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*Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and  
challenges*

## **Second Chance Programmes in South Asia**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, most countries in South Asia have made impressive strides in enrolment and access for children of elementary school age. However the challenges of re-entering the education system and in accessing further learning opportunities are huge especially for young people (age 15-24) who did not finish elementary school or did not go on to secondary school. For the past fifteen years, policy documents acknowledge that the needs of school drop-outs must be taken into account in planning and implementation<sup>1</sup>. However, in a concrete way the major strategy for dropouts is preventive and focussed on ensuring that children complete elementary schooling rather than enabling those who are no longer in school to access continuing education. There are however some noteworthy efforts in India to provide a “second chance” opportunity for education and learning to those in the 15-24 age group who have missed out on a full cycle of basic education. From the government side, these include “open schooling”, educational interventions for girls that are linked to women’s empowerment programs, residential programs for girls who can continue till the secondary stage. Several non-governmental organizations also offer models for giving young people a chance to continue learning. But none of these programs are at the scale or quality which is needed if countries in South Asia want to reap demographic dividends. The next few years will show if India is able to translate priorities into plans and plans into practice on scale.

## MAIN CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH ASIA WHO HAD DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL WITH SECOND CHANCE FOR ACQUIRING FOUNDATION SKILLS AROUND 2000 (1000 words)

In the years leading to 2000 as well as in the decade that followed, India’s main focus in education has been on universalizing enrolment. It was rightly assumed that there would be many benefits of ensuring that all children were enrolled in school. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Government of India’s flagship scheme was launched in 2000-2001. It provided for a “variety of interventions for universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in elementary education and improving the quality of learning.”<sup>2</sup> The new law for the Right to Education that came into force in 2010 made education free and compulsory up to eight years. This thrust in policy was matched by increases in government expenditure and led to the levy of a 2% education cess to support schooling for all. Ensuing universal access, guaranteeing inputs, providing incentives and entitlements (textbooks, midday meals, uniforms, scholarships) for school-goers have been important characteristics of this phase of India’s development.

While enrolment levels have reached well above 96% in the age group 6 to 14, the path from elementary to secondary schooling continues to have challenges. Since 2000, almost all policy documents clearly acknowledge the need to strengthen and expand secondary schooling. Despite SSA’s enrolment achievements, even if students successfully completed eight years of elementary education, transition into the secondary stage was neither certain nor easy especially in rural areas. Access and affordability were clear barriers to getting a secondary school education.<sup>3</sup> In existing

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<sup>1</sup> In India, see the Plan documents from the Planning Commission: (<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/welcome.html>) and other documents from the Ministry of Human Resource Development ([ssa.nic.in](http://ssa.nic.in) and [rmsa.nic.in](http://rmsa.nic.in)).

<sup>2</sup> <http://mhrd.gov.in/schemes>

<sup>3</sup> According to DISE 2012-13, for every 2.06 primary schools, there is one upper primary school and for every 2.64 upper primary schools, there is a secondary school. These ratios vary considerably by state. All

secondary schools, there were and continue to be shortages of the proper facilities and of trained and capable teachers.<sup>4</sup> Analyses of the “mainstream” pathway from elementary to secondary schools repeatedly state that fundamental reinforcements are needed.<sup>5</sup> But for those who had not made it to the end of the primary or elementary stage, the path forward is even less clear.

The reasons for not completing school cannot be reduced to a single event or factor; causes are a series of interrelated events, influences and contexts that eventually lead to a student dropping out. Many of the same sets of determinants also make it difficult for such students to re-enter the mainstream school system or indeed engage in any other alternative educational opportunity or “second chance” programmes.

Many family factors combine to “pull” students out of school or from education across South Asia.<sup>6</sup> Students from better off and smaller families and with better educated parents are less likely to leave school.<sup>7</sup> As an individual gets older, the opportunity cost of time rises. Important among other “pull” factors is the need to have adolescents look after younger siblings and do household chores while other adults in the family work. Even today, caste and social background matters so does gender - with disproportionately higher numbers of students from scheduled castes or tribes leaving school as compared to their peers.<sup>8</sup> Children with special needs and disabilities have a huge disadvantage in the mainstream education system with very little supplemental physical support or additional learning assistance being made available.<sup>10</sup> Overall, poverty is correlated with poorer health, more incidence of illness which leads to discontinuities in school attendance which eventually lead to low participation in the education process.

