefore interrelated. In practice, addressing them requires:

- better recognition and understanding of the differential needs of individuals and groups;
- identifying and tackling the root causes of exclusion;
- promoting and supporting their inclusion in decision-making processes; and
- Identifying and implementing appropriate and sustainable solutions.

A needs-based approach aims to change people's situation of deprivation or lack of access to services, viewing people as passive 'recipients' or 'beneficiaries'. This approach may satisfy the needs of that group of people for now but there are no guarantees that improvements in access will be sustained.

A rights-based approach is a transformational development process in which people are the drivers and subjects of their own development. Moving to a rights-based approach implies focusing on the relationship between state and civil society. A rights-based approach is about improving wider systems of governance which determine progress towards our vision of a world where everyone has access to all the resources. It implies a change in the power dynamics between those without access and the duty bearers. It aims to bring about sustainable and long term structural change in policies, procedures and laws, as well as changes in attitudes and behaviours. There are also incremental benefits in implementing a rights-based approach and considerable potential for multiplier effects by focusing at a number of different levels.

In India, net primary school enrolment for 6 to 14 year olds is 98% but is only 58% for 11 to 14 year olds. Only 70% of children who are enrolled attend school regularly. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are two groups of people who have been historically excluded and oppressed in social, cultural, economic and political affairs.

As a first step in the exercise of bringing children from marginalised communities into school a careful mapping of these children -who they are and where they live - will have to be undertaken systematically.

## 2. Understanding Exclusionary Practices

In addition, an in-depth understanding of the realities of the situation faced by marginalised children at the community and school level, including an identification of all the points of exclusion from the level of the household up to education system will be required.

Exclusionary practices mostly begin even before a child reaches the school premises. A Dalit child especially girl, for instance, traveling through an upper caste village on her way to school may face harassment on his/her way that could well discourage him/her, and dissuade his/her parents from sending him/her to school. Parents of children from Muslim and tribal families may also have similar inhibitions in sending their children to schools that are located in area dominated by the majority community. Safety of children is regularly subjected to derogatory name calling, rebuking, even physical harassment is a significant factor determining participation of children from such backgrounds in school. Children from Dalit (Scheduled Castes), Scheduled Tribes and Muslim communities have both common as well as unique needs and challenges impeding attempts to their inclusion. Following is the brief account of needs and nature of exclusion pertaining to each community as extracted from the Report of the Committee on Implementation of RTE (Right to Education) and Resultant Revamp of SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhijan).

### 3. Following is the Broad Listing of Examples of Exclusion of Dalit (Scheduled Castes) Children

#### Exclusion by Teachers:

- I. Segregated seating arrangements in the classroom with SC children made to sit separately and typically at the back of the classroom.
- II. Undue harshness in reprimanding SC children, especially in relation to upper caste children. For instance, in scolding children for coming late to school, in resolving fights between children condoning name-calling by upper caste children, etc.
- III. Not giving time and attention to Scheduled Castes children in the classroom, such as not checking their homework or class work, not answering their queries – even rebuking them for asking questions in class.
- IV. Excluding Scheduled Castes children from public functions in the school. These include non-participation in the morning assembly or other public events such as on Republic Day or Independence Day. Routinely making them sit at the back of the classroom.
- V. Making derogatory remarks about Scheduled Castes children - their supposed inability to keep up with academic work.
- VI. Denying Scheduled Castes children the use of school facilities, including water sources. Keeping water segregated; even preventing SC children from using the school taps or containers used to store drinking water have been reported from many areas.
- VII. Asking Scheduled Castes children to do menial tasks in school, including cleaning the school premises and even the toilets.

#### Exclusion by peer group:

- I. Calling Scheduled Castes children by caste names.
- II. Not including Scheduled Castes children in games and play activities in the classroom or in break time when children go out to play; Scheduled Castes children often return to their own neighbourhoods to play with non-enrolled Scheduled Castes children there.
- III. Not sitting with Scheduled Castes children in the classroom.

