One out of every ten Indians is currently between 14 and 18 years old. The school system and its capacity to meet the needs of this 10 million strong population is key to shaping future outcomes, not only for young people themselves but also for the country as a whole.

While policy goals aiming to ensure universal quality secondary education have been in place for almost a decade, numerous obstacles remain. At the same time, a range of initiatives aiming to address these obstacles have emerged. This conference aims to provide a forum to discuss current research and practice with regard to some key issues in secondary education.

The event is organized as three sessions. The first two sessions will each address a broad set of issues. Each will begin with a set of presentations by researchers and practitioners who will highlight key issues involved and some possible solutions to address them, followed by a larger discussion with participants. The third and final session will be a panel discussion between researchers, practitioners and policy makers to discuss lessons learned and possible collaborations and actions in the future.

**Session 1: From elementary to secondary school**

While enrolment at the elementary level has been well over 90% for more than a decade, the transition to secondary school remains a challenge for many students. One issue is that of access: for example, a recent study by ASER Centre in Uttar Pradesh and Odisha highlighted the fact that only 10% of sampled government schools offered secondary grades, leaving students to travel long distances or enrol in local private schools. Government figures also capture significant gender gaps in transition to secondary school (girls 88.6%; boys 92.5%). Research also shows that learning outcomes in elementary grades are an important predictor of transition to secondary school. Equally, factors like child marriage and social exclusion affect children’s progress to secondary grades.

**Session 2: Provision of skills and capabilities in secondary school**

Once our young people are in secondary school, how well we are preparing them to build a better future for themselves and for the country? This session will address three key sets of capabilities that are critical enablers of future progress. We will discuss academic competencies, based on evidence from longitudinal and other research showing that poor foundational learning at the elementary stage leads most children to struggle with the academic burden of the secondary school curriculum. Second, we will address vocational skills and the available mechanisms that enable youth to acquire them. And finally, we will look at helping this age group to acquire key life skills such as self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills, among others that are critically important, especially for girls and young women.

**Session 3: Looking back, looking forward**

What are the key issues and challenges with regard to secondary education, and what are the kinds of actions that can help resolve them? How can research and action on the ground better inform each other? How can policy be shaped by lessons learned in the field and evidence emerging from research? Is there some low-hanging fruit that could provide a starting point for collaborative efforts? In this concluding session representatives from government, non-government, and academic institutions will reflect on ways in which we can help our young people build their own future and that of the country.

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1 Census 2011
2 ASER Centre (2018). A study of access, transition and learning in secondary schools
3 DISE 2015-16