Specific demographic events can have a big impact on life chances; for example death of family members especially the father can precipitate a sudden change in what a young person is able to do.

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India, there are 853870 primary schools, 218857 secondary schools and 122368 higher secondary school. These are based on available government figures from 2012-13.

<sup>4</sup> See the Joint Review Mission reports of RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Mission) [http://mhrd.gov.in/JRM\\_RMSA](http://mhrd.gov.in/JRM_RMSA)

<sup>5</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Review Mission aide memoire of RMSA lays out the challenges very clearly [http://mhrd.gov.in/JRM\\_RMSA\\_third](http://mhrd.gov.in/JRM_RMSA_third).

<sup>6</sup> PROBE report (1999), Dostie and Jayaraman (2006), Jayachandran (1997) Chugh’s work (2004) from Delhi slums shows the importance of family income and father’s employment status determined the chances that children would continue in school.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Siddhu (2011) finds that in educationally backward blocks in Uttar Pradesh that students from households with more school age children were less likely to transition to secondary school than their peers from smaller families. This was even more acute among the poorest families and among families with older parents. Alexander, R. (2008). Education for All, the Quality Imperative and the Problem of Pedagogy. CREATE Pathways to Access No 20. Brighton:University of Sussex. Also see Hunt, F. (2008) Dropping Out from School: A Cross Country Review of Literature, CREATE Pathways to Access, Research Monograph, No,16. Brighton: University of Sussex.

<sup>8</sup> Citing government documents, a recent article notes that the national drop out rate for children who leave school before completing eighth grade is 42%. Compared to this, the comparable figure for “dalits” (scheduled castes) is 51%, for tribal minorities is 58% and for adolescent girls is 64%.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/22/qa-talking-discrimination-and-school-dropout-rates-india>. Among other studies see Ramachandran (2006), Ramachandran and Sharma (2008), Visaria (2006).

<sup>9</sup> Although the gap in enrolment between boys and girls in elementary school is small in most Indian states (see ASER reports or government enrolment figures), it widens substantially after Grade 8 or age 14.

<sup>10</sup> Singal’s work outlines the implications of insufficient and inadequate data even for estimation or identification of needs of such groups. (RECOUP working paper). Despite the 2000 law – The People with Disabilities Act – facilities and amenities for students with special needs are woefully inadequate.

Marriage and child responsibilities are another set of big barriers, especially for young women, who are seeking to continue or re-join education.<sup>11</sup> Multiple disadvantages accumulate making it even harder for those in vulnerable populations or locations to overcome constraints. More often than not, the constraining influence of these disadvantages grow as the individual gets older and the opportunity cost of time rises.

The inability to participate in a sustained way in continuing education or second chance opportunities is often correlated with the factors that pushed such students out of school in the first place. Among the commonly cited “push” factors that lead to school dropout are issues of distance (access to secondary schooling), safety (especially for girls) and the overall quality of education. For example recent work in India is highlighting the fact that although over time more students are completing more years of schooling, but many are not gaining the fundamental skills needed to move forward for further study in school, or for obtaining skilling and certification or in the workplace.<sup>12</sup> Doors are not open in middle school or in secondary school to welcome back those that have dropped out. In many cases, even vocational skilling programmes require entrants to have basic skills. In India, with the Right to Education Law in India guaranteeing eight years of schooling, the chances that a substantial proportion of young people will complete the elementary stage with insufficient and unsatisfactory learning levels and thus will be unable to move into the secondary school channel or indeed into any other productive pathway.<sup>13</sup>

## **EVIDENCE ON CHANGES IN POLICY FRAMEWORKS/LAWS/REGULATIONS AND IMPACT OF SECOND CHANGE PROGRAMS (1000 WORDS)**

A reading of the major policy documents of the Government of India from 2000 to the present show serious concern for children who drop out of elementary school.<sup>14</sup> However, the government’s strategy so far in dealing with dropout and incomplete or discontinuous educational careers has been primarily preventive - by a strengthening of the delivery of elementary education and by making special efforts with vulnerable groups to keep children within the mainstream system at least until they complete eight years of schooling.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> But all of these measures were designed and

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<sup>11</sup> From a social and demographic perspective, the Youth Report of NFHS-3 (a nationally representative sample of households surveyed in 2005-2006) provides worrying concrete evidence for the challenges that young people face in India for realizing their full potential. These include early marriage at ages well below the legal minimum age especially for women, early childbirth, early child rearing responsibilities and poor health (serious malnutrition and anaemia and weak links to health services).