#### Exclusion by the system:

- I. Incentives schemes meant for Scheduled Castes children not being implemented in full.
- II. Lack of acknowledgement of Scheduled Castes children role models in the curriculum or by teachers.
- III. Reinforcing caste characteristics in syllabi and textbooks.
- IV. Lack of sensitisation of teachers in teacher education and training.
- V. Insufficient recruitment of Scheduled Castes teachers.

The interventions for children belonging to Scheduled Caste communities have to be based on the intensive micro-planning addressing the needs of every child. The following suggested list of interventions for inclusion of SC children can help in addressing the above-mentioned practices of discrimination and exclusion.

- I. Establishing norms of behaviour within the school for teachers and students.
- II. Timely detection of the forms of discrimination practiced in a particular context by either teachers or students. This is not an easy task as many forms of discrimination have become part of accepted behaviour and go unnoticed and unchallenged by the majority. Finding ways of listening to children's voices would be crucial to this exercise. Setting up a system of reporting on discriminatory practices at the school level would be a place to start. Complaint boxes that are regularly dealt with at SMC meetings are a suggested intervention.
- III. Timely redressal of instances of discrimination at the level of the school or Block. Delays in taking action can lead to discouragement on the part of the parents and teachers.
- IV. Escorts to school for Scheduled Castes children.
- V. Establishing norms for classroom interactions such as seating patterns that ensure that children are not segregated on the basis of caste, community or gender. The 'Nali-Kali' model of multilevel learning, pioneered in Karnataka in the mid nineties, (based on the Rishi Valley School-in-a-bag programme) is worth revisiting and adopting as it allows children to sit in groups based on levels of learning. This not only breaks social barriers but it also allows for a rotation and thus intermingling as children move in and out of the learning circles.
- VI. Co-curricular activities, such as sports, music and drama which tend to break social barriers among children need to be encouraged. They have remained a hugely neglected area and would be an important strategy for increasing the interaction of children as well as allowing children from varied backgrounds to exhibit their talents and get recognition
- VII. Recognizing the agency of teachers. The teacher is a key figure in the school and can help to either perpetuate or obliterate discriminatory practices. But her role in this process has been largely neglected so far. Interventions in the following areas would go a long way in overturning the current situation.
  - a) Sensitisation of teachers from the stage of pre-service training onwards. Special modules should be developed by recognized experts for use in teacher education and training programmes. Special in-service training within the mandated 20 days should be organised to deal with the specific problems of inclusion at the Block level.
  - b) Setting norms for teacher behaviour. Some norms related to corporal punishment and abuse have been included in the RTE. Strict monitoring and adherence to these norms would help obliterate some of the malpractices mentioned above, such as making SC children perform menial tasks.
- VIII. Helping the teacher develop pedagogical tools and classroom practices that allow social barriers to be broken. Technical support in developing such tools should be sought from experts as well as civil society groups.
- IX. Providing adequate infrastructure for elementary schooling in districts with concentration of Scheduled Castes population.
- X. Opening schools in Scheduled Castes concentrated neighbourhood wherever required.
- XI. Special training as per need for age appropriate admission
- XII. Interventions for specific categories of deprived children belonging to scheduled caste community living in difficult circumstances.
- XIII. Monitoring attendance and retention of Scheduled Castes children regularly
- XIV. Providing context specific intervention in the form of a special facility like residential schools or transport as required.

SSA (Sarba Siksha Abhijan) recognizes that problems of exclusion often take highly local and context specific forms, and the above mentioned is a general list of issues that have emerged from the studies conducted so far, which need to be addressed urgently.

#### **Exclusion of Scheduled Tribe Children:**

Tribal children, besides facing some of the exclusionary practices mentioned above for Dalit children also face problems peculiar to their situation. Tribal populations tend to be concentrated in remote, hilly or heavily forested areas with dispersed populations where even physical access to schools is difficult. If there are schools and teachers, the teachers are unlikely to share the students' social and cultural background or to speak the students' language, leading to a sense of alienation among the children.

