


Impact of COVID-19 on 

Girl Child Education

In India

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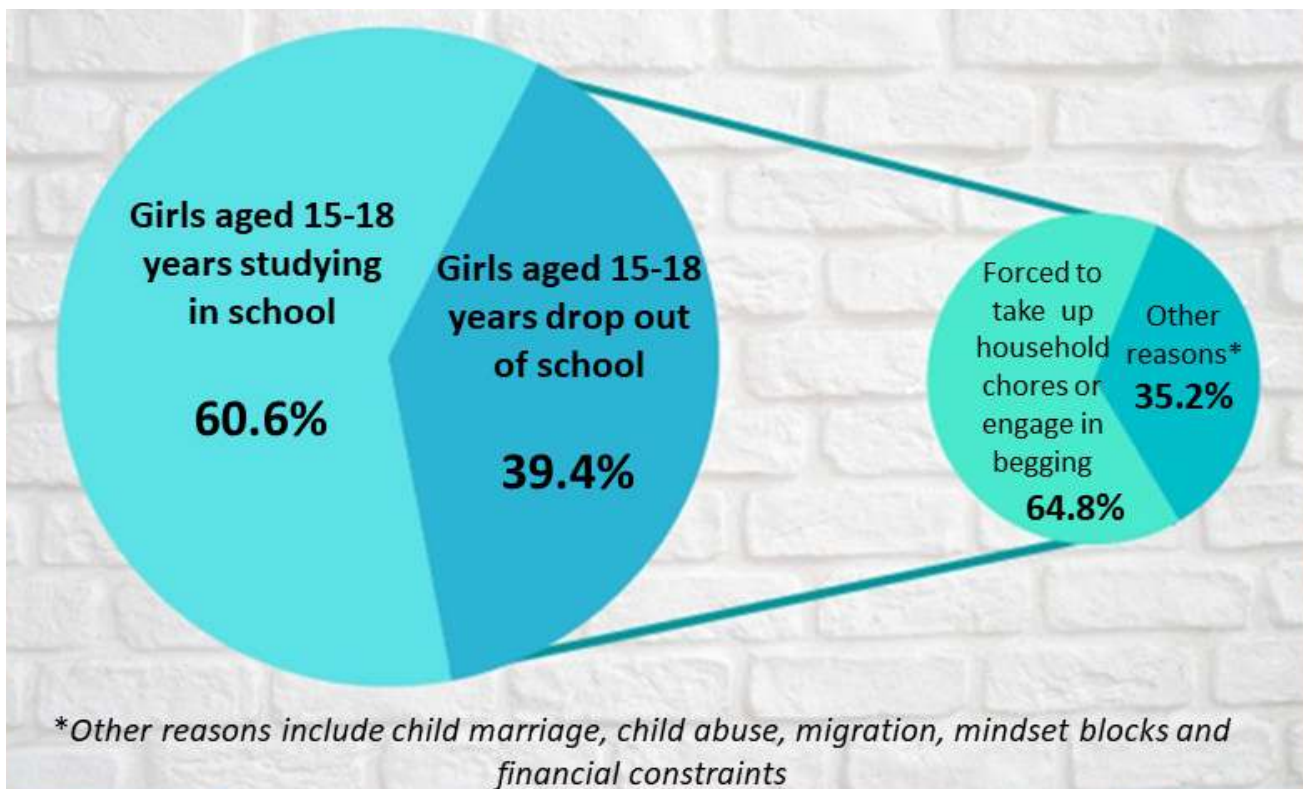
GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN INDIA

An Overview

India has been struggling with the long scar of gender equality since several decades. The current ratio of 930 females per 1000 males is lower than the 2011 census data which had 940 females per 1000 males. In spite of the Government advocating various new strategies and passing laws to punish prenatal sex screening and female foeticide; India has a long way to go.

One obvious concern that has taken a disproportionate toll on gender equality is the issue of Girl Child Education in India. The literacy level of India is 74.37% wherein men stood at 82.37% and literacy in women was at 65.79% as per the last available records for India.

