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INDIA

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

CASE STUDY

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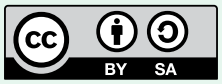

Coordinator: Malisa Santigul
Editor: Ellie Meleisea
Graphic designer: Filippo Monti

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Acronyms

ABL	Activity based learning
AIE	Alternate and innovative education
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CCE	Continuous and comprehensive evaluation
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
CSO	Civil society organization
CWSN	Children with special needs
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DFID	Department for International Development
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EC	European Commission
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
EFA	Education for All
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
GDI	Gender Development Index
GeSCI	Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
GoI	Government of India
HDI	Human Development Index
HSTP	Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme
ICICI	Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India
ICT	Information and communication technology
IFIG	ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth
INR	Indian Rupee
JRM	Joint Review Mission
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MVF	Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
NCERT	National Council of Education, Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NPE	National Policy on Education
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
PESLE	Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institution
PTA	Parent-teacher association
PTR	Pupil-teacher ratio
REI	Rajasthan Education Initiative
SC	Scheduled Castes
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SIS	State Implementation Society
SMC	School management committee
SPK	Shiksha Protsahan Kendra
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribes
SWRC	Social Work and Research Centre
TRSG	Technical Resource Support Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Preface

There has been significant progress towards the six EFA goals, however, all available indicators are pointing to a bitter reality that EFA will be an "unfinished business". The 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report has concluded that with less than two years until the 2015 deadline, the world is not on track. Amidst the many challenges, many countries have demonstrated how achievements can be made with the commitment from government, expanded partnerships, innovative thinking and efficient use of resources. There are lessons to be learned.

At the Global EFA Meeting (GEM) in Paris in November 2012, Ministers, heads of delegations, leading officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and senior representatives of civil society and private sector organizations, including those from Asia-Pacific, committed to the "Big Push". The GEM participants called upon governments and EFA partners to identify successful initiatives and innovative practices and to adapt, replicate, or scale-up such initiatives to speed up EFA progress.

Subsequently, the 13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators: The Big Push, which was organized in Bangkok, Thailand on 26-27 February 2013 as a follow up to the GEM, underscored the need for increased knowledge on innovative and creative ways of addressing EFA challenges so as to inform policy-making and programme development on EFA. To this end, the meeting requested UNESCO Bangkok to document innovative approaches and effective practices from countries that have succeeded in transforming EFA goals into concrete realities and to disseminate this knowledge for the benefit of all countries.

The Asia-Pacific region is full of successful initiatives, with stories of good practices in almost every country. Over the years, UNESCO has documented these practices to share them with a wider audience. These five country case studies provide in-depth understanding of promising initiatives that are critical in EFA acceleration in Asia-Pacific. While this research attempts to gather evidence on successful initiatives that have helped countries to accelerate EFA progress, it should be noted that these case studies are some examples selected from a vast pool of equally promising EFA practices in this region.

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Executive Summary

This case study on promising practices in Education for All (EFA) in India was commissioned by UNESCO Bangkok with support from the Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT) as one of five country case studies from the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific region is full of successful and innovative initiatives that have helped governments accelerate EFA progress at the country level. Governments in the region and beyond can learn from these experiences. It is in this context UNESCO Bangkok has embarked on the documentation of such practices.

India's focus on elementary education and literacy goals precedes the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990. In 1986, India's national educational goals and strategies were re-examined and were reframed in the National Policy on Education, leading to the setting of the goal of free and compulsory education for all children aged 6–14.

The new education strategies and policies were in response to the grim education situation that existed in much of India in the mid-1980s. In many states literacy rates were low, especially among girls and women, and there was much disparity in education levels between states. Particular challenges had arisen as a result of extreme inequality in society. Education indicators showed that disadvantaged communities, which constituted more than one-third of India's population, had low achievement levels in many areas. In the context of such challenges, India's progress since then towards achieving the EFA Goals has been remarkable.

While India has shown progress in all six of the EFA goals, the extent of progress in each varies. India's major achievements have been in Goal 2 and Goal 5.

India's current status, as of 2013, in terms of the EFA Goals is summarized below.

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Early childhood care and education in India is provided for children aged 3–5 in Anganwadi Centres. Enrolment and the number of Anganwadi Centres more than doubled between 2002 and 2011. Formal schools, particularly private ones, also provide pre-primary education. Nevertheless, a large number of children are not enrolled in any pre-primary facilities.

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

While only around 50 per cent of children in the 6–14 age group were in school in 1991, as of 2013 nearly 95 per cent are in school. Not all enrolled children are able to complete the required eight years of education, however. In 2007–08, only 68 per cent of children aged 16–17 had completed eight years of schooling.

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Literacy rates of youth have increased remarkably since the 1980s and India expects to achieve a youth literacy rate of 90 per cent by 2015. In addition, the gender parity index is expected to be near 1. Expansion of participation in secondary and vocational education has been limited, however. A lack of reliable data limits efforts to precisely measure progress towards this goal.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

The adult literacy rate has increased significantly, and the targeted increase of 50 per cent is likely to be achieved by 2015. A significant gender gap remains, however.

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

The gap between male and female attendance rates has declined significantly over the past 25 years. The attendance rates of males and females at the primary and upper-primary levels are almost equal at present, but a marked difference persists at the secondary stage.

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Improvements in the quality of education have been limited, in spite of a variety of efforts. Various surveys (Annual Status of Education Report 2006 and National Achievement Survey Class V 2012) have revealed slow progress towards better learning outcomes in terms of literacy and numeracy skills.

This study examines the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the "Education for All Movement", India's flagship programme aiming to achieve universal primary education. In particular, this case study examines the implementation of the SSA programme in two states: Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The main focus of this study is to examine partnerships in these states between government and civil society and assess the contributions of these partnerships to the SSA programme.

The SSA was a collaborative effort of the central, state and local governments. The planning, implementation and monitoring of this multifaceted programme was a mammoth task. Civil society organizations (CSOs), including those with their origins in the voluntary sector; non-profit groups set up as foundations, as well as those that are part of profit-making companies; and private sector organizations had significant roles in the programme.

The study draws on secondary sources, supplemented by discussions with leaders of prominent CSOs and with individuals in the government and United Nations who have experience in the education sector in the two states.

In the Indian context, there was a new emphasis on elementary education after the formulation of the National Policy of Education in 1986. Other changes in the macro environment played a critical role, such as the large fiscal deficit in the early nineties leading to expenditure reductions in the social sector. Internationally, this was also the time when the aid agencies were keen to increase their aid commitments to primary education (Jomtien Conference). As a consequence of these parallel developments, a significant amount of aid resources were directed at primary education in India for the first time. Other changes in 1994 were the Constitutional amendments through which local governments were given statutory recognition, and school education was included in the list of its responsibilities. This influenced the structure of education management.

The following years saw the emergence of various externally-funded, centrally-sponsored projects, which started as pilot interventions in one or more locations and later expanded their geographical coverage. In contrast to earlier projects, these actions were targeted towards specific districts or specific blocks. Some of them were implemented through independent State Implementation Societies (SIS). At the same time, internally funded micro-initiatives were launched.

The various projects were managed under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1993–94, the first large-scale multi-state education programme, which was funded by several external agencies. From the donors' point of view, the DPEP had many of the essential features of later sector wide approaches.

In 2001–02, the Indian government launched the SSA programme at the national level as a single umbrella programme absorbing all individual education projects. Evaluations of earlier education projects informed the design of this new programme. The intention of the programme was to provide a wide but convergent framework for decentralized planning and implementation of all central and state government initiatives in elementary education. Three major time-bound targets, similar to EFA goals 2, 5 and 6, were adopted.