<sup>12</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Review Mission report of RMSA highlights this point forcefully. Since 2005 ASER reports have been showing that a substantial proportion of enrolled children in Grade 8 do not have fundamental literacy and numeracy skills.

<sup>13</sup> ASER 2013 data suggests that even at Grade 8 level there are about 25% of children who are unable to read basic text at Grade 2 level and almost half of all children in Grade 8 have difficulty with a simple division problem. ([www.asecentre.org](http://www.asecentre.org))

<sup>14</sup> Even as far back as 1986, the National Policy of Education stated that this group of people who have not finished even primary school will have future needs for learning. Throughout the document there is mention of specific groups who will need special attention such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities, differently abled, youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers, children of indigent families, children from families of scavengers and so on (NEP 1986).

<sup>15</sup> For example, through remedial programs, non-formal arrangements, residential schools, special entitlements for girls and incentives to remain in school.

<sup>16</sup> The Twelfth Plan document, Planning Commission, Government of India. Chapter on Education p 59-60. For example, the Twelfth plan states that special efforts are needed for those children who are still not in school or

implemented for children up to age fourteen. The launch of RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan) in 2009 signalled the importance of universalizing secondary education as a priority for youth development.<sup>17</sup> But policies and programmes designed for secondary education continue to deal mainly with those still in the education pipeline and not with young people who have left school but are still in the secondary school-going age.<sup>18,19</sup>

In Pakistan, successive governments have launched school enrolment and registration drives. There have been substantial efforts by civil society organizations to identify children at risk in schools. Both government and non-government efforts have used a two major strategies to stem the flow of dropouts - through innovative non-formal programs as well as improving conditions in schools so that children could persist and transit from one level of schooling to another.<sup>20</sup>

Tracking youth policies in India show some movement over time from broad rhetorical statements of comprehensive development to more focussed priority areas of action.<sup>21</sup> The 2014 National Youth Policy recognizes that young people who have not completed school need special focus but does not allude to the magnitude of this population nor explicitly lay out specific interventions for such youth. Much of the action plans moving forward hinge on the effectiveness of the expansion of secondary schooling and on national skilling efforts (via the recently set up National Council Skill Development and the National Skill Development Corporation and the National Skill Qualifications Framework).<sup>22</sup>

The Indian government's growing need for and commitment to skill development is reflected in the setting up of a series of policies, missions and implementation bodies from 2009 onwards. Among the main objectives of the ambitious National Skill Development Policy (2009) is to "create

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who need sustained attention for remaining linked to school. Here the focus has to be on every child in school and learning well. So efforts must include strategies for effective and sustained mainstreaming with accelerated learning strategies built in as part of the mainstreaming strategy. (Accelerated learning refers to strategies for speeding up the process of academically bringing a child up to grade level.)

<sup>17</sup> The need for a mission for secondary education was emphasised in the Mid-Term Appraisal of the Tenth Plan (June 2005), and in the two reports of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committees on Universalisation of Secondary Education (June 2005) and Girls' Education & the Common School System.

<sup>18</sup> The vocational training programmes of the government have also traditionally looked at institutional ways of improving skilling opportunities rather than reaching out to those are outside the educational system completely and who may not have very high level of basic literacy or numeracy skills. For example, in the current plan period there is talk of revising the vocational training schemes but much of this planning is related to how to make skill training more effective within the secondary school structures.

<sup>19</sup> Following other policy documents of the Government of India, the National Policy on Skill Development (2009) mentions the need to strengthen school education to reduce dropouts. The document does refer to the need to provide those who have dropped out of school with "alternative education coupled with skill development opportunities to bring them into the economic and social mainstream as well as the need to revisit the formal educational requirements for accessing training (p 21).