The enrollment of children in the age group of 6 yrs to 14 yrs is remarkably high at 96%. But the girl segment sees a huge school drop in the age bracket of 15 years to 18 years. With a drop rate of 39.4% in this category, over two-third of the girls are forced to take up household chores or many ends up in begging. A slight relief from such dismal state is evident in the urban areas where girl children are better off than their rural counterparts who are still struggling for their right of equality and education.





THE STATE OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN INDIA CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS FACTORS.

The five prominent causes are:



Child Marriages

Out of the 223 million girl children married in India, 102 million girls are married before attaining the age of 15. Around 27% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday and 7% much before they can even attain the age of 15.

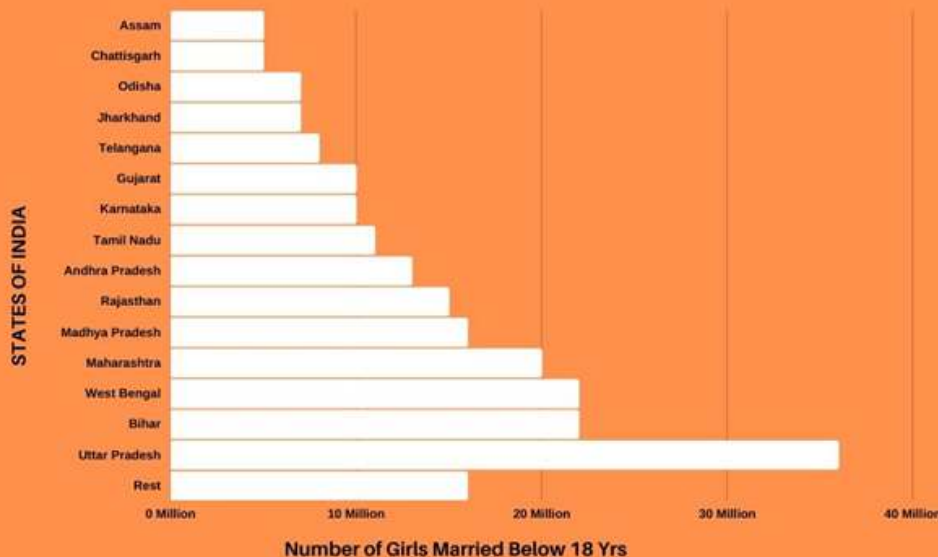


RECENT FINDINGS

TOTAL NUMBER OF GIRLS MARRIED UNDER THE AGE OF 18 YEARS = 223 MILLION

Total No. of girls married below the age of 15 Yrs = 102 Million

Total No. of girls married between the age of 15-18 Yrs = 121 Million



Over half of Indian child brides live in these five States. Uttar Pradesh tops the chart with the largest population with 36 million of child brides:

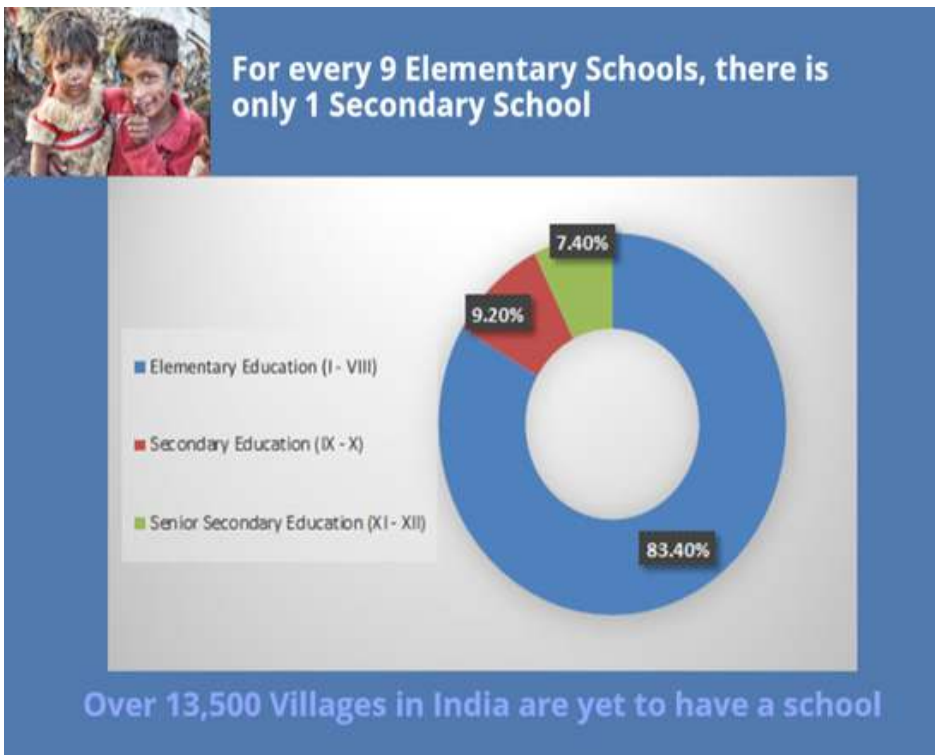
- o Uttar Pradesh
- o Bihar
- o West Bengal
- o Maharashtra
- o Madhya Pradesh