The Tribal Welfare Department has tried to address this problem by establishing residential or 'Ashram' schools for tribal children; however, there is a need not just for many more residential schools but also for improved quality in these schools. With the notification of the RTE (Right to Education) Act, 'Ashram' schools would also come under its purview and have to follow the prescribed norms and standards. Collaboration with the Education Department on residential schools for tribal dominated areas would be required to enable a strengthened and consolidated approach to this problem including recruitment of teachers of similar social and cultural backgrounds and provision of curricula and textbooks that are not alienating for tribal children.

The biggest problem faced by tribal children is that of language. Analysis of the educational indicators shows that majority of tribal children drop out of the primary school due to the difference in the school and home language. Teaching materials and textbooks tend to be in a language the students do not understand; content of books and syllabi ignore the students' own knowledge and experience and focus only on the dominant language and culture. Not understanding the school language and therefore the course content, the children are unable to cope, end up repeating grades and eventually dropping out.

While instruction in the mother tongue is widely recognised as beneficial to language competencies in the first language,

achievement in other subject areas, and second language learning,<sup>1</sup> there is no explicit obligation on the states on institute mother tongue education. The “three language formula” that has been the cornerstone of the language policy in India has not been uniformly implemented across the country. In some states such as Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh, which are linguistically diverse, the problem is compounded by the multiplicity of linguistic backgrounds represented in a single classroom.

#### 4. The Following Suggested List of Interventions for Inclusion of Tribal Children can Help in Addressing the Above Practices of Discrimination and Exclusion

- I. Teaching in the local tribal language by recruiting native tribal teachers.
- II. Development of educational material in local tribal languages using resources available within the tribal community.
- III. Establishing resource centres in tribal dominated areas for providing training, academic and other technical support for development of pedagogic tools and education materials catering to multi lingual situations.
- IV. Training of teachers in multilingual education with special focus on tribal languages.
- V. Sensitisation of teachers to tribal cultures and practices.
- VI. Incorporation of local tribal and indigenous knowledge in the curriculum and textbooks.
- VII. Creating spaces for cultural mingling within schools so as to recognise tribal cultures and practices and obliterate feelings of inferiority and alienation among tribal children.
- VIII. Involvement of tribal community members in school activities to reduce social distance between the school and the community.
- IX. Textbooks in mother tongue for children at the beginning of Primary education where they do not understand regional language.
- X. Anganwadis and Balwadis in each school in tribal areas so that the girls are not required to do baby-sitting.
- XI. Special training for non-tribal teachers to work in tribal areas, including knowledge of the tribal languages and cultures.
- XII. Special plan for nomadic and migrant workers.

**Exclusion of Muslim Children:** Education of Muslim children continues to be a particularly neglected area in policy and programming in India today. As a result their educational attainments are second only to those of the Scheduled Caste populations in most areas as mentioned in the Sachar Committee Report.

Constraints felt by Muslim Children: From the scattered bits of evidence that do exist, it can be said that in addition to the general issues of discrimination and harassment faced by children from other disadvantaged and excluded groups, children from Muslim families face some of the following constraints as well:

- I. Denial of admission
- II. Unfriendly school and classroom environment
- III. Cultural and religious domination

- IV. Early withdrawal of male children to enable them to apprentice with artisans, mechanics etc. to enable self-employment as discrimination in the organised labour market is a huge perceived concern.
- V. Even earlier withdrawal of female children to enable them to find grooms more educated than themselves.
- VI. Unfulfilled demand for adequate number of Urdu medium schools or at least Urdu as a second language
- VII. Lack of Urdu language teachers