The SSA initiative was different from earlier projects as it was to be implemented across all districts of India, and the target was to ensure all children participated in eight years of education in place of the earlier goal of five years.

Initially the SSA was to be funded only from domestic resources, but when the GoI could not mobilize sufficient resources, it sought assistance from the World Bank, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission (EC). From 2004, the programme received external support in two phases of three years each. Over a period of ten years the SSA was co-funded by the central government, the state governments and donor partners.

Following the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009, the second phase of the SSA was extended until 2011–12. In these years, the objectives and strategies of the SSA were reviewed and revised.

SSA Phase I: At the core of this programme were decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring, and the focus was on schools and communities. District annual plans were made through a "bottom-up" approach starting from the school level. The annual financing needs were determined through the process of decentralized planning. Funds were transferred from the centre directly to the SIS and then to district offices. School-community linkages were set up through village-level education committees. To facilitate decentralized planning and monitoring, an easily-accessible decentralized education management information system was developed. Apart from regular school-level monitoring, a monitoring and accountability mechanism was introduced into the SSA through Joint Review Missions (JRM), from January 2005.

SSA Phase II: The mid-term assessment of SSA in 2005–06 showed that progress towards access and equity targets at the primary level was remarkable, but additional effort was needed to achieve the SSA goals. Moreover, although school participation had increased, retention was still a problem. The SSA programme was extended until 2011–12 with a slightly altered focus to meet the challenges of equitable access, retention and quality.

In the earlier phase, SSA focused on planning, implementation and monitoring of inputs (textbooks, etc.). In the second phase, the programme concentrated more on monitoring and improving outcome indicators – that is, improving learning achievements levels and reducing dropout rates.

SSA after the Right to Education Act: In August 2009, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (the "Right to Education Act") was passed. The Ministry of Human Resource Development established a committee to suggest necessary follow-up action in SSA in light of the new Act. On the basis of their report, the government broadened the SSA framework. In this period, the SSA management structure was integrated with the state education structure in some states.

The SSA framework actively encouraged CSOs to contribute to the achievement of the SSA goals. This period saw a change in the number and type of CSOs entering into partnerships with the State. The collaborations were for various types of service provision within the programme, innovations in teaching training modules to build capacity of teachers, involvement in community mobilization and building capacity of members of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Education Committees. CSOs with members that had a rich experience of working in the education sector prior to SSA played an important consultative role in the process of implementing the Right to Education Act.

The SSA programme achieved a great deal. The achievements in terms of access, equity and quality are summarized below:

Access: The number of schools and enrolment increased sharply over the SSA implementation period. This growth was higher for primary classes in the first phase of SSA and higher for upper-primary classes in the second phase. There was a sharp decline in the number of out-of-school children, and the number out-of-school was reported as 3 million in 2010–11.

Equity: Over time, the SSA approach shifted from being input-based to being process-based. The emphasis on eliminating discrimination in the classroom and exclusion from school brought benefits. The proportion of enrolled children from disadvantaged communities increased, although vulnerable groups still required ongoing targeted support.

Quality: The mid-term assessment of SSA revealed relatively poor progress in terms of quality improvement. With a renewed focus on the quality of education in the second phase of SSA, several changes were introduced. States began the process of revising their textbooks in light of the new National Curriculum Framework in 2005, which emphasized the need to provide useful and relevant education. Several state-specific initiatives were launched, which focused on improving teacher training and student learning achievements.

Systemic changes in finance, administration and management in schooling took place over the SSA decade, more slowly in some states than in others. These system reforms, along with decentralized planning led to a more efficient process of financial allocation and utilization. Expenditures on education increased dramatically over this period and the composition of expenditure changed with SSA priorities. Community-based bodies were formed in all villages, which played an important role in ensuring teacher accountability and general school functioning. After the enactment of the Right to Education Act, this process was made more uniform and all states replaced their community-level Education Committees with School Management Committees (SMCs). These school-based committees were given the responsibility of school-level planning and monitoring. Panchayati Raj Institutions were given the responsibility of community mobilization and the identification of out-of-school children through household surveys.

As noted above, this case study examines the partnerships between CSOs and the state governments of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh during the implementation of the SSA programme.

These states were selected for the case study as they were on the list of educationally disadvantaged states during the 1990s and have received relatively large shares of central government assistance since then, and because they both had a rich history of CSOs working with the state government. The SSA programme took somewhat different routes in the two states in terms of partnerships with CSOs, however. This reflects the political contexts as well as the evolution of education in the states prior to the SSA programme and prior partnerships.

Rajasthan: New developments came about in community partnerships in Rajasthan in various ministries in the mid-1980s. Partnerships were formed to implement the Women's Development Programme and the Total Literacy Campaign. These programmes were followed by the Shiksha Karmi project and the Lok Jumbish project, which were major initiatives in primary education implemented by the GoI and the state government with donor support. Several CSOs that had initiated innovative activities in schools at the micro-level were invited to help in the implementation of these projects. The DPEP was initiated in 19 districts of Rajasthan in the DPEP's third phase, and CSOs were involved in its implementation as well.

In 2002, all ongoing projects in elementary education were absorbed under the SSA. Initially, this resulted in a period of uncertainty when the administrative structures of earlier projects were dismantled and new ones brought in. CSOs that were involved in the implementation of earlier projects had to review their experience and strategize.

The year 2005–06 marked a change in the number and type of partners involved. The Rajasthan Education Initiative (REI) also began at this time. It was an innovative multi-stakeholder partnership that engaged local and global partners from the private sector, foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support education in the state of Rajasthan. It therefore had multiple sources of funding, including from the Government of Rajasthan (GoR), the Government of India, the private sector and international and local donors. MOUs were signed with multiple partners for various types of interventions. Small-scale innovative interventions by CSOs continued, but larger partnerships between GoR and well-funded foundations were also set up at the time.

With the enactment of the Right to Education Act in 2009, the state had to face the challenge of bringing about transformative changes required by the Act. The state had to introduce some changes on a large scale in a short time period, and it relied on the support of CSOs to implement these changes. UNICEF played a major role over this period by facilitating the involvement of experienced CSOs in the process of educational reform.

Madhya Pradesh: In this state, DPEP played a critical role in the 1990s, as this programme was implemented in 21 of the state's 42 districts during phases 1 and 2 of DPEP, and later in another 14 districts. Through DPEP, the government gained experience and expertise in handling large externally-funded projects, and the SSA built on this. The contribution of the CSO Eklavya was critical, particularly in its work in government middle schools and primary schools.

A major initiative in the State of Madhya Pradesh was the setting up of an apex policy-making body for academic decisions whose members were education practitioners and educationists. These experts were brought into the policy process, and combined with the government-CSO partnerships, enabled considerable progress towards achieving the EFA goals. Prior to the SSA, partnerships with CSOs took various forms, including implementing the Lok Sampark Abhiyan and visits to every home to find out which children were out of school, and why. The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), which earned a Commonwealth Innovation Award for the state, was launched in 1997 as a direct consequence of the Lok Sampark Abhiyan.