2

Lack of geographical proximity of Secondary Schools

The total number of girls enrolled in schools are higher as compared to the enrollment figures for boys in India. However, their mean years of schooling remains almost half that of boys. Girls manage to just get 4.7 years of schooling in comparison to 8.2 years for boys. Definitely one of the critical reasons is attributed to the non-availability of secondary education schools in village proximity.

Added to the list is the Indian patriarchal driven mindset where the boys still manage to continue but it becomes very difficult for girl children to carry on their studies in the longer perspective owing to the distance of school from their abode of living.



The statistics are not very encouraging in rural India where for every 100 elementary schools (classes I to VIII), there are 14 schools offering secondary education (classes IX-X) and only six schools offering higher secondary education (classes XI-XII). This forces children to walk many miles to get their higher education.



Stereotypes

Poverty



Poor Scores



Ignorance



Contract job



3

Mindset Blocks - Although Indian Government has created various schemes to incentivize kids to take up education seriously in government run schools; girl child in India is often seen as a liability, a burden to pass on. Parents are unwilling to send daughters to schools due to reasons like a girl must help family in household chores; girls have the responsibility to take care of new born siblings and many a times they have to support their families financially by working in the fields. 22% of Indian population still live under poverty line and prefer to use additional hands to earn their living instead of depending on education to make their daughters' lives better.