<sup>20</sup> National Education Policy 1998-2010. Provincial education plans have similar pronouncements for example the Punjab Education Sector Plan (2013-17) suggests forming linkages between the NFE and regular schools through formal agreements to provide a second chance to drop out children to enter mainstream education (Chapter 5). Also see Sindh Education Sector Plan 2013-17 (Chapter 3).

<sup>21</sup> In India, the 2003 National Youth Policy defined youth as those in the age group 13-35 (further divided into two groups – 13-19 and 20-35) whereas the 2014 National Youth Policy document focusses entirely on the age group 15-29.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/India\\_2003\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/India_2003_National_Youth_Policy.pdf). Also see <http://yas.nic.in/en/yas1/national-youth-policy-2014>

opportunities for all to acquire skills throughout life, and especially for youth, women and disadvantaged groups” and to have flexible delivery models of skill training such decentralized delivery, mobile training, distance learning, e-learning and web-based learning. India’s National Skills Qualification Framework which was officially notified in December 2013 is expected to “translate qualifications between different education and skilling programmes. This will enable individuals to transition between learning systems, building skills and acquiring qualifications most suitable to their own development and employer needs”.<sup>23</sup> The skill development initiatives if effectively implemented could have important implications for expanding access to second chance learning opportunities for dropout youth.

The National Skill Development Corporation in India that was set up in 2009 by the central government, is showing some promise. Their long run goal is to reach 150 million in the next eight years. While numbers are not available precisely of “learners” who are in the age group 15-25 and have not completed school, but overall the expanding reach of this four year old initiative is significant. From 2010 to early 2014, 1.53 million have been trained of whom over 800,000 have been placed.<sup>24</sup>

In Bangladesh, the government launched a national skill policy in 2012 in which training was to be “demand-driven, flexible and responsive.”<sup>25</sup> The new policy is expected to bring a new impetus to developing mechanisms by which people, especially young people can access targeted opportunities.

So, what happens to young people who have dropped out of school either at the elementary stage or? Are there ways in which such a young person can find a “second chance” opportunity to either re-enter the formal education system, or an alternative pathway to obtain foundation skills and other qualifications?<sup>26</sup>

Analyses of policy pronouncements and implementation documents, in context of South Asia, suggests that there are five broad “second-chance” pathways that have developed (or are developing in the region) for meeting the educational and learning needs for those who are now above fourteen and have not completed their schooling.<sup>27</sup> These include:

First, distance education opportunities for acquiring “learning equivalency” and educational certification. The open schooling framework can be a useful vehicle for students to access “entry” into the education system from remote and acquire mainstream certification in a flexible manner.

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<sup>23</sup> National Youth Policy 2014 (p 29).

<sup>24</sup> This is being done via 2500 training centres in 350 districts.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_113958.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_113958.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> The entire gamut of possibilities for continuing learning opportunities is being referred to in this document as “second chance” programmes.

<sup>27</sup> This is a broad categorization of actual and potential pathways. They exist in varying degrees of development in different parts of South Asia.

Advances in technology have made and will continue to make open schooling a potentially powerful method of providing second chance opportunities to youth.<sup>28</sup>

Second, opportunities that have developed within and as a result of women's empowerment programmes to provide for literacy and learning needs of women and adolescent girls as well as entry into the education system.<sup>29</sup>

A third avenue are the adult literacy programmes of the government.<sup>30</sup> For example, in India, the Twelfth Plan outlines intent to revive, strengthen and expand adult literacy initiatives under the banner of Sakshar Bharat which will give special focus to adolescents and young adults who have left school and help to build not only literacy but also connect them to avenues of lifelong learning.<sup>31</sup> In Pakistan, the NCHD adult literacy programmes have presence in more than 130 districts reaching over 2.5 million adults (90% of whom are female).<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, are the new and emerging skill development initiatives particularly in India where new frameworks, tool and vehicles for training, certification and employment are being designed and implemented. Under the larger umbrella of skill development, specific programmes (often run as public-private partnerships or as civil society efforts) are also growing targeted at drop out youth and young people from disadvantaged communities and circumstances. Many of these are too new to assess impact or outcomes as yet.<sup>33</sup>

Fifth, there are innovative second chance models by non-governmental organizations – but these are rarely found to be operating on any significant scale.