#### 5. Some Interventions for Inclusion of Muslim Children can be

- I. Systematic and robust research on specific constraints faced by Muslim children in different areas. Muslims, like SCs and STs are not a homogeneous community and exhibit wide differences in social and cultural practices in different states. A more thorough understanding of these issues will help formulate better interventions for inclusion of Muslim children into the education process.
- II. Opening of schools in Muslim concentrated neighbourhoods.
- III. Providing ‘girls only’ schools in Muslim concentrated neighbourhoods.
- IV. Providing Urdu medium schools in Muslim concentrated neighbourhoods.
- V. Providing escort to Muslim girls, preferably through women from the community for safe school going
- VI. Option of learning Urdu as a second language
- VII. Recruitment of more Urdu teachers, especially in Muslim concentrated areas;
- VIII. Context specific and tailor made programmes for special training.
- IX. Sensitisation of all teachers to issues of cultural and religious diversity especially in relation to Muslims.
- X. Incorporation of practices, such as
  - a) Due representation of Muslim culture in curricular and pedagogical processes;
  - b) Encouraging discussion of Muslim cultural and religious practices in the school or classroom with the help of community members;
  - c) Celebration of Muslim festivals in the schools;
  - d) sensitive handling of Muslim children during Ramzan when they may be fasting and
  - e) Adequate representation of Muslim parents in the SMC.

A large part of exclusion results from social distance caused by lack of knowledge and understanding about minority communities. Finding spaces to break these information barriers would go a long way in reducing the hostilities and insecurities that exist.

#### 6. Children belonging to Most Under-Privileged Groups

SSA (Sarba Siksha Abhijan), which means “Education for All”. Recognises the hierarchies among the poor. There are groups which are not only the most, deprived and exploited, but also quite neglected. These groups deserve a special priority and focused action. SSA functionaries will have to carefully assess their

needs and then plan context specific, innovative integrated interventions to make tangible progress in eliminating exclusion of children belonging to these groups. The following groups by far have been classified among the most disadvantaged groups:

- I. Urban deprived children
- II. Child labour, particularly bonded child labour and domestic workers
- III. Children in ecologically deprived area where they are required to fetch fuel, water, fodder and do other household chores
- IV. Children in very poor slum communities and uprooted urban habitations  
Children of families of scavengers and other such stigmatised professions
- V. Children of itinerant or seasonal labour who have mobile and transient lifestyle like construction workers, road workers and workers on large construction site
- VI. Children of landless agriculture labourers
- VII. Nomadic communities and pastoralists
- VIII. Forests dwellers and tribals in remote areas and children residing in remote desert hamlets
- IX. Children in areas affected by civil strife

A major issue concerning children in extremely difficult circumstances is sheer lack of their voice due to their alienation from community and little representation in agencies and forums like the SMC, PTA or VEC. SSA would make efforts to address this issue by advocacy for children's right to participation, by supporting the formation of support groups children's collectives, and, by encouraging efforts to accommodate their voices in planning, implementation and monitoring of interventions and strategies.

## 7. Education of Children affected by Migration

To address the issue of seasonal migration for varying periods for work in brick kilns, agriculture, sugarcane harvesting, construction, stone quarrying, salt pans etc. and its adverse effect on education of children who migrate with or without other members of the family, SSA encourages identification of districts, blocks and villages/cities or towns from where or to which there is a high incidence of migration. The RTE Act mandates bringing such children to regular schools either in districts where they stay or in districts to where they seasonally migrate. This would require innovative and effective strategies for special training to develop age appropriate competencies to facilitate children's enrolment and retention in age-appropriate classes, and to coordinate between the education providing agencies at both the locations mentioned above.

Special Training strategies for these children would require very meticulous planning. Some strategies can be developed on the following ideas:

- a) Seasonal hostels or residential camps to retain children in the sending villages/urban habitat during the period of migration,
- b) Transportation facility to and from the school in the vicinity of the worksite, and if it is not practical then work-site schools should be provided at the location where migrant families are engaged in work,

- c) Peripatetic educational volunteer/s who can move with the migrating families to take care of children's education during the period they are on move from school at one location to school at the other hand,
- d) Strategies for tracking of children through migration cards /other records to enable continuity in their education before, during and after the migration.