4

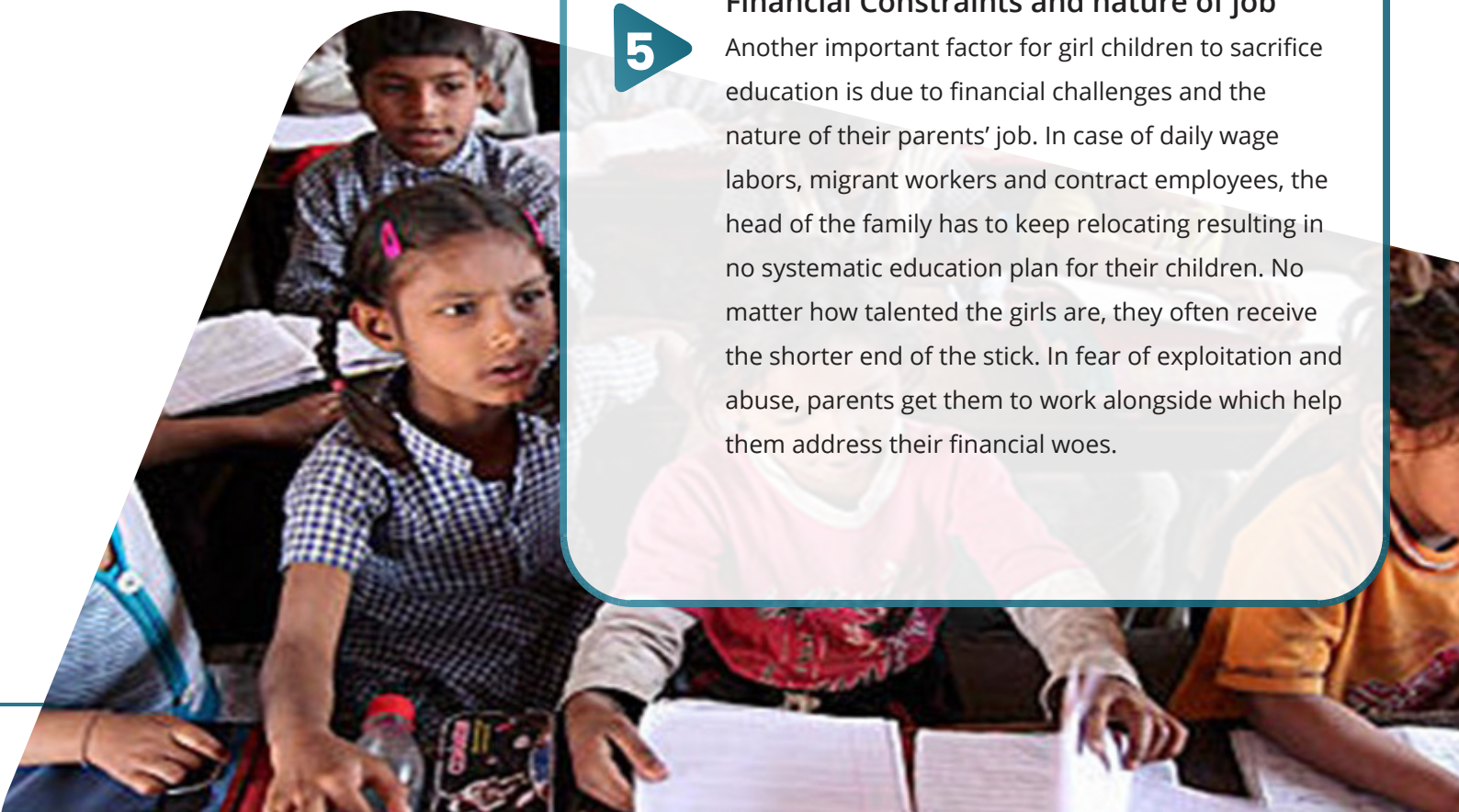
Poor Learning Outcomes

The existing predicament of not getting the right family support deters girl children to take up education seriously. Lack of motivation from social circle, inadequate assistance for children with learning inability and various other reasons create withdrawal symptoms resulting in comparatively poor scores that end up in voluntary drop outs. Moreover, they never get a push from their families to join back school considering that their parents who are generally illiterate never understand the importance of education.

5

Financial Constraints and nature of job

Another important factor for girl children to sacrifice education is due to financial challenges and the nature of their parents' job. In case of daily wage labors, migrant workers and contract employees, the head of the family has to keep relocating resulting in no systematic education plan for their children. No matter how talented the girls are, they often receive the shorter end of the stick. In fear of exploitation and abuse, parents get them to work alongside which help them address their financial woes.