Some case studies illustrating these models are included in the next section.

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<sup>28</sup> See the case study that follows for details of the current status of open schooling in India.

<sup>29</sup> See case study of Mahila Samakhya in the following section. Over 10.5 lac women have been covered by the Mahila Samakhya till 2012. This programme began in 1988-89, and is currently active in 10 states, 105 districts and over 33,000 villages. It is considered to be a successful women's empowerment initiative for poor and marginalized women which enables women to effectively participate in the public domain and in educational and learning processes (12<sup>th</sup> Plan document. Chapter on Education p. 67)

<sup>30</sup> The heyday of adult literacy movements in India was in the late 1980s when there were large scale examples of government and people working together to achieve "total literacy". While the actual literacy gains varied across locations in India and often did not lead learners into the education system, the adult literacy campaigns resulted in two kinds of changes – one was a strong demand for primary schooling and the other was a variety of women-led social campaigns like anti-alcohol movements etc. For the last 20-25 years, adult literacy programmes have not been very vibrant in India. But if past history is any indication then adult literacy programmes do have the potential for large scale social mobilization around critical issues of education and human development.

<sup>31</sup> The official documents state that "under this new paradigm of lifelong learning and literacy, the focus is not only on non-formal education set up but on establishing strong linkages with the formal system with mechanism for recognizing prior learning and accreditation. (12<sup>th</sup> Plan document. Chapter on Education p.88). In the last decade, the National Literacy Mission lost momentum. The attention of central and state governments was focussed on elementary education. The Sakshar Bharat campaign is coming out of the National Literacy Mission and therefore will need to re-energize the teams and structures that will operationalize and implement the new revamped adult literacy programmes.

<sup>32</sup> More details see :

[http://www.nchd.org.pk/ws/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=62](http://www.nchd.org.pk/ws/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=62)

<sup>33</sup> See the websites for NSDC (nsdcindia.org) and National Skill Development Authority (<http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/>) for a variety of details on programmes, partners and projects.

Overall, it is fair to say that the question of what can be done with those who leave school without completing any phase have been acknowledged for a long time but effective large scale mechanisms and models that give young people a meaningful “second chance” on scale are still few and far between when compared to the level at which such mechanisms need to operate.

## CASE STUDIES

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING (INDIA):** The beginnings of India’s national open school system can be traced back to 1979 when it was set up as a unit of the Central Board of Secondary Education. By 1990, the National Open School was born with “authority to register, examine and certify students registered with it up to pre-degree courses”.<sup>34</sup> Over time, it was strongly felt that India needed a NIOS, the National Institute of Open Schooling, offers “open basic education programmes” for those who are 14 and older. Courses and certification in open basic education is geared for levels that are equivalent to grades 3, 5 and 8 in the formal system. Apart from the school level grade equivalency courses, learners have access to courses that lead to secondary and higher secondary level certification examinations. There are a variety of vocational courses and life enrichment programmes. For implementing the open basic education, NIOS partners with over 600 agencies across the country who provide outreach in the form of study centres/contact classes. For academic courses beyond the basic level, there are close to 4000 study centres being run by accredited institutions and just under 2000 accredited vocational institutions. For senior and secondary levels, NIOS allows choices of course (academic and vocational) and flexibility in sitting for examinations (up to nine chances over five years). Study materials are available in several languages and on-demand examinations are also possible.

Enrollment figures and number of certified learners has been rising steadily over the years. NIOS official statistics claim that they have outreach to a total of 2.2 million students especially in secondary, higher and vocational streams. For example, in 2000-2001, NIOS had 186,000 enrolled in their academic programmes. This number has risen to 1,813,622 by 2012-13. Similarly vocational enrollment has increased substantially in the same period from 17,849 to 250,489 learners. In fact, since 2007-2008, the number of female students is significantly higher than the male students. It is often said that NIOS is the largest open school in the world.<sup>35</sup>

There have been several research studies in recent years investigating different aspects of NIOS. A study of the profile of learners found that majority are school drop outs, rural youth, urban poor both girls and women and ex-servicemen and women who were are not able to continue for a variety of reasons in the formal schooling system. Many of whom used the completed high school certification to access vocational and academic courses.<sup>36</sup> The open school system in India has seen growing enrolment over time. In addition to further expansion, reviews indicate that the key to improving quality of services and outcome will include improving facilities of study centres, strengthening student support services, quality of study materials, increased monitoring and more in-depth of student progress both in formative and summarize ways.<sup>37</sup> Studies reiterate that the potential of

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<sup>34</sup> NIOS website.

