

A Mission Approach to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Ever since its inception in November 2000, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has made impressive strides in seeking to ensure universal elementary education. However, its progress has varied across states and the objective of ensuring gender parity remains elusive, especially for the more backward states. Monitoring of SSA funds can be assured by setting disaggregated targets for every state, wherein programmes and timelines could be designed according to the needs of individual states.

GURSHARAN SINGH KAINTH

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) forms the cornerstone of government interventions in basic education for all children. SSA, launched in November 2000 as an umbrella programme, was to support and build on primary and elementary education projects. The programme aims to ensure five years of primary education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 2007 and eight years of schooling by 2010. SSA was evolved from the recommendations of the state education minister's conference held in October 1998 to pursue universal elementary education (UEE) in a mission mode. The assistance under the SSA programme involved a sharing arrangement between the central and the state governments, on a 85:15 basis during the Ninth Plan, at 75:25 during the Tenth Plan and 50:50 thereafter. The programme covers the entire country except the state of Goa with a special focus on educational needs of girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other children in difficult circumstances. The goals of SSA are: (i) all children in schools, education guarantee centre, alternate school, back to

school camp by 2005 (revised up to 2007); (ii) bridge all gender and social category gaps at the primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010; (iii) universal retention by 2010; and (iv) focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.

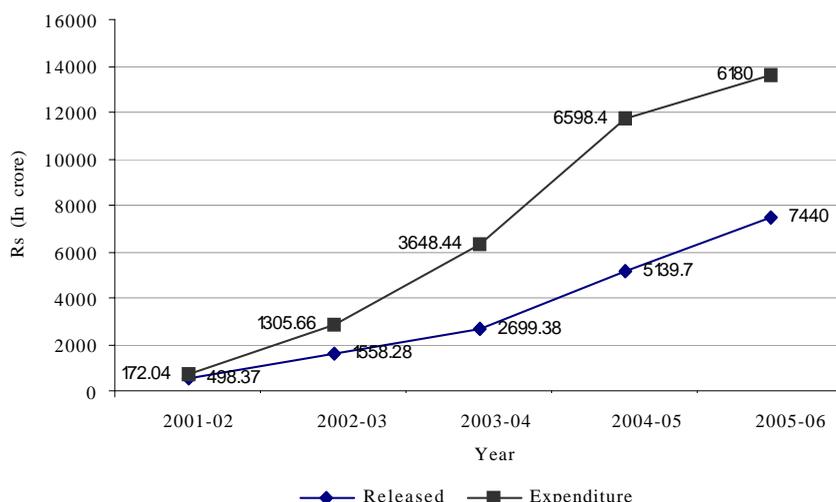
The SSA approach focuses on community ownership and the village education plans proposed in construction with panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) will form the basis of district elementary education plans (DEEPs). The implementation of SSA since its inception has made significant achievements in the field of education. Special emphasis was laid to ensure inclusion of all out-of-school children in the field of education. The focus has been on improving the existing infrastructure of regular schools as well as on alternate strategies for mainstreaming children who have been left out of the schooling process due to various reasons. As a result, the number of out-of-school children declined from 320 lakh in 2001 to 95 lakh as on October 2005. Cumulative progress made under SSA is depicted in the table while funds released and expenditure made is depicted graphically in the figure. Towards

the objectives of improving infrastructure, 1,17,677 new schools have been opened against the approval of 1,22,661 schools. Likewise, 3,86,458 teachers have been appointed till March 31, 2005, against the sanctioned limit of 5,96,245 teachers to ensure proper pupil-teacher ratios. More than 21,79,366 primary teachers are also receiving an annual round of in-service training of 10 to 20 days duration in a year. More than 60,000 academic resource centres have been established at the block and cluster levels to provide academic support to primary and upper primary teachers and students as a follow-up to teacher training programmes (TTPs).

During 2005-06, SSA recorded remarkable progress in terms of new schools, additional classrooms and additional teachers. Two independent survey shows that 93 per cent of the children in the age group of 6-14 years are in schools. Recognising its good performance, outlay for SSA has been increased from Rs 7,156 crore to Rs 10,041 crore in 2006-07. Around five lakh additional classrooms will be constructed and 1.5 lakh more teachers appointed. Further, physical infrastructure has been sought to be improved through provision of more than one lakh additional classrooms, around 60,000 school buildings, one lakh toilets and 75,000 drinking water facilities. To improve the quality of results on the part of students, grants are given to all teachers for developing teaching-learning materials, 20 days training is expected to be given to all teachers and free textbooks distributed to all girls and children of SC/ST origin. In addition, maintenance grant for civil repairs and a school grant for replacement of equipment is given to all schools. About 1.42 crore children are expected to be enrolled in education guarantee schemes (EGSS) centres and alternative education interventions like bridge courses.