CSOs had a fairly limited role to play in Madhya Pradesh during the first years of the SSA programme, as in Rajasthan. Post-2005, the government decided to expand its partnerships with CSOs. This was in response to the need to meet the SSA goals and to bring in more funding to achieve this. The Madhya Pradesh government set up a "Partnership Cell" to facilitate this. Partnership agreements were signed with organizations outside the state such as Pratham and the Naandi Foundation, as

well as with local organizations such as Eklavya, Samavesh and Muskaan. The partnerships remained limited in terms of duration and spread, however. As of 2013, the government has partnerships with only a few organizations.

Two interrelated processes were observed in terms of partnerships in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh during the SSA period. First, the organizations that had been closely working with the government in the implementation of major education schemes in the 1990s had partnerships at a reduced scale. Despite this, these CSOs made a major contribution to policy formulation during this period. Second, partnerships were initiated with new types of organizations, including corporate and non-corporate foundations. Their contribution was important as they could provide greater financial and managerial support for programme implementation than the CSOs that had partnered with the state governments in the past.

The unique feature of the SSA programme was its inclusive and flexible framework, encompassing a decentralized planning and implementation process, which allowed the identification of additional financial resources and the introduction of a monitoring and evaluation system at various levels. Thus, the SSA framework offered scope to assess the impact of policies and to change strategies accordingly.

The SSA was flexible in that while it provided a framework to make use of available resources in the government and non-government sector, each state was free to choose its own path towards addressing education issues arising from the diversities and inequalities that existed within these states and within the districts. The constitutional amendment that gave recognition and responsibilities to local governments and the decentralization of education administration as part of SSA both played crucial roles in providing opportunities to address the needs of diverse populations. While uniform norms and targets were set for all districts, the SSA framework had the flexibility to adapt strategies according to local requirements.

The case studies indicate that neither Rajasthan nor Madhya Pradesh made optimum use of the technical expertise they could access through their local CSOs, which have a wealth of experience. Their partnerships with the other types of organizations are still fairly new and have not continued for sufficient time for this study to be able to judge their impact.

In terms of getting the best out of partnerships, it would be useful for state governments to put more systems in place to share information, and to streamline procedural issues related to approval and renewal of projects. CSOs, on their part, should continue their micro-initiatives, but also play a watchdog role when such micro-initiatives are scaled up by the government and new policies are implemented. It is hoped that CSOs will continue to raise critical issues with the government, particularly related to child development and child rights, and more so for children of socially marginalized groups.

It is clear that in spite of the progress made on several fronts, universal primary education has not been achieved yet in India. This case study found, however, that the SSA, and the partnerships formed as part of it, made significant contributions towards achieving that goal and the other EFA Goals. The SSA programme can be considered as a promising practice because it successfully used macro-strategies to scale-up pilot projects and it built on lessons learned from the experience of educational reform in the preceding decade. This case study's examination of the SSA programme shows that the EFA Goals cannot be achieved through "quick fix" strategies, but instead need long-term, focused interventions.

1 Introduction

"In our national perception, education is essentially for all."
(National Policy on Education, 1986)

There has been significant progress worldwide towards achieving the six EFA goals, but the goals are unlikely to be realized in all countries by 2015 (UNESCO, 2012). At the Global EFA Meeting in Paris in November 2012, a commitment was made by the participants to accelerate progress. To identify successful initiatives and innovative practices in the Asia-Pacific Region that have shown good progress in achieving the EFA goals, UNESCO commissioned case studies from five countries in the region. This case study looks at India's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme.

India's commitment to free and compulsory elementary education and literacy for all dates back to the drafting of the nation's constitution and these goals were re-examined and reframed in 1986 when the National Policy on Education was instigated. This new policy led to the adoption of several new programmes, including "Operation Blackboard" (which sought to improve access to schools and infrastructure in schools) and the setting of minimum levels of learning for each grade in primary school. It also led to district-based campaigns to improve adult literacy. Also, foreign assistance was accepted for several projects which aimed at extending the coverage of primary education in India and improving its quality in innovative ways.

The pledges made during the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 reinforced India's commitment to achieving universal primary education. The Jomtien Declaration proposed the attainment of universal primary education by 2000 and specified five other targets on aspects related to improving access to education and the quality of teaching and learning. The resource implications of these targets were formidable and therefore required the summoning of significant political will. The governments of 155 countries made commitments to education goals, and many donors expressed their willingness to aid primary education and adult literacy in these countries. India, with more than 30 million out-of-school children aged between 6 and 14, put greater attention and resources towards achieving these goals. In the following years, international aid to education in India increased significantly. In later decades aid declined, but the government of continued its efforts towards reaching the EFA goals, primarily through its own resources.

2 Overview of the Study

While India has shown progress in all six of the EFA goals, the extent varies for each goal. Its major achievements have been in terms of Goal 2 (universal access to free and compulsory primary education) and in terms of Goal 5 (gender equality in access to primary and secondary education).

In a country as large and populous as India, the progress made towards these goals required sustained effort and resources. The developments in the past two decades are a result of several innovative practices implemented across the country. For all children in India to benefit from them, these practices had to be successfully mainstreamed, while taking into account local contexts and needs if they were to have a significant measurable impact.

This case study examines the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme, a macro-strategy adopted by the Indian government in pursuit of universal access to education, which was implemented by the central and state governments in all states of India between 2002 and 2012. This case study sought to evaluate the impact of the SSA in terms of achieving the EFA goals, particularly in terms of ensuring access to primary education of good quality, completion of primary school, and gender equity in education. In particular, this case study examines the contributions of the civil society organizations and the CSO-government partnerships in terms of ensuring the success of the SSA programme and the achievement of its goals.

The SSA learned from several separate pilot projects and implemented a holistic programme that focused on various aspects of elementary education with the aim of achieving uniform outcomes in all areas of the country and for all population groups. Towards this end, the programme was flexible and allowed planning and implementation to vary depending on the target groups and contexts.

The planning, implementation and monitoring of this multifaceted programme involved mammoth effort and required cooperation between the central, state and local governments. Partnerships between the government and CSOs were also crucial. The government-CSO partnerships took different forms in the various states and these partnerships changed over time. These partnerships were explored in this case study, focusing on the experiences in two states: Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The lessons learned from the partnerships in these states are useful when considering the replication of such strategies in other contexts.

Both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have significant populations of marginalized groups and have faced enormous challenges in their efforts to provide education to all children, especially in reaching girls and other disadvantaged groups. Since the 1970s a number of CSOs have been very active in the education sector, and some of the early government-CSO partnerships occurred in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. For the implementation of the SSA, various CSOs worked with the government, including domestic and international non-governmental organizations and foundations. Partnerships were also forged with United Nations organizations and private sector organizations. All of these partnerships have made a critical contribution to education progress in these states.

The study was primarily based on secondary sources, including India's Five Year plans and the annual reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Joint Review Mission (JRM)

monitoring reports, project appraisal documents and the annual work plans of the central and state governments. This study also examined annual reports and other publications and statistics produced by NGOs that have worked closely with the state governments of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh

The information gained from the reports and other documents was supplemented by interviews with members of prominent organizations that have had long experience in working with the central government and with the governments in the two states. In Madhya Pradesh, the research team also interviewed representatives of the Department of Education and UNICEF. In Delhi, discussions were held with experts who have extensive experience of working in one or both of the focus states. Combined, the interviews gathered a vast amount of data, providing an understanding of the diverse roles played by non-governmental actors in the SSA programme as well as people's perceptions of the collaborative process and its strengths and weaknesses, in the past and at present.