<sup>35</sup> All information about the open schooling opportunities are from NIOS website [www.nios.ac](http://www.nios.ac). In

<sup>36</sup> Sahoo, Tracer Study of Successful Products of NIOS in UP. Also Jena, Agarwal, Chugh Profile of Learners.

<sup>37</sup> Jena, Agarwal, Mahapatra, Factors affecting enrolment in different subjects.



technology needs to be maximized for reach and quality in this sector as well as to benefit students with disability and special needs.

**MAHILA SAMAKHYA (INDIA):** Mahila Samakhya Program (MS) was launched in 1988. It was piloted in the 10 districts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Over these 26 years, the scheme has been extended to eight other states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttaranchal. At present, 122 districts and 39,566 villages in these 11 states come under the purview of the central MS programme with a membership of about 12.7 lakh women.<sup>38</sup>

Mahila Samakhya sees empowerment as a process of supporting women in rural areas, especially the ones from socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society: to question, critically analyze and address their problems of social oppression. This was done by mobilizing and facilitating women to form “sanghas” or groups. The sanghas provided women a forum for dialogue, democratic engagement and collective action. From these discussions, reflections and questioning, came women’s demands for literacy, learning and education for themselves and for their daughters. Over time, Mahila Samakhya groups have played a major role in developing and implementing educational strategies appropriate in different contexts. These include running non-formal educational programmes as well as supporting the mainstream schools.

The Mahila Samkhya played a key role in enabling adolescent girls, who had either never accessed or dropped out of the mainstream schooling system, to re-enter the system and continue their education. An important achievement of the scheme has been the establishment of the innovative women-centered learning facilities, the Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSK) in rural areas. These Centers’ provide residential condensed educational programmes for these out-of-school girls and women in the 16-35 age-group to complete either primary or upper-primary level of schooling. The courses are compressed to 8-11 months. The MSKs also offer 12-18 month educational and development programs to train these women in various vocational skills. The MSKs use an interactive-participatory approach in teaching. The girls also learn many non-traditional skills like self-defence, driving, plumbing, masonry, etc. The Mahila Samakhya’s MSK initiative is a unique and innovative programme that shows how collectives of empowered women can take responsibility and work in their communities to bridge the gender gaps and promote education and development of the marginalized girls and women.

The strength of the Mahila Samakhya programme is the intensive participatory and collaborative set of processes that are critical for the evolution of activities in each location. But this also implies that scale-up action is neither automatic nor is it easy. Its success in linking women’s empowerment with education has led to government programmes want to expand Mahila Samakhya work. This in turn has led to tensions within Mahila Samakhya about whether universal education should be the primary focus of expanding programmes or whether women’s empowerment should be at the centre of the stage.<sup>39</sup> While the effectiveness of Mahila Samakhya work in harnessing the energies of

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<sup>38</sup> Fourth Joint Review Mission of Mahila Samakhya, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Ramachandran and Jandhyala editors (2012). Cartographies of Empowerment: The Mahila Samakhya Story. Zubaan, New Delhi.

women and in linking that to contextually appropriate learning, skill and educational strategies has been widely appreciated, it has not been as easy to assess impact in quantitative indicators.<sup>40</sup>

**Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (INDIA):** Aimed primarily at girls up to the age of 14, the Government of India, launched, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) in July 2004. The scheme entails setting up residential facilities (either independent or attached to upper primary schools) to enable girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who had not been able to complete primary school to not only finish primary but also reach till the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The KGBV facility is located in the educationally backward regions in each district of the country where female literacy is dismally low. In these blocks, priority is given to those areas with high concentration of these target communities and/or those with low female literacy. The scheme essentially targets girls in the 11 years old (+) age group, who are either out-of-school and unable to complete primary education. In the last decade, KGBV has significantly spread across the country and is operational in 27 States and Union Territories: Today there are 3,573 operational KGBVs (out of 3,609 sanctioned KGBVs) with 349,037 enrolled girls.<sup>41</sup>

Some states like Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Gujarat have successfully forged linkages between KGBVs and the government secondary schooling mission, allowing girls to easily transition from KGBVs to secondary schools.<sup>42</sup> The last review of the KGBV program strongly recommends the extension of the program to Grade 10 in all states as this appears to be a promising pathway to ensure that girls remain “in-school” and get certification. However, the many states lack such structural linkages, commitment and resources to build bridges to the next stage and therefore are unable to guarantee the continued education of these girls beyond the elementary school stage.