An education cess of 2 per cent on all direct and indirect central taxes has been imposed through Finance (No 2) Act, 2004. The relevant bill was introduced in Parliament on July 8, 2004. Action was initiated for creation of a separate, dedicated, non-lapseable fund, the 'Parambhik Shiksha Kosh' and maintained by the HRD ministry, department of elementary education and literacy. During 2006-07, Rs 8,746 crore will be transferred to the Parambhik Shiksha Kosh from revenues raised through education cess. The proceeds would be available on a rollover basis for the scheme of basic education and

Figure: Growth of Release and Expenditure Funds under SSA



mid-day meals (MDMs) scheme. Twelve crore children are now covered under the mid-day meal scheme, which is the largest school lunch programme in the world. It is proposed to enhance the allocation for this from Rs 3,345 crore to Rs 4,813 crore in 2006-07. Budget provision of Rs1,675 crore was made for mid-day meal scheme during 2004-05. In addition Rs1,232 crore was provided to states/UTs as additional central assistance (ACA) under the state sector as outlay for meeting cooking cost.

Other concerns for the SSA programme are:

- (i) High dropout rates and quality education are the two main areas of concern of SSA that should be addressed through specific measures.
- (ii) Teacher related issues like vacancies, absenteeism, untrained teachers, inefficient training should be addressed urgently.
- (iii) Adequate teaching-learning materials and provision of other joyful learning conditions in the schools should be ensured and the child tracking system should be intensified.
- (iv) SSA funding system of 75:25 between central and state governments should be maintained till the mission period, which is up to 2010.
- (v) SSA guidance should be revised to ensure optimise investment, meet output targets and cater to special regional circumstances.
- (vi) SSA should also have a separate component of early childcare education (ECCE) where integrated child development services (ICDS) is not in operation. States should ensure proper management structures and monitoring arrangements

including social audits, accountability and public-private partnership under MDMs.

(vii) Factors leading to low learner's achievement, including poor classroom transactions, lack of pupil evaluation and low proportion of female teachers should be addressed effectively.

(viii) Local community should be involved in monitoring school performance.

Ensuring a Gender Perspective

Recent assessments show that girls' participation in schooling has improved significantly during the last 10-15 years. However, the Global Monitoring Report of UNESCO on progress towards EFA goals considers the progress to be far from satisfactory and emphasises the goal of gender parity and equality must be met. Are the strategies pursued for girls' education appropriate? It is important that a gender perspective is incorporated into all aspects of planning. For instance, in order to promote girls participation in schooling the Operation Blackboard

scheme required that the second teacher appointed to any primary school with one teacher would be a woman teacher. The early 1990s also saw the emergence of a explicit programme for woman's empowerment such as Mahila Samakhyas as means of improving participation of girls in schools. Unfortunately, no effort has been made to capitalise on the achievements made through these by incorporating complementary measures to retain girls in schools through the full cycle of elementary education. In July 2003, the government of India approved a new programme called the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) as an amendment to the existing scheme of SSA for providing additional support by way of girl child friendly schools, stationery, uniforms, etc, of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at the elementary level. The scheme has been implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where the level of female literacy is below and the gender gap is above the national average, i.e., in blocks not covered under EBBs but have at least 5 per cent SC/ST population and where SC/ST female literacy is below 10 per cent – and also in selected urban slums. Apart from NPEGEL, a new scheme called the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) has been approved for launch during 2004-05 for setting up 750 residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level for girls belonging predominantly to SC/ST, other backward castes (OBCs) and minorities in different areas. All the 750 KGBVs have been sanctioned by the government with 117 KGBVs (15.6 per cent) allocated to blocks with substantial minority population. Initial results of KGBVs have been encouraging. One thousand new schools for girls for SC/ST/OBC and minority communities will be opened in 2006-07. A provision of Rs 128 crore has been made in the

Table: Cumulative Outcome Indicators for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan till March 31, 2006

Particulars	Project Approved	Project Completed	Completion as Percentage of Approval
Opening of new schools	122661	117677	95.94
Construction of school buildings	82912	77342	93.28
Construction of additional classrooms	172893	143358	82.92
Drinking water facilities	111147	90165	81.12
Construction of toilets	156634	120710	77.07
Teachers appointed	596245	386458	64.08
Supply of books	x	5.77	x
Annual in-service training of teachers	3252785	2179366	67

budget 2006-07 and an additional amount of Rs 172 crore will be provided during the year. It also proposes to provide further incentives to the girl child who passes the eighth standard and enrolls in a secondary school. A sum of Rs 3,000 will be deposited in her name and she would be entitled to withdraw it on reaching 18 years of age. A provision of Rs 989 crore has been made for the Tenth Plan; the annual plan allocation for 2004-05 was Rs 100 crore. The department of elementary education (DEE) has approved 525 KGBVs involving an amount of Rs 123.03 crore for 2004-05. Another component of SSA is the Education Guarantee Scheme and the Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS and AIE) the latter specially designed to provide access to elementary education to children in school-less habitations and out of school children. It supports flexible strategies for out-of-school children through bridge courses, residential camps, drop in centres, summer camps, remedial coaching, etc. It helped to provide elementary education to 85.67 lakh children in 2004-05.