3 EFA Achievements and Challenges

Education was traditionally a state responsibility and it continued to be so after India attained independence from Britain in 1947. The central government played a minor role in education, particularly in formal schooling. Therefore, interstate variations, which were inherited with independence, remained. Consequently, states such as Kerala, with a rich history of investing in education, progressed very quickly in comparison to large states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh that did not have the same emphasis on education.

A constitutional amendment in 1976 moved education from the list of state responsibilities to the list of concurrent responsibilities, thereby enabling the GoI to contribute more to state-level education finance. The problems, particularly in elementary education, were not only a shortage of financial resources, however. It was necessary "to bring about changes and improvements in the system through increased attention to non-monetary inputs" (GOI, 1979, Section 21.47). Growing concern about this need for reform led, during the Seventh Plan period (1985–90), to a number of strategic developments in education and its governance, marked by the adoption of the new National Policy of Education (1986).

Since 1976, when education became a joint responsibility of the central and state governments, there have been attempts to institute a common school structure in all states. Some changes have been made in terms of school structures and age norms, but differences still persist.

In India there are multiple sources of data on literacy and education. Comparison of the education systems and indicators of the various states is a challenge because of differences between the states in the manner in which schooling is structured and the way in which data is reported. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some comparisons between the states.

Statistics from the mid-1980s paint a grim picture of the nation's education system at the time, particularly in states in the north and east. Access to schools had improved in the 40 years since independence, yet many children (around 25 per cent in the 6–14 age group) were still out of school. The gross enrolment ratios (GERs) were 92 per cent and 52 per cent at the primary and upper-primary stages, (grades 1–5 and 6–8). State-level differences in education policy were reflected in the clustering of out-of-school children in nine states and particular issues had arisen from social stratification.

Hindus, who comprise four-fifths of the total population of India, are divided into castes – a system based on a hierarchical social order, endogamy and hereditary occupations. Certain groups – the "Scheduled Castes" (SC), have been disadvantaged as a result. They comprise 16 per cent of the population. Another disadvantaged group is the "Scheduled Tribes" (ST), also called *adivasis*; indigenous people who have traditionally lived in remote locations with forested and hilly terrain. They constitute 8 per cent of the population and have been disadvantaged by their geographical isolation, with poor access to infrastructure and facilities. Another minority group is the Muslims, which constitute 13 per cent of the population. The incidence of poverty is very high in this group (Indian Human Development Report 2011).

Combined, these three groups (SC, ST and Muslims) constitute more than one-third of India's population. They have been excluded from mainstream development to a great extent, particularly in states that were lagging behind educationally. Providing education to these deprived groups has been a major challenge.

Gender differences in access to education were also extreme and cut across social communities. In the 1980s, studies found that women were disadvantaged in multiple ways, access to education not being an exception. Disadvantages were even more pronounced for women from poorer households and for those belonging to marginalized social groups.

In the context of such challenges, India's progress towards the EFA goals has been remarkable. Below, we take a quick look at India's achievements in terms of the six EFA Goals, as revealed through the available data.

3.1 Early Childhood Care and Education

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

In India the duration of pre-primary education varies from one to three years. There are several types of pre-primary education:

- Government provision is for three years duration, for children aged between 3 and 6, as part of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in Anganwadi Centres under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- Government schools in some states have one year of pre-primary education attached to the primary schools.
- Privately-managed schools, which have a strong presence in India, have one to three years of pre-primary schooling.

Anganwadi Centres are the main ECCE option for children from rural areas and for those from disadvantaged groups in all areas. Data from the MWCD shows that the number of Anganwadi centres and the number of students enrolled in them more than doubled between 2002 and 2011. The growth in enrolment was sharper in the earlier years but slowed down in the later years.

The number of government schools with pre-primary education is very limited, but pre-primary classes in private schools are quite common, particularly in urban areas. Their numbers rapidly increased in recent years, though no exact figures are available. This is because not all private schools are recognized by the government, particularly the ones that focus on pre-primary education.

Calculated on the basis of the projected population in the 3–5 age group, the GER for children aged 3–5 in pre-primary grades increased between 2007 and 2012. The actual GER for pre-primary grades is likely to be much higher. Not only are the numbers in private pre-schools underestimated, the figures do not include the children in the age group who are studying in primary grades. In many states, the age of admission to Class 1 is 5 years, so the majority of 5-year-olds are in Class 1 rather than in pre-primary grades. This finding is supported by data collected in household surveys like those of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), which show that 5-year-olds are more likely to be in the primary stage of schooling rather than pre-primary.

While enrolment in Anganwadi Centres has been increasing, enrolment in formal pre-primary grades (in government and private schools) has been decreasing (Table 1).

Table 1: Enrolment in pre-primary schooling facilities (millions) Year

	ICDS/Anganwadi Centres	Pre-primary grades (formal)	Total attendance	Gross enrolment ratio
2002–03	25.40	8.17	33.57	
2007–08	33.91	6.58	40.49	40 %
2011–12	35.82	6.30	42.13	57%

Source: Seventh All India Education Survey, selected education statistics and population projections from the Registrar General of India (given in relevant years).

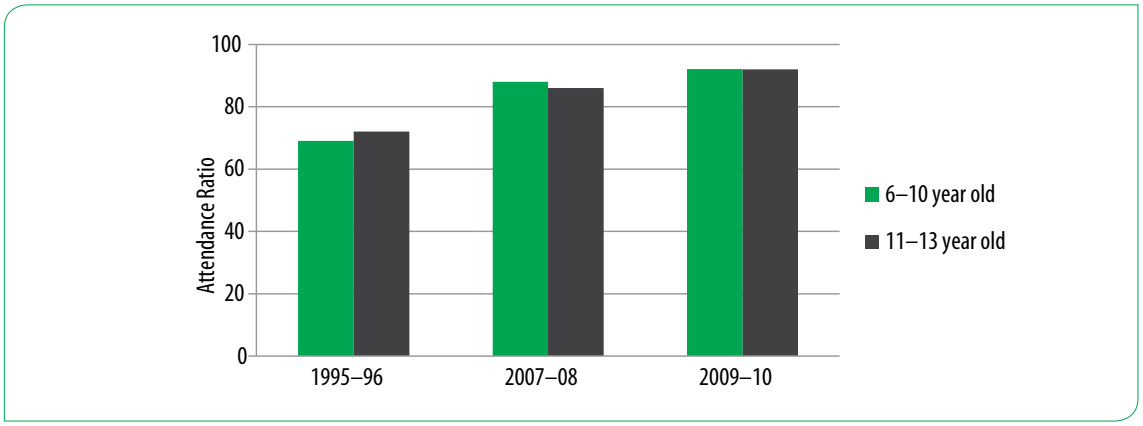
In summary, while the number of children accessing ECCE programmes has increased, only a small proportion is enrolled in pre-primary grades in formal schools. Anganwadi Centres have a greater reach and are accessed by nearly half the children in the 3–5 age group. Nevertheless, there are many children who do not receive any pre-primary education. While some 5-year-olds may be enrolled in primary schools, many children in the 3–4 age group are not enrolled in any education facility.

3.2 Universal Primary Education

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

According to the 1991 census data, only half of the children aged 5–14 were attending school that year. NSSO survey data show a rapid increase in school attendance rates in the following two decades. In 1995–96 nearly 70 per cent of children in the age group were attending school and in 2009–10 the figure was nearly 90 per cent (Figure 1). Another household survey commissioned by the government to estimate the number of out-of-school children found an even higher level of school attendance in 2009 – around 95 per cent. This is a remarkable achievement. The attendance rates of children from marginalized and vulnerable groups are lower than average, however.

