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Ensuring Education for All in Jharkhand: Highlighting the Obstacles

The extent to which India will be able to successfully harness its demographic dividend depends significantly on the situation of its youth, notably on the levels of education and market-oriented skills they attain. While many states have made progress on the education front, many other states, including Jharkhand have lagged behind. Indeed, lack of educational facilities for youth is a major concern acknowledged in the Jharkhand Youth Policy 2007.^a

Looking at the current educational situation of youth in Jharkhand, this policy brief argues that significant investments in terms of appropriate policies and programmes are required to enable the state to achieve the millennium development goals of universal primary education and elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, harness its demographic dividend and enable its youth to participate in and benefit from global development.

The study

Data are drawn from the *Youth in India: Situation and Needs* study, a sub-nationally representative study undertaken for the first time in India of key transitions experienced by young people in six states of India, including Jharkhand. The study included a representative survey of youth in both rural and urban settings. Respondents included unmarried women and men and married women aged 15–24 and, in view of the paucity of married men in these ages, married men aged 15–29.

In Jharkhand, the survey was conducted in 2006. A total of 8,814 married and unmarried young women and men were interviewed in the survey. These included 2,684 married young women, 2,730 unmarried young women, 1,259 married young

men and 2,141 unmarried young men. This brief is based on data obtained from 2,637 young men and 5,414 women aged 15–24.

Achieving universal education: how far have youth in Jharkhand come?

Sizeable proportions of youth have never been to school

Findings from the Youth Study indicate that schooling was far from universal among young people, particularly young women in Jharkhand; indeed, one in seven young men and as many as two in five young women had never been to school. Even among the younger cohort (aged 15–19), one in ten young men and one in three young women had never been to school.

While young women were clearly more disadvantaged than young men, findings indicate that among young women, the married and those in rural areas were far more disadvantaged than the unmarried and those in urban areas. More than half of married young women (52%) had never been to school, compared to almost one-quarter of unmarried young women (24%). Likewise, almost half of young women in rural areas (47%) compared to one in six of those from urban settings (17%) had never been to school.

Educational milestones are achieved by relatively few youth

Not only was school enrolment limited, but relatively small proportions of youth had completed such milestones as Classes 4, 7 and 10. Again, young women were particularly disadvantaged. Just over half of young women had completed Class 4 and two-fifths had completed Class 7. In contrast,

Percentage of youth who had never been to school, according to age, marital status and place of residence

^a Department of Art, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Jharkhand. 2007. *Jharkhand Youth Policy 2007*. Accessed 1 November 2008 at <www.jharkhandonline.gov.in/depts/culsp/Revised_Final_Jharkhand_Youth_Policy.pdf>.

over four-fifths and two-thirds of young men had completed Classes 4 and 7, respectively. As with school enrolment, rural youth, particularly rural young women, were far more disadvantaged than their urban counterparts in terms of completion of Classes 4 and 7. Among rural young women, just 46% had completed Class 4 and 31% had completed Class 7.

What are the leading obstacles that inhibit youth from reaching educational milestones?

Poverty's grip keeps young people out of school

Leading among factors that inhibited school enrolment and completion were economic reasons (work on the family farm or business, wage earning work and family poverty, i.e., the family could not afford to keep the respondent in school)

Percentages of youth who had completed Classes 4, 7 and 10

Percentage of youth who had completed secondary school, according to household economic status

Just one in three young men (32%) and one in six young women (16%) had completed 10 or more years of education. Indeed, even among those aged 18 and above, only 37% of young men and 18% of young women had completed secondary school.

Of note is the striking difference in the proportion of young people who had completed 10 or more years of education by economic status of young people's households, as measured by wealth quintiles (with the first quintile representing households of the lowest wealth status and the fifth quintile representing households of the highest wealth status). Differences by economic status were much wider than either gender differences or differences by rural-urban residence. For example, among young men, just 3% of those from households in the poorest quintile had completed 10 or more years of schooling, compared to 66% of those from households in the wealthiest quintile. Among young women, just 1% of those in the poorest quintile, compared to 50% of those in the wealthiest quintile, had completed 10 or more years of education.

and among young women, a related factor, namely domestic responsibilities as well. Typically, more young men than women reported economic reasons and more young women than men reported domestic responsibilities. For example, three in five young men (61%) and half of young women (52%) who had never been to school reported that they were not enrolled for economic reasons. Likewise, two in three young men (65%) and one in three young women (35%) who had discontinued schooling before completing Class 7 reported that they had left school for economic reasons. Domestic responsibilities were cited, in contrast, by half of all young women and just one-sixth of young men who had never been to school, and somewhat fewer—two in five and one in seven— young women and men who had discontinued schooling before completing Class 7. It is notable that as progressively higher milestones were attained, economic and housework related reasons became progressively less prominent obstacles to schooling among young women. However, economic reasons remained prominent obstacles to schooling for young men, irrespective of the level of education attained.