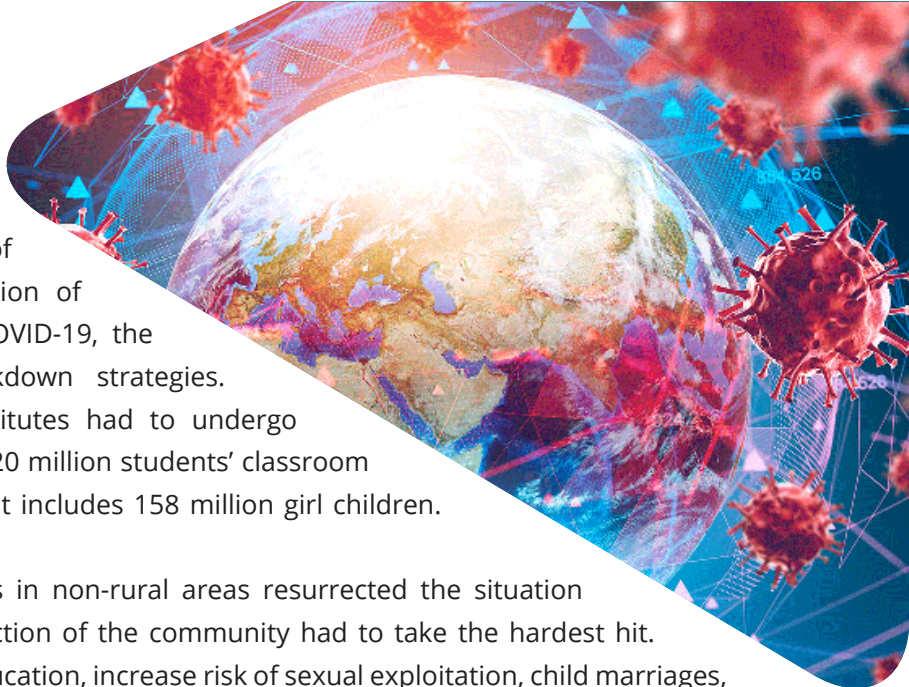
HOW COVID-19 HAS AGGRAVATED THE PROBLEM?

COVID-19 pandemic, originating from China's Wuhan city has exacerbated lives of millions of Indians, especially the lower section of the strata. In order to stop the spread of COVID-19, the Indian government used differentiated lockdown strategies. As a result, all universities, schools and institutes had to undergo humongous change in their operations. Over 320 million students' classroom learning has been hit due to the shutdown that includes 158 million girl children.

While the privileged section of private schools in non-rural areas resurrected the situation through online classes; the underprivileged section of the community had to take the hardest hit. Furthermore, this will amplify gender gaps in education, increase risk of sexual exploitation, child marriages, premature or unwanted pregnancies and burden of household in the hands of girl children. The drop-out rates is expected to aggravate further and will disproportionately affect girl children education across the country.

Another major resultant factor will be the rise in malnutrition level. One of the main motivations for rural parents to send their daughters to school was accounted to the nutritious food supply that forms a part of the education system. Schools are the provider of food for all children attending school under mid-day meal scheme by the government. The mid-day meal scheme is the largest school-lunch program aimed at improving nutrition and the underprivileged parent community considers this as a boon to reduce some burden from their shoulder. Due to the physical lockdown and shutting of schools, not only will literacy level suffer but also the chances of malnourishment among them will see an exponential growth.

OTHER CHALLENGES THAT COME IN THE WAY OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN INDIA ARE:



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES



The government of India has been aggressively working in the area of improving literacy rate in the country with a special focus on girl child. There are various schemes running at national, state and local level to achieve this goal and improve India's stature at global level.

The government has been initiating regular efforts to lift the status of the girl child in the society besides subsidizing or funding their education through enormous welfare and constitutional provisions. Some of the schemes and initiatives that the Indian government had categorically created with a focus on girl child are:



Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

This program aims to address skewed gender ratio at the district level. Spreading large scale awareness to reduce the preference for male children and empower girls through education, it still has a long way to go when it comes to addressing prejudices. The program cannot work in isolation and need to work in tandem with the much needed education sector reform.



Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

The program focuses on improving existing school infrastructure by building more classrooms, toilets, providing clean drinking water and improvement grants. It simultaneously stresses on the education of girl children, kids with special needs and promotes computer literacy.