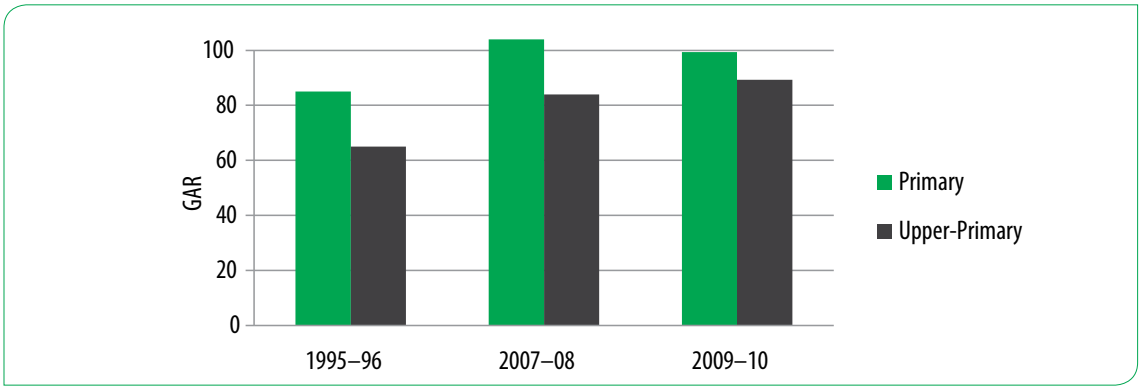
Figure 1: Attendance ratios for children aged 6–10 and 11–13 (1995–2010)



Source: NSSO

The gross attendance rates increased rapidly between 1996 and 2007, but progress was greater at the primary level than at upper-primary. The net attendance ratios are lower.

Figure 2: Gross attendance ratios at primary and upper-primary levels (1995–2010)



Source: NSSO relevant rounds

While more children are attending school, not all are studying at age appropriate grades – many of them are over-age for their grades, indicating that many children begin schooling late and/or repeat grades.

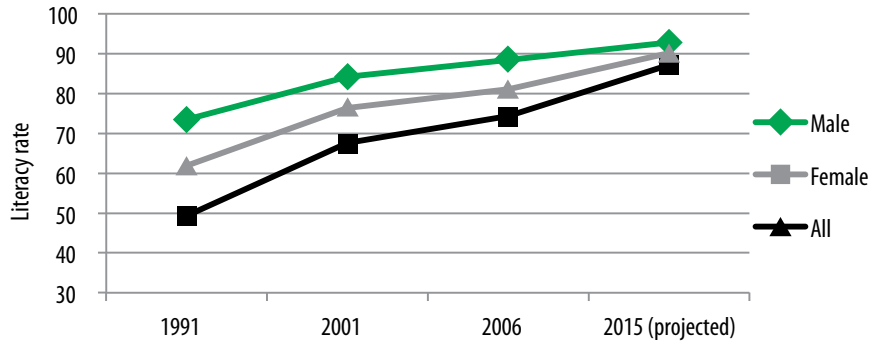
Furthermore, while the increasing attendance rates are a positive sign, not all enrolled children complete eight years of education. NSSO data for 2007–08 shows that while 71.5 per cent of children aged 11–13 completed Class 5, only 49 per cent of children aged 11–13 and 68 per cent of children aged 16–17 completed Class 8.

3.3 Youth and Adult Skills

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

The literacy rates of youth aged 15–24 have increased remarkably since 1991. Projected figures for 2015 show an increase in the youth literacy rate of more than 50 per cent over the past two decades – from around 60 per cent in 1991 to a predicted rate of 90 per cent in 2015. There was even greater growth in literacy rates among females, with the rate rising from 50 per cent in 1991 to a projected 87 per cent in 2015 (Figure 3). As a result, the gender parity index is expected to be near 1 by 2015.

Figure 2: Youth literacy rates (1991–2015)



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2013.

The increase in literacy rates has been achieved primarily through expansion of primary education. The expansion of secondary and vocational education has been more limited.

Attendance rates are lower among youth compared to younger age groups. Only around one third of youth aged 15–24 were attending educational institutions in 2009–10 (Table 2). The proportion receiving vocational training was almost negligible (Table 3).

Table 2: Attendance rates of youth (2009–10)

Year	Male	Female	All
2009–10	30.1%	22.1%	26.4%

Source: NSSO 66th Round (2009–10)

Table 3: Proportion of youth receiving or received formal vocational training (2009–10)

Year	Male	Female	All
2009–10	2.9 %	2.3 %	2.6 %

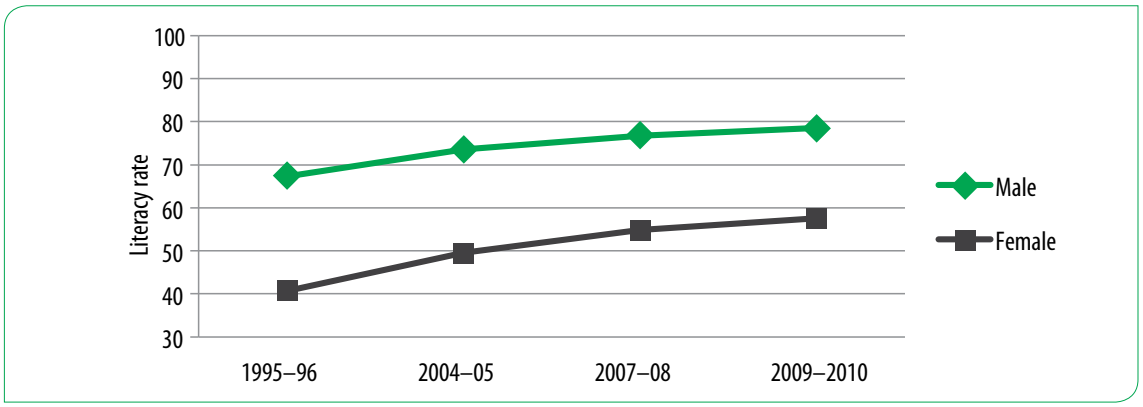
Source: NSSO 66th Round (2009–10)

3.4 Improvement in Adult Literacy

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

The literacy rate of adults (persons aged over 15) has increased significantly over the past two decades, and the targeted increase of 50 per cent is likely to be achieved by 2015. The male literacy rate increased from 67 per cent in 1995–96 to nearly 79 per cent in 2009–10, while the female literacy rate increased from 38 per cent to 61 per cent (Figure 4). Despite this large increase in female literacy, a significant gender gap remains. The increase in the male and female literacy rates was rapid between 1991 and 2001, but has slowed down since then. The early spurt could be the impact of the National Literacy Campaign conducted in the early 1990s.