There are a number of initiatives that are being implemented by non-government organizations in India. Here is one example:

**Pratham Open School of Education (POSE)** aims to reach out to young girls and women who have been marginalized from the mainstream education system and give them a **second chance** to complete their schooling. Started in 2011 as a residential program in 10 centres in Maharashtra, POSE enrolled 300 girls who had dropped out of school and provided them academic and operation support to take the 10<sup>th</sup> standard board examination. Today this programme has expanded to 31 centers across 7 states and reaches over 4000 young women.

POSE follows a hub and spoke model; the hub is located at block headquarters with a network of 5 to 6 cluster centres spread across the block<sup>43</sup>. The cluster centre caters to 20 villages each. Each block has 4 roving subject-specific experienced faculty supported by a set of 10 tutors (who are not as experienced or well qualified as the faculty members). The foundation course is conducted at the cluster centre. The students shortlisted after the foundation course move to the hub centre for their second phase of classes. POSE has evolved to incorporate residential and non-residential centre models. In the former, the students reside at the hub centre for 5 days a month whereas in the later,

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<sup>40</sup> Saxsena and Mehrotra in Ramachandran and Jandhyala (2012).

<sup>41</sup> Second National Evaluation of KGBV Programme of GOI (November-December 2013)

<sup>42</sup> See the review mission documents for KGBV

<sup>43</sup> India has over 600 districts. In rural areas, below the level of the district, the next administrative unit is called a block. There are approximately 6000 blocks in India.

they spend the day at centre and return home by evening. This change was made taking into consideration the safety concerns that parents had about their daughters.

Some students in the first round of examinations were unable to clear math and English at the required level. Students who had attended the foundation course or those who had dropped out in a higher grade were more likely to pass. Hence, steps like extended foundation course, focused attention to weak subjects, equipping faculty with improved training, enhancing attendance, state-specific curriculum changes to incorporate varying difficulty and examination patterns across states are being considered and implemented across all centres. Campaigns are being designed for more effective mobilization and sensitization. Efforts are also being directed towards students enrolled in schools who are at a higher risk of dropping out of the system.

POSE also addresses other aspects like personality development and focuses on enhancing soft skills such as articulation, confidence, expressing oneself, etc. The larger goal is to better equip its students to enter the workforce as well as place themselves well in the society. Pratham Open School of Education also tries to leverage its students to spread its outreach. This is achieved by requiring the students enrolled with POSE to teach basic math and language to younger children (at primary level) in their villages and communities. So far, POSE students have taught 20,000 primary school children. This has multiple outward benefits: Teaching these students helps POSE students boost their confidence and public speaking skills as well as helps the younger students build better foundation for future classes. Hence, positive forward and backward linkages are enforced. The program is yet to have an external evaluation but each year refinements and improvements are being done based on the experiences of that year.

### **BRAC (BANGLADESH):**

The world renowned organization BRAC is recognized for their path breaking work in primary education especially in bringing out-of-school children into the primary education system, in helping them complete primary and preparing them for the secondary level. After completing BRAC primary education 97 % graduates transferred to formal secondary schools. BRAC has experienced that BRAC graduates who are admitted in secondary schools often cannot complete their secondary education due to many critical circumstances. To develop a strategy for supporting “graduates” BRAC started tracking children who had moved into secondary schools. To emphasize the importance of regular attendance, participation in examinations, regular study at home, regular payment at school, education material purchasing, cleanliness etc regular meetings are conducted with children, guardians, teachers and members of school committees. BRAC provides financial support to poor students, also keeps related communication with secondary school authority and other organizations to manage scholarship and full/half free education for BRAC Primary School graduates. BRAC graduates students are members of adolescent clubs, where they have opportunity to explore reading book, doing sports, enjoying cultural activities, getting life skills and livelihood training and involve in income generating activities. Through a variety of efforts, BRAC continues to support its graduates through secondary school.<sup>44</sup> BRAC also have new skilling initiatives (STAR) in which drop out adolescents are helped to gain skills and get the job market.