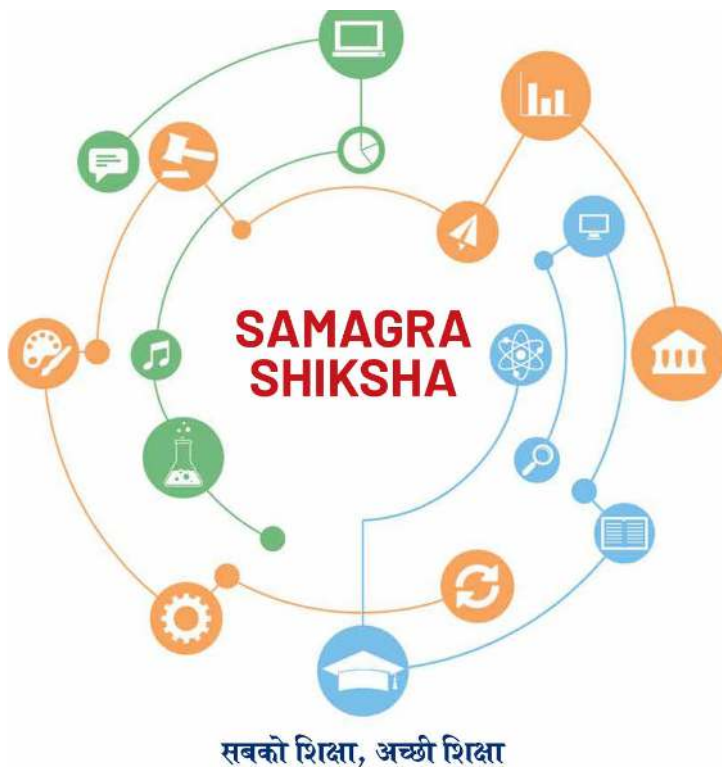


Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Yojna (KGBV)

The scheme implemented in educationally backward blocks (EBBs) of the country for places with low female rural literacy aims to reduce the evident gender gap in education. The objective of KGBV is to ensure access and quality education to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools at upper primary level.

Unification of Programs under Samagra Shiksha

In 2018-19, government merged a plethora of schemes related to education and equality under one category to treat school education holistically without segmentation from pre-nursery to Class 12. The broader goal was to improve school effectiveness on equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. This Scheme covers the following areas: ▶



The vision of the Scheme is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for Education.

The scheme aligns its focus with SDG goal 4.1 and 4.5.



"By 2030, ensure that all boys and girls complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."

"By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of Education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"





WAYS TO COPE UP WITH THE CURRENT CHALLENGES AND THE SOLUTION AHEAD

Existence of national strategy on girl child education is in place and the Indian Government has already taken a giant step by unifying different programs under one roof of Samagra Shiksha. With added objectives to harmonize implementation mechanisms and transaction costs at all levels, this program envisages a better future on education of girl child. Furthermore, the program is aligned with SDG Goal 4 that focuses on education as defined by United Nations to achieve by the year 2030.

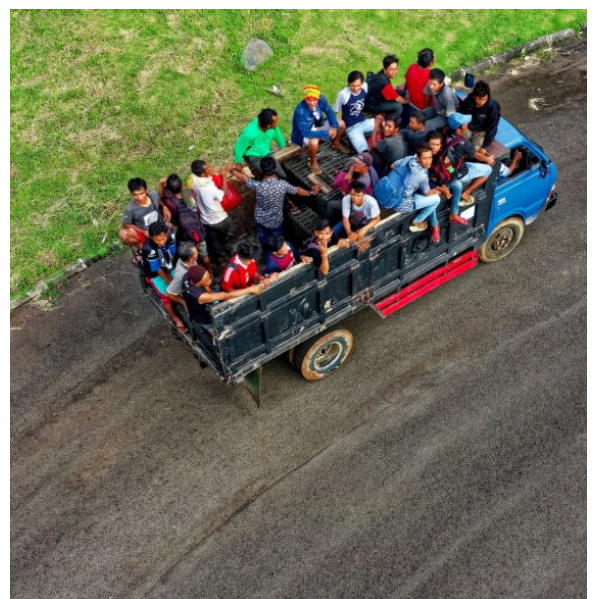
Girls' education is a strategic development priority for the nation. Considering over 60 percent of the female in the age bracket of 15-59 years focusing in household work, it would be very difficult to achieve the goal of USD 5 trillion economy by 2025.