Figure 4: Adult literacy rates (1995–96 to 2009–10)



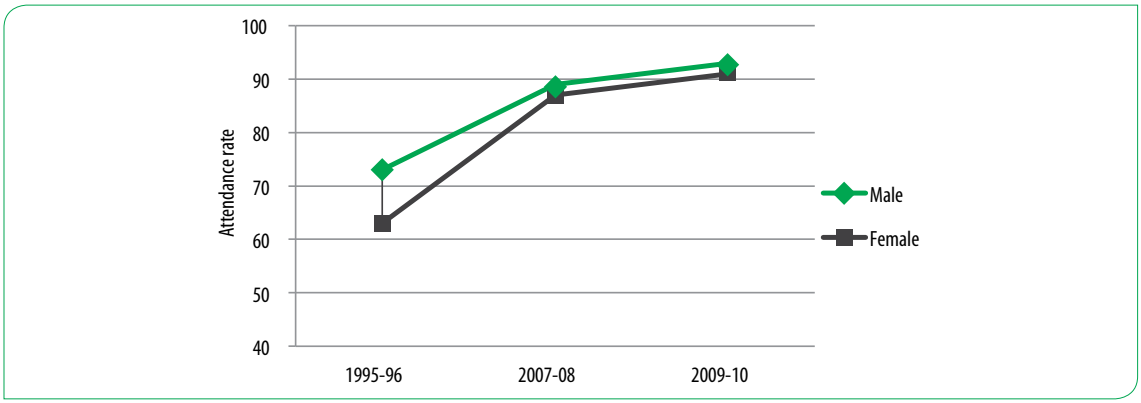
Source: NSSO

3.5 Gender Equality in Access to Basic Education

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

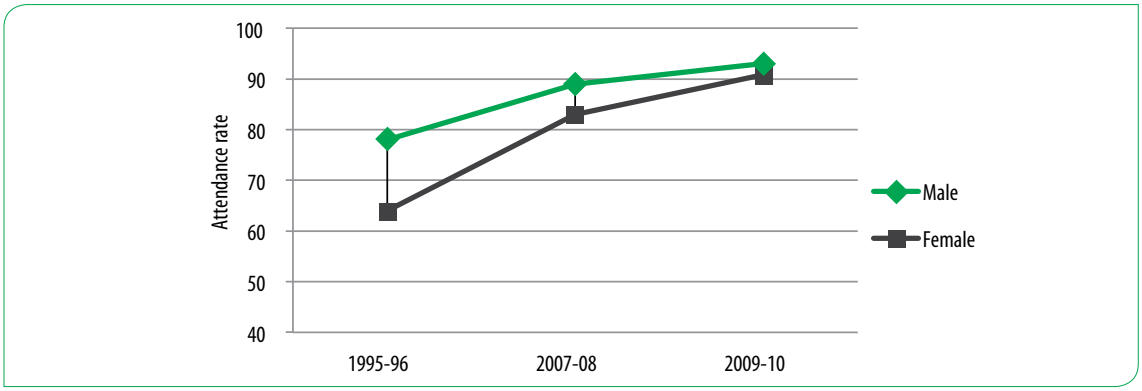
The gap between male and female attendance rates has declined over the past two decades. As of 2009–10, the attendance rates of males and females at the primary and upper-primary levels were almost equal (Figures 5a and 5b), though a marked difference persists at the secondary level. (Figure 5c).

Figure 5a: Gender differences in attendance rates of children aged 6–10 (1995–96 to 2009–10)



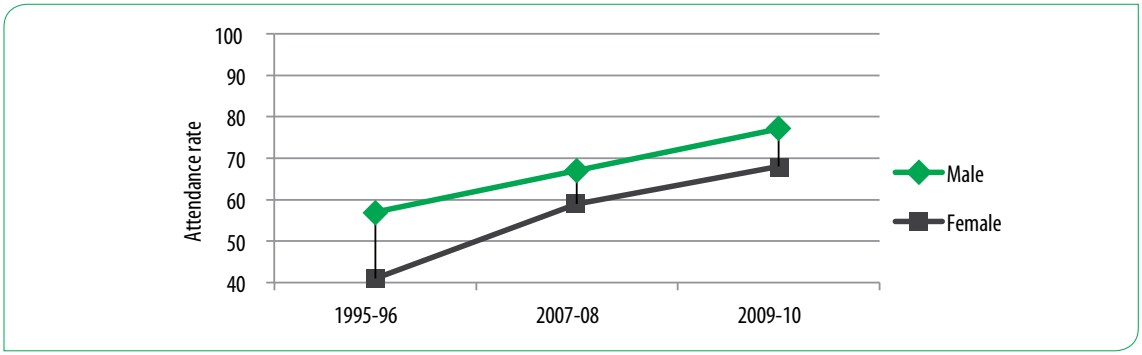
Source: NSSO relevant rounds

Figure 5b: Gender differences in attendance rates of children aged 11–13 (1995–96 to 2009–10)



Source: NSSO relevant rounds

Figure 5c: Gender differences in attendance rates of children aged 14–17 (1995–96 to 2009–10)



Source: NSSO relevant rounds

The data show a significant improvement in gender parity at all levels: primary, upper-primary and secondary, particularly in terms of participation. The dropout rates of both boys and girls have declined over time and the differences in these rates are now lower. A difference in male and female education achievements persists, however.

3.6 Improving the Quality of Education

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The progress towards Goal 6 has been limited, in spite of a range of efforts. It can be said, however, that school infrastructure has improved, even in the educationally disadvantaged states in north India. Where previously there were dilapidated buildings, often with leaking roofs, today many schools have all-weather classrooms, brightly painted and welcoming to both teachers and students. The availability of toilets and drinking water has also improved. Additionally, many schools have ramps to facilitate wheelchair access. Yet, in spite of these improvements, there are still infrastructural gaps, particularly in densely populated states such as Bihar. More teachers have been recruited to keep pace with the increase in enrolments, though shortfalls continue.

In terms of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, a new curriculum framework has been developed. In addition, teachers are given regular in-service training, though feedback suggests that the quality of teaching still leaves much to be desired. Survey data (Annual Status of Education Report 2006 and National Achievement Survey Class V 2012) reveal slow progress in improving levels of learning in terms of literacy and numeracy skills. The poor scores achieved by 15-year-olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy in two Indian states that participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) confirm this. The situation is aggravated by the fact that many students are first generation learners and have little home support. Teaching is very textbook-focused, and the levels do not match the learning capabilities of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Student attendance is also quite irregular (Chaudhary et. al., 2006), which impacts learning negatively, as does poor school functioning and teacher absenteeism. Over the past two decades, many more schools have been set up, and functioning has improved, but teacher attendance is still quite low, and school and classroom observation indicate low levels of teaching activity, even when teachers are present in school (De et. al., 2011).

The next section introduces education projects that were introduced in several states following the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986; seeking to improve access to education and the quality of schooling.

4 The First Decade of EFA

In 1986 India formulated the National Policy on Education (NPE), and a Plan of Action was developed following a revision of the NPE in 1992. In the Indian context, these policy documents were important, as they brought about a new emphasis on elementary education.

As part of the implementation of the NPE, several centrally sponsored schemes were launched, including "Operation Blackboard", revised schemes for non-formal education and new schemes for teacher education. The 42nd constitutional amendment (1976) had earlier moved education from the list of state responsibilities to the concurrent list, and these new centrally sponsored schemes formally signalled a change in the role of the central government in school education, giving the national government "a larger responsibility to reinforce the national and integrative character of education, to maintain quality and standards…(and) to study and monitor the educational requirements of the country" (Aggarwal, J. C., 2008, p. 20).

Several changes in the macro-environment took place around this time, and these had a significant impact on the education system. One such change was in the area of public funding for education. India had developed a large gap between public expenditure and revenue in the early 1990s. The attempt to stabilize the situation led to sharp reductions in public expenditures with consequent expenditure reductions in the social sector. The education department, which already had limited resources, faced an additional resource crunch, and this was aggravated by an increase in salary expenditures following the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission. Therefore, supplementary funding was necessary to implement the NPE. The funding needs were met by international banks and aid agencies, which were keen to increase their aid commitments to primary education following the Jomtien EFA conference in 1990. Thus, a compensatory social safety net programme, funded by loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, was launched. A significant amount of aid resources were directed towards primary education in India for the first time.