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<sup>44</sup> BRAC documents and materials.

## **KEY PRIORITIES FOR POLICIES RELATED TO POST-2015 AGENDA (750 words)**

There are millions of young people in South Asia who have not completed a basic cycle of education. The Global Monitoring Report 2012 estimates this number to be close to 100 million. It is critical that urgent and immediate attention is paid to how such a large section of the population can be connected to ongoing education, learning and skilling opportunities. As each country implements their Right to Education laws and as entitlements and benefits for enrolment in elementary school increase, it is likely that students will remain “enrolled in school” for longer at least on paper. The probability is high that a larger number of students leaving school whether after completing the elementary cycle or before will be underprepared and ill-equipped for further study or work.<sup>45</sup>

The first priority in the countries of South Asia is to estimate and report the current magnitude of the problem on hand. While there are references, usually in passing, to this population, in policy documents, without actual numbers being widely known and publicly discussed, concerted action on scale is unlikely to happen. Reports should include not only years of completed schooling but also level of basic skills. Strategic planning for this population needs to straddle ministries of education, labour and youth, rather than slip through the cracks between these units.

Although governments are enacting laws for free and compulsory schooling for the elementary stage, they do not specify what a student should be able to do (in terms of capabilities, skills, benchmarks) at the end of the primary or elementary cycle. A clear statement of such benchmarks would be very helpful to anchor the work that happens in school as well as provide goals and guidelines for “second chance” programs.<sup>46</sup>

The most widespread second-chance opportunity currently available in South Asia is the open school and distance mode of education<sup>47</sup>. A review of the open schooling pathways needs to be assessed to understand the current constraints and achievements. While open schooling opportunities need to expand and deepen in many ways. Certification possibilities need to become available for non-academic skills and become acceptable in the market. For students who will avail of open schooling opportunities a wider set of handholding, mentoring and scaffolding opportunities need to be devised. The role of technology in a variety of ways will have to be explored as well as apprenticeship possibilities for young people to learn as they earn or at least as they work.

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<sup>45</sup> Data from India indicates that years of schooling completed is rising over time (different rounds of the National Sample Surveys, IHDS 2011-12 surveys) but the basic skills of students is low and not improving (ASER 2005-2013).

<sup>46</sup> The content and curriculum in upper primary school and in secondary school is purely academic; it is assumed that students will proceed in a linear way to higher education. What happens to those who either do not finish this academic curriculum or do not want to continue to college is not considered. One of the major challenges facing policymakers in South Asia today is to re-envision the big picture of what the education system beyond the primary phase wishes to achieve. How it can cater effectively to the needs to a diverse young population and to the demands of a diverse economy and society?

<sup>47</sup> See Bangladesh Open School which is a part of Bangladesh Open University (<http://www.bou.edu.bd/>) as well as the use of radio and television programmes in Bangladesh for reaching adolescents and adults. About 250,000 students are enrolled in the secondary and higher secondary programs in the Bangladesh Open School.

Skill development is emerging as a major priority in South Asia. Policy documents highlight the role that skilling initiatives will play in the future development of these countries in harnessing the demographic dividend. However it is essential that as skilling opportunities grow, access to and participation of youth who have dropped out are kept in mind. Current policies are framed in a general way but do not specifically focus on the challenges that will be faced by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who neither have qualifications in terms of completed years of schooling nor basic skills.<sup>48</sup> Provisions will have to be made for providing extra support to such students.

In conclusion, school dropouts and their problems figure in many policy documents in countries across south Asia. But effective large scale pathways via second chance programmes have yet to be built on the scale at which they are needed. Ironically, in future, well developed “second chance” opportunities for learning and skilling tailored to those who have not completed basic education may in fact lead to serious rethinking of the mainstream education system as well.

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<sup>48</sup> In India, at least quite often vocational training institutes require students to have completed at least secondary school and assume that they are literate and numerate.