The government has initiated various unique schemes including gender-based quotas to promote employment for women. However, it would still be a daunting task to accomplish the target until the country prepares to deck up for a huge participation from the women segment of India. There is an intense need to strengthen and empower local governance systems for bringing in a significant change. Some of the initiatives and possible solutions that can address the challenge during and after COVID-19 era can be:

1

Solving the plight of migrant workers

Tracking and convincing migrant workers to send their children to a formal government school has been a challenge since many years. In 2018, Government has created separate child friendly scheme under a 7 state policy - Interstate Migrant Policy Index (IMPEX). It ranks each state on the basis of various facilities provided for migrant children including education and child rights. Many NGOs and private charitable bodies at individual levels are also taking up measures to promote girl child education in the country. In the recent time of COVID-19, the Indian government has begun enrolling each migrant under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (also known as Ayushman Bharat) to cover them under their large scale



Recommendation

- The situation of girl child of migrant workers at such unprecedented times is shaken. A factor that is arguably even more important is to track the existing girl students who can be prevented from drop out post COVID-19. For this, the government can use data of migrant workers collected under Ayushman Bharat to map the location of girl child of migrants.
- Using the above data, local level administrators can supply packed food grains at student's homes.
- An app can be launched by the government to track movement of each migrant worker family whose girl child has a school enrollment. This technology enabled tracker can eventually help in transferring records of girl child from one government school to another in much faster and easier way.



2

Need to have Schools Closer to Home

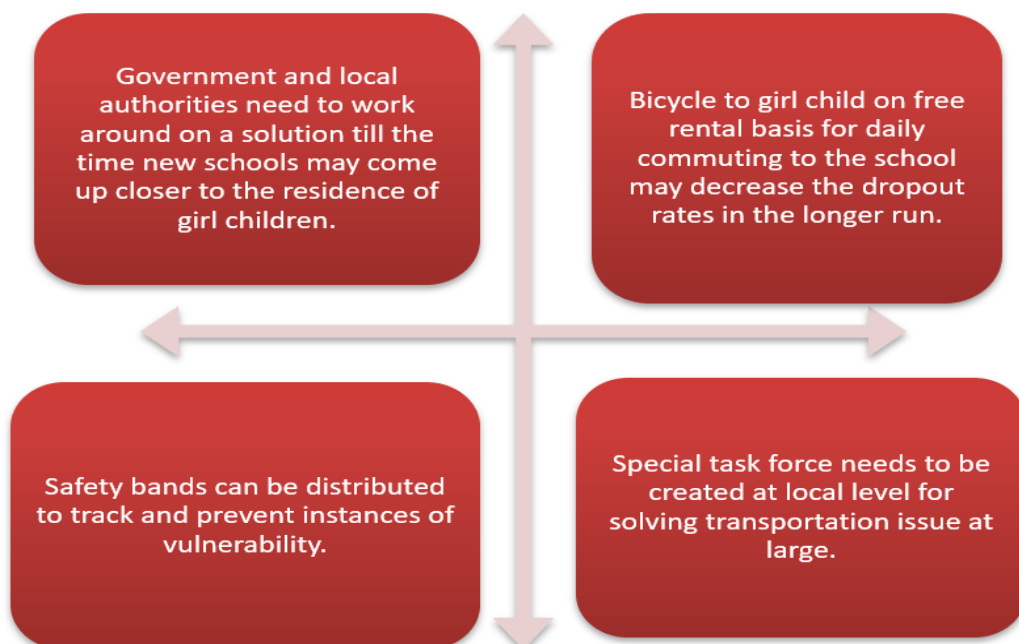
Government is currently working hard to improve the overall infrastructure by creating policy changes to increase number of schools.

However, over 13,500 villages do not have a single school in their village and there is only 1 secondary school on every 9 primary schools.

A girl child is forced to leave school after primary education in most cases due to the distance of school from home even if she wishes to continue. The vulnerability to attacks and rampant cases of molestations prohibit parents to allow their girls to travel long distances.



Recommendation



3

Mentoring Program for breaking stereotypes

In India, majority of people in the financially lower strata envision roles and trajectories for their daughters that are restricted to traditional mindset of home-maker, mother, and wife. Gender stereotypes are even embedded in few textbooks that show girls and women as household workers and caregivers.