Another important change was in terms of local government responsibility for education, which occurred in 1992. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments gave local governments statutory recognition, and school education was included in the list of their responsibilities. This influenced the structure of education management.

The years between 1986 and 1994 saw the emergence of various innovative schemes (Table 4), which started as pilot interventions on a small scale and were later expanded in terms of geographical coverage.

As the 7th Five Year Plan described, there was the realization in the 1980s that the problems in the primary education system were due to more than a resource crunch (GOI, 1986). Hence, while most new projects were financed through donor aid, the interventions were designed based on a more comprehensive strategy than the schemes introduced in earlier years. For example, the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project had two components – a capital building part and a training programme for teachers (Lacey et. al. 1993). Likewise, the Bihar Education Project went beyond the norm, covering all components of basic education and incorporating a simultaneous process of people-mobilization and micro-planning at the district level. The Lok Jumbish initiative also relied

heavily on community mobilization and sought to increase decentralization of management and accountability and to improve relevance. The Uttar Pradesh Basic Education project had similar components and focused on building institutional capacity.

Table 4: Education projects in India (1987–1994)

Year	Programme	Intervention and coverage
1987	Operation Blackboard	This was introduced to improve quality through the provision of more teachers (at least two per school) and better infrastructure (at least two all-weather rooms, essential teaching aids and toilets) in all primary schools.
1987	Restructuring and Reorganization of Teacher Education	District Institutes of Education and Training were set up at district headquarters to provide in-service training for teachers.
1987	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project	Funded by overseas development agencies and initiated in a pilot phase between 1984 and 1986, this project was expanded in 1987 to all districts in Andhra Pradesh. Its aims were to provide primary school with classrooms and school buildings and improve their quality; and to enhance the professional competence of primary school teachers through training programmes.
1987	Shiksha Karmi Project	Introduced in Rajasthan, this project was a collaborative venture between the GoI, the Government of Rajasthan and the Swedish International Development Agency. Aimed to address teacher absenteeism, a high dropout rate and inadequate access to education by training locally recruited para-teachers. Focused on remote, economically-challenged rural areas.
1988	Non-formal education revised	This was an alternative delivery system of education for children who are not able to participate in the formal elementary school. It provided them with opportunities for education at a convenient place, pace and time. It was introduced in 10 educationally disadvantaged states, as well as in urban slums.
1988–89	Mahila Samakhya	Launched in 10 districts in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat, and funded by Dutch Aid. This project focused on the education and empowerment of women from socially and economically marginalized groups in rural areas. Sought to enable the women to make decisions about their own lives and to create educational opportunities that could enhance their children's development.
1991	Bihar Education Project	Launched in 1991 with aid from UNICEF in 20 districts in Bihar. Focused on bringing about quantitative and qualitative improvement in the elementary education system. The project covered all components of basic education and incorporated a simultaneous process of people-mobilization and micro-planning at the district level.
1992	Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project	Introduced in Uttar Pradesh in 10 districts initially and funded by World Bank. Main components were (a) building institutional capacity to plan, manage, and evaluate a basic education development program; (b) improving school quality and completion rates through strengthened community participation, early childhood education, curriculum and textbook revision, in-service training, targeted programs for women and girls, and strengthened school management; and (c) improving access to basic education (up to grade 8) by constructing additional primary and upper-primary schools.
1992	Lok Jumbish	Introduced by the GoI and the Government of Rajasthan with support from the Swedish International Development Agency in three districts in Rajasthan. The project goal was "to develop, demonstrate, catalyse and transform the mainstream education system with the objective of ensuring that every child has access to elementary education" (up to grade 8). It relied heavily on people's mobilization and decentralization of management and accountability.
1993–94	District Primary Education Project	Focused on providing four to five years of good quality primary education to all in specific districts. Implemented initially in 42 districts in seven states, it gradually expanded, in several phases, to cover more districts and became the first project implemented at a national level covering 272 districts in 18 states. This project received aid from multiple sources.

Until the late 1980s, states that had been identified as "educationally backward", (Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) had received assistance under centrally sponsored schemes (GOI, 1998). The new projects marked a change in education planning. These new projects were usually implemented in specific districts, and within districts in specific blocks. Some of these projects were not implemented through the state education departments. Instead, SIS were set up, which used both centrally and state-generated funds for implementation, and worked in parallel to the state education department.

Examination of district-level data found that the inter-district variations were more significant than the inter-state variations. The success of the Total Literacy Campaign, which had used districts as its unit for planning, led to the development of further district-based projects and programmes, including the DPEP.

The GOI wished to adopt different strategies and plans for different types of districts (8th Five Year Plan) but it was limited by a lack of resources. The interest of international donors – led by the EC and the World Bank – in funding district-based primary education projects enabled the GOI to launch DPEP in 1993–94, thus beginning the first education programme to be developed indigenously and funded through multiple sources.

The central and state governments financed DPEP projects in cooperation with donors in a ratio of 85:15, with aid from the World Bank, European Union, DFID, UNICEF and the Netherlands. The programme expanded over the years, in three phases, and in its final phase the programme covered 219 of the 575 districts of India.

DPEP was implemented through the SIS. The focus was on community mobilization and participation, textbook creation, professional development of teachers, improved classroom practices, early childhood education and reform in educational management and planning, in line with the new guidelines (8th Five Year Plan). According to the guidelines, non-formal education was encouraged for the education of vulnerable difficult-to-reach children. A computerized education management information system was developed, with the district as the unit of collection, computerization, analysis and use.

A major difference from earlier schemes was that the targets of DPEP were specified in terms of outcomes rather than inputs. Another major departure was the system of biennial Joint Review Missions, in which nominees from the donors and the government were to meet to monitor the implementation of the programme.

Evaluations of DPEP found that it had a positive impact in districts that started off with low female literacy rates. Also, interventions under the programme appeared to have facilitated access to schooling and greater social equity (Singh and Sreedhar, 2005). A problem identified with the programme was that many education projects in this period (both DPEP and the other smaller projects) were implemented by SIS, while others were the responsibility of the state education departments, leading to major inter-district variations. DPEP districts were seen to have a more favoured status, including in terms of levels of remuneration, which led to resentments building up among employees elsewhere.

From the donors' point of view, the financing of DPEP acquired many of the essentials of later sector wide approaches. However, for the GOI, the structure was somewhat unwieldy, as it involved reporting to, and dialogue with, more than 30 donor agencies and thus became a very time- and people-intensive process.

The emergence of these new education projects in the late 1980s and early 1990s also saw an increasing role for civil society organizations (Nair, 2004). The NPE 1986 and the revised Plan of Action 1992 sought to revise the existing programme of non-formal education for out-of-school children. CSOs were seen as best suited to implement this programme because of their links with the community. Non-formal education centres were expected to be more effective when run by persons or groups focused on meeting the needs of children from marginalized communities. The non-formal education programme was largely non-functional, however.

The late 1980s also saw the establishment of the National Literacy Mission, and the beginning of district-focused adult literacy campaigns. CSOs were an integral part of this important initiative as they were active in mobilizing communities. While there were many problems related to sustaining and developing literacy skills of neo-literates, the initial success of the literacy movement is credited largely to the efforts of the CSOs.