The receiving district /State where migrant families are located for some period shall have responsibility for ensuring that education to the children in age appropriate classes continues during the period of migration. It is expected that the AWP&Bs of these districts would include activities for education of such children, under Special Training component. The involvement of NGOs in the processes of mapping of migration and planning and implementation of interventions should be actively supported. Funds available under innovation can be used to support activities in an integrated strategy which are not supported under any other Norm of SSA.

Since migration takes place across districts and states, it would be necessary for sending and receiving districts and States to collaborate with each other to ensure continuity of education of such children and by other means such as providing appropriate text books, teachers who can teach in the language in which children have been receiving education. For this purpose "task forces" could be set up to effect regular coordination between States/districts.

## 8. Urban Deprived Children

SSA has been focusing on the growing problems of schooling of disadvantaged children in urban areas. Successive JRM's have also dwelt on this component. Urban areas have special challenges like the education of street children, the education of children who are rag pickers, homeless children, children whose parents are engaged in professions that makes children's education difficult, education of children living in urban working class slums, children who are working in industry, children working in households, children at tea shops, garages etc. Other city specific features are: very high cost of land, heterogeneous community and high opportunity cost etc.

However, despite these initiatives, there is a growing need for systemic and coordinated efforts to provide solutions on an institutional basis to urban issues. Thus to implement RTE in urban areas, SSA would adopt a more holistic and systems approach. This approach would necessitate coordination and convergence of interventions across Departments, local bodies, civil society organisations and the private sector. SSA would encourage a diversity of interventions planned and executed in integrated, collaborative and cohesive manner to tackle the unique challenges in urban areas. This would require planning distinctively for the urban areas either as separate plans or as part of District Plans in the case of smaller towns. In either case, this would require partnership with NGOs, Municipal bodies, etc.

## 9. Children in areas affected by Civil Strife

This is a new area of growing concern that is leading to the marginalisation of large number of children from educational processes. SSA recognises the situation of these children as an

alarming and significant problem and advocates for concrete steps to ameliorate the situation as early as possible. Some measures to insulate children and their education from the impact of such situation must be undertaken with active involvement of Civil Society Groups, which are as follows:-

- a) Prohibiting the use of school and other educational facilities for housing police, military or para-military forces.
- b) Making schools safe zones by providing adequate security and emotional support to enable children to come to school and continue with their education undisturbed.
- c) If security cannot be provided then making alternative arrangements for all affected children to enable them to continue their education without a break. These arrangements could include providing residential schooling facilities or transportation to safer schools to children from the affected Areas.
- d) Organising special negotiations with leaders in these areas to ensure that schools are allowed to function uninterrupted.

### 10. Excluded among the Excluded

SSA acknowledges that by no means have the above categories exhausted the whole list of children excluded from the education process. While children with special needs are being dealt with in a separate section, children from migrant families with nomadic background, children working as domestic

help, children in conflict with law, children in protective institutions, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children affected by natural disasters, to name a few, are some that have not been explicitly mentioned above or dealt with elsewhere. Special strategies to enable their participation will have to be developed. Support in developing these strategies, advocating for them and monitoring the continued participation of these children will be important elements of SSA's focus in the context of implementation of the RTE Act.

There are many active civil society groups like LAMP and other member organizations of the "All India Association of Voluntary Agencies(AIAVA)" and FICE-India, that have gained substantial experience and knowledge of working with these children. Active involvement of these groups must be sought to enable their inclusion in the education process. A process of empanelling such groups for resource support would be a good starting point. However, more active engagement of the education department as well as NCPCR- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (India). /SCPCR- State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights or Right to Education Protection Authority (**REPA**) will be necessary to ensure that these children from marginalized communities do not remain excluded.

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