Although through the counseling centers, schools run programs to timely ring the bell, especially when a girl start missing school continuously for few days. Yet, the drop out still remains a big concern which is strongly ingrained in the culture and system.

Recommendation

- Effective training programs for teachers to counter gender stereotypes should be made mandatory in schools at all levels. Educators should be trained every year with innovative techniques on dealing with the newer generation effectively. Psychometric assessment should be part of the teacher's training need analysis.
- Incentive plans should be designed to provide additional bonuses to teachers where the drop-out rates are less than district/state average.
- Appointment of significant numbers of female educators should be taken up to help counter discrimination against girls. Creating an e-mentoring platform between female role models and girl students can help them discover the opportunities education can create for them in future.
- Student online mentoring session can be included in the curriculum to bring an emotional connect and bond of educators with the girl child.

4

Health Support and short term incentives

Currently, in order to reduce the drop-out rate in the country, the government has launched **National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE)** to incentivize each girl child to attend secondary education.

Girls who have cleared class VIII and are 14-18 years old are eligible to receive INR 3,000 as fixed deposit. This amount can be withdrawn with added interest either after attaining the age of 18 years or passing class Xth examination.

Recommendation

- There are government policies to incentivize parents for sending their children to school. However, there is a dearth of student centric incentive scheme that must aim to motivate children. Government should bring in new incentive strategytargedtowardsgirlchildren to managethedropoutratesinconsultationwithvariousexpertsandadvisors.
- Under the current COVID-19 situation, monetary incentives should not have a farfetched approach and introduction of schemes that helps to survive the health crisis must be top priority.
- Local authorities must extend unemployment benefits to single mothers of families where girl children are willing to carry forward their education post COVID-19.
- Government must tie-up with health centers for girl child to distribute general medicine for immunity boost.
- Sanitary pads should be supplied free of cost to all enrolled students by the school authorities.





5

Access to e-Education

Government has initiated efforts to provide online education to girl child in rural areas.

Digital Gender Atlas : The idea behind Atlas is to identify the low performing geographic pockets for girls and ensure an equitable education for them.

Udaan (by CBSE): It provides online material for girl students of Class XI and XII to prepare for admission test of premier engineering colleges.

E-pathshala: A portal offering educational resources to teachers, students, parents and researchers in three languages (English, Hindi and Urdu).

Suggestion Portal: This is a group on 'MyGov' site to take suggestions from everyone on ways to improve girl child education.

National Digital Library: Launched in 2018 with 1.7 crore books, journals and thesis for all ages.

Recommendation

- Creating a technology-enabled rural India education wing is the need of the hour.
- Local authorities need to tie-up with telecom companies for laying out infrastructure and increasing bandwidth availability in rural areas.
- Schools need to circulate recording of videos prepared by educators from home. The loss of classes can be compensated in some way to adapt to the COVID-19 era. Students can anytime refer to these class lectures for better understanding of the subjects.
- Distribution of mobiles by the local administration at a subsidized cost in rural areas that contain pre-recorded lectures and assignments could do wonders to reduce the drop out percentage for girl students. This will also allow children to access vast content straight from the government's National Digital Library free of cost.

IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT WAY

Many evidences from the past reflect that effective strategies to address challenges of girl child education in India require governmental cross sector cooperation and local level integration. There are policies and programs that are uniquely positioned to directly address the plight of girl child education. Many developmental programs are engaging key stakeholders to cultivate broad partnerships and mobilize communities to shift norms for the betterment of the nation.

However for fostering a transformative shift and making greater progress; **IMPLEMENTATION is the key**. Some critical pointers to be considered while implementing the newer and the existing programs are summarized as:

▶ **Monitor**
Continuous progress tracking and mapping with SDG on the newly implemented & existing schemes with the help of team of experts

▶ **Measure**
Effectiveness measurement of existing & newer programs post identifying how these schemes can affect various groups of participants in different way



▶ **Communicate**
Regular communication on impact analysis of the schemes to stakeholders at all levels

▶ **Technology**
Leveraging technology solutions to manage unforeseen emergencies like COVID-19 and fostering transparency in program management

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