However, these programmes are just taking off. The coverage under these programmes is likely to be quite limited whereas problems of girls' participation in education remain widespread covering even states otherwise well placed in education development. The problem of non-participation of girls in schooling has been well explored and the causes are known. While inaccessibility of schooling facilities is one of the causes, tackling deeply entrenched social factors is a greater need in many areas. No doubt, gender gap in primary education is closing but in some areas there exists a wide gap. But SSA does not seem to be working in attaining universalisation. SSA is and probably would contribute successfully in expanding the provisioning of education, but its role in gearing the system towards the needs of diversity and deprivation appears extremely limited. Its approach in training the teachers in a largely, only perfunctory in nature. SSA also includes training of community groups, but the reach and focus remains very limited. The financial guidelines of

SSA are restrictive and are not need-based planning. The educational administration processes would also need to change. Educational administration is a part of a larger bureaucracy and functions in a similar fashion. Education is a long-term process with its specific requirements not always amenable to bureaucratic processes and priorities. A number of decisions are based on administrative ease rather than on issues of appropriateness and need. The time has come to act actively with the participation of implementing agencies, lest the flagship programme of SSA should remain on paper only. It is suggested that government should consider the proposal of providing vocational education to children at upper primary stage. Central and state governments should ensure that SSA is taken up as "People Movement" with a do or die spirit. The time has come to act in active coordination with the implementing agencies, lest the flagship of SSA scheme should remain on paper only. Sustained efforts should be made to achieve the objectives of SSA: Universalising primary schooling by 2007

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Fear

During the academic year 2007/08, the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies will focus on the study of fear in history. We invite scholars from all disciplines to examine fear as an historical experience, its generative, productive as well as negative and destructive roles in history, and the processes by which it operates, spreads, dissipates, and is countered. As in the past, we hope to address topics and problems from a wide variety of periods and places, from prehistory to the present, and from all parts of the world. Topics could include but are not limited to the following: the emotional and psychic texture of fear in historical situations; the mode of fear's operation, circulation, and dissolution; people's fear of the state and the state's fears as reflected in its generation of documentation and archives; fear of disease, war, empire and imperial dissolution; fear of the racial, religious, political, ideological, and sexual contamination; fear of disorder or the imposition of order; fear of change and fear of stasis; fear of technology and the projection of alternatives; fear of hell and for the fate of the soul; fear of urban dysfunction in generating utopian futures; fear of the "mob"; fear as a productive agent in violence, resistance, solidarity, artistic expression, and thought.

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Written inquiries should be addressed to the Manager, Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, Department of History, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544-1017, U.S.A. Applications can be made online at <http://dav.princeton.edu/program/e13/application.html>. The deadline for applications and letters of recommendation for fellowships for 2007/2008 is December 1, 2006. Scholars who would like to offer a paper to one of the weekly Seminars are asked to send a brief description of their proposal and current curriculum vitae to the Director. *Please note that we will not accept faxed applications.*

Professor Gyan Prakash
Director

and elementary education by 2010. The model and strategies followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala could be emulated by the poorer performing states. "Learn While You Earn" scheme could be an effective measure to retain students in schools. But an act alone cannot achieve the goal unless the education is delivered in a manner, which will take into account the socio-economic reality, and perceptions of people to whom it is addressed. Apart from attracting children to school, the education system should be able to provide nourishment and inject creativity among children. Also the aim of the education system should be to build character, human values, enhance the learning capacity through technology and build confidence among children to face future challenges. To make UNICEF Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of Universal Primary Education by 2015 a reality, a radical shift in thinking and policy will be needed.

It should be recognised that the Indian scenario is too complex and varied to be effectively captured by aggregate national figure. Some states would move quite close to the target by the end of the plan period while some others would remain far behind. The right approach would be to replace the current practice of setting global targets timeless for the whole country with disaggregated targets for different states and UTs. This would inject the much-needed sense of realism to the whole exercise of assessing the magnitude of the task and setting time frames. Considering that education is on the concurrent list and the centre has rightly provided high priority to elementary education, appropriateness of a proactive approach by the centre in designing development activities cannot be questioned. Going by past experience, there is a danger that after the initial enthusiasm, the implementing agencies may seek financial assistance under SSA but lose interest in and ownership of the programme and action soon after. Proactive approach of the centre may be taken as a licence by many states to be inactive. The real test of SSA would be its adaptability to the changing contexts of different states and its ability to enthuse the state governments to continuously innovate the strategies for demanding central assistance. Therefore norms for support under SSA should have flexibility to accommodate new initiatives. **EPW**

Email: gursharan_kainth@rediffmail.com