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Unfavourable attitudes to education deter many

Unfavourable attitudes and perceptions of youth and their parents regarding education (for example, that education was unnecessary or the respondent was not interested in schooling) were also a key factor that inhibited many youth from getting

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Of those who had never enrolled/discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited economic constraints, including the burden of domestic responsibilities

enrolled in the first place or continuing schooling. Over one in four young men and women who had never enrolled in school cited attitude and perception-related reasons. Similarly, almost one in four young men and women who discontinued schooling before completing Class 7, and about one in six of those who discontinued before completing Class 10 reported attitude and perception-related reasons for discontinuation.

Of those who had never enrolled/ discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited unfavourable attitudes regarding schooling

School-related issues are significant, particularly for young women

Although school-related issues were infrequently cited as the reason for never attending school, one in six young women (and 6% of young men) reported that distance to school and school quality were key reasons for never attending school. School related reasons became more important factors accounting for discontinuation among young women who discontinued their education before Classes 7 and 10. For example, 22% of those who discontinued their education before completing Class 7 and one in three of those who discontinued their education after completing Class 7 and before completing Class 10 reported that such school related factors as distance and failure to pass school examinations had prevented them from continuing in school. Fewer young men reported school related obstacles (9–17%). Indeed, as many as 15% of young men and 20% of young women reported that failure to pass school examinations was the main reason for discontinuing their education after completing Class 7 and before completing Class 10.

Pressure to marry early adds to young women's disadvantage

Many young women but hardly any young men reported that marriage had interrupted their schooling. Indeed, one in seven young women who had discontinued their education before completing Class 7 and two in five of those who had discontinued their education in Classes 7–9 reported doing so in order to marry.

Of those who had never enrolled/discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited school-related barriers

Of those who had discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited early marriage/ engagement as the reason

Are schools equipped with basic amenities?

Findings suggest that irrespective of the level of education that youth have reached, the schools they attended lacked basic amenities. While drinking water was available in most schools, 12–13% of youth studying in Classes 1–7 reported that drinking water was not available in their schools. Toilet facilities, so essential for girls in particular, were not available to many—as many as 40% of young men and women studying in Classes 1–7 and almost half (48%) and one third (29%) of young men and women in Classes 8–10 did not have toilet facilities in their school. Library facilities were even less likely to be available. Indicative of the indifferent quality of education, many youth, moreover, required private coaching—as many as two-thirds (68%) of young men and three-fifths (58%) of young women studying in Classes 8–10.

Programme recommendations

Findings indicate that several challenges remain in ensuring universal access to primary and secondary education and thereby achieving Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education

and elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The Jharkhand Youth Policy has articulated the need for universal school enrolment and the recently enacted Right to Education Bill has made education compulsory for all children. Moreover, several central and state government programmes are ongoing, ranging from the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* to *Ashram Shalas* and the midday meal scheme, that are intended to encourage school enrolment and retention. What is required now are that policy commitments are met and programmes are effectively implemented. While the achievement of universal school enrolment and primary school completion are key goals, the importance of high school education in enabling youth to make a successful transition to adulthood underscores the need, at the same time, for efforts to overcome barriers to high school completion.

Address economic pressures

Efforts must be made to address the economic pressures that dissuade parents from enrolling their children in school and from keeping them in school once enrolled. Conditional grants and targeted subsidies that encourage school enrolment and completion among disadvantaged groups need to be considered.

Raise aspirations of youth and parents regarding education

Activities are needed that are directed at parents that raise their aspirations for the education of their children and encourage greater parental involvement in their children's education. There is also a need to incorporate livelihood skills building models within the school setting and provide opportunities for those in school to gain market-driven job skills that will raise the aspirations of youth regarding their education and career.

Address school-related barriers

Activities must address school-related barriers, notably, distance to school, poor infrastructure and quality of education, and academic failure. Particularly relevant school level barriers for young women were distance to school and absence of such essential infrastructure as toilets. Attention must be paid to ensure that schools, particularly at primary level, are accessible to all youth and that basic amenities—water and toilets—are available in all schools. The state government has launched various schemes to address the barrier posed by distance (for example, the bicycle scheme for girls); however, it is important that the effectiveness of these schemes is evaluated and promising lessons are assimilated and scaled up. Given the large proportions of youth reporting that schooling had been interrupted because they were required for work on the family farm or business or for housework, efforts are needed to adjust school timings, or to establish evening schools, to enable children to accommodate their work commitments without sacrificing their education. Moreover, investments in improving the quality of the schooling experience are needed that focus on providing better training of teachers and ensuring greater accountability among teachers. The facts that many young women reported poor quality of education as a reason for school discontinuation and that many youth reported academic failure as a reason for discontinuation, reiterate this need and call, in addition, for attention to support students who perform poorly.

Eliminate the practice of early marriage

Findings indicating that early marriage was an important reason for school discontinuation—even among girls who discontinued their education before completing Class 7—emphasise the fact that programme commitments outside the education sector are also critical to the achievement of universal school enrolment and completion. Specifically required are programmes that seek to critically examine norms and practices surrounding marriage and to eliminate the practice of early marriage. Explorations of subsidies and cash transfers that link school retention with delayed marriage among girls are needed.

Provide a second chance to obtain a basic education to young women left behind

Findings suggesting that married young women and rural young women remain considerably disadvantaged in terms of school enrolment and completion call for interventions that would give these sub-groups a second chance to obtain a basic education.

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