International pressure in the 1990s to eliminate child labour also gave CSOs a more visible role, as again the success of the initiatives depended on building support for them in the local communities.

The passing of the Panchayeti Raj (Rule of Village Committee) Act in 1989 led to a need to empower the local communities to be able to undertake local self-government, and CSOs were expected to play a major role in their capacity building.

In all these cases, visionary bureaucrats are reported to have looked to harness the expertise of prominent CSOs of that period. According to Chandoke, there was a "perceptible shift" (2009, p. 13) from the government to CSOs in terms of service delivery, from the 7th Five Year Plan (1985–90) onwards. This was not only in the education sector, but was a part of the broader pattern of rolling back the role of the government and bringing in non-governmental providers. While CSOs were involved in service delivery, their technical expertise was also being utilized in the management of the larger educational projects. Examples include the Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish programmes in Rajasthan, which were run by registered societies set up by the government. The boards of these societies included members of CSOs. The DPEP initiative, which was spread over many states, similarly, had oversight committees at the national and state levels that included members of CSOs. Several of the CSOs were also involved in developing new methods to mobilize communities, as well as in developing and revising subject contents and curricula and in introducing innovative teaching methods. These will be discussed in greater detail in the context of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The following section discusses the Sarva Shikhsha Abhiyan programme, which incorporated features of the projects discussed above, and was implemented in the whole country. The uniqueness of the programme was not only a consequence of the specific interventions included in it, but also of the systemic changes brought about in education management, planning and finance that facilitated the implementation of the programme. The SSA Framework (MHRD, 2011) also drew in CSOs, as will be discussed later.

5 The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Programme

In 2001–02, the GoI initiated the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. It was implemented as a single programme at the national level, absorbing all the individual projects. The SSA was the single largest holistic programme in the country, addressing all aspects of elementary education and covering over one million elementary schools, Education Guarantee Scheme centres and Alternate and Innovative Education (AIE) centres, and reaching about 200 million children (GoI, 2008). This programme was informed by evaluations of earlier education projects, particularly by the experience of the Joint Review Missions of DPEP. The intention of the programme was to provide a wide but convergent framework for decentralized planning and implementation of all central and state government initiatives in elementary education.

Three major time-bound targets, quite similar to EFA goals 2, 5 and 6, were adopted. These were: (i) to enrol all children aged 6–11 in schools or alternative centres by 2003, and to ensure all children in that age group would complete five years of schooling by 2007, while all children aged 6–14 would complete eight years of schooling by 2010; (ii) to achieve a satisfactory level of education quality with an emphasis on "education for life"; and (iii) to eliminate gender and social gaps in primary education by 2007, in elementary education by 2010, and to achieve universal retention by 2010.

While these objectives were similar to those of earlier projects, the major differences of this programme were that the SSA was to be implemented in all districts of India, and the earlier target of universalising five years of education (primary cycle) was now extended to universalising eight years of education (elementary cycle). Thus, in the districts where DPEP and other projects had been implemented, the SSA represented mainly a scaling-up from schooling up to Class 5 to schooling up to Class 8. In other districts, the SSA represented a very significant new development.

A national SSA "mission" was constituted with a governing council and an executive committee. The prime minister of India headed the council, while the minister of the Ministry of Human Resource Development headed the executive committee. Other members of the mission included the ministers of the MWCD and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as well as state education ministers, representatives of teacher unions and political parties, educationists, scientists and representatives of civil society. Accordingly, political and professional leaders from the highest echelons of society were directly involved in the SSA programme's governance and management (Shekhar, 2010).

The central and state governments intended to jointly fund the programme – initially in the proportions of 75 per cent to 25 per cent. The GoI was not able to mobilize sufficient resources from regular budgetary sources to meet its share, however. Accordingly, in 2004 it requested assistance from the World Bank, DFID and the EC. The terms of financing were different from the earlier aided projects. The SSA became a sector wide approach – the first in the country to pool external funds and GoI resources, while having no parallel financing structures. Procedures were harmonized through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with common formats for all partners (Colclough and De, 2013).

Over the next ten years, the programme was co-funded by the three partners: the central government, the state governments and the donors. The partners agreed on the approach developed in the SSA Framework (MHRD, 2011) and 10th Five Year Plan, and took no part in day-to-day monitoring or implementation of the programme. One of the donors noted that experiences with this type of sector wide approach have been positive and the harmonization among donor partners enabled a reduction in transaction costs (World Bank, 2007).

The programme was initially planned for two phases: the first being from 2003–04 until 2006–07, and the second being from 2007–08 to 2009–10. Following the enactment of the Right to Education Act, the programme was extended for a third phase, from 2009–10 until 2011–12. During this third phase, the objectives and strategies of the SSA were assessed and revised. The following sections examine the developments of the SSA in each of the three phases.

5.1 SSA Phase I (2003–2007)

Decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring were at the core of SSA. At the micro-level, the focus was on communities and the schools serving them, and a pre-programme phase was initiated to mobilize communities and build awareness of the programme. A core planning team was identified through a participatory process involving members of local education committees, community leaders, NGO representatives, school heads, teachers and parents.

In order to implement the SSA programme, new institutions and processes were first put in place in all states. First, as with DPEP, funds were transferred not from the centre to the states, but directly to the SIS, and then to the district and block level offices. These were set up in parallel with the regular administrative structure of the state education system.

The project structure that had been used in DPEP was introduced in all districts. The SSA programme was administered through the SIS at the state level, through District Project Offices at the district level, and through Block Resource Centres (BRC) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRC) at the sub-district levels.

The annual financing needs were determined through the process of decentralized planning. While centrally-specified norms (based on enrolment) were to be used in planning, some flexibility was kept to allow the state, district and local governments to adapt the programme to their particular needs.

Feedback from earlier projects had demonstrated the problems that arose from irregular flow of funds. Therefore, with technical support from external agencies, major changes were planned to ensure a smooth flow of funds. A financial management and procurement system was introduced to streamline and enhance the efficiency and transparency of the system.

To facilitate the implementation of the programme, the school administrative structure was also decentralized.

School-community linkages were set up through the formation of various community-based bodies, including school management committees, village education committees (VECs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The members of these bodies were given the responsibility of monitoring school enrolment and attendance and helping in enrolment drives.

The new process of planning involved the preparation of an Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPB) in a participatory process involving school teachers and education officers as well as the

community-based bodies and local government institutions or Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), thus taking into account local needs and specific contexts. The PRIs were expected to play a key role in micro-planning, especially in the development of Village/Ward Education Plans and School Improvement Plans. They were encouraged to conduct regular household surveys and identify children who were out of school. These findings, when matched with the availability of neighbourhood schools and their facilities, helped with planning at the school level and determined the need for infrastructure, teachers and incentives. Thus, the district annual plans were compiled through a "bottom up" approach – from school to cluster, block and then district level.

To facilitate decentralized planning and monitoring, an easily-accessible decentralized education management information system was necessary. This was attempted through an extension of the school data collection system that had been developed in DPEP districts (District Information System for Education data) to all districts and schools providing elementary education.

Monitoring was another important component established to facilitate programme implementation. While the community-based bodies had the responsibility of school-level monitoring, about 40 resource institutions all over the country were identified to provide technical support to states and districts for appraisal and monitoring. The monitoring and accountability mechanism, Joint Review Missions, used in DPEP, was found quite useful so was introduced into the SSA from January 2005, after the external funders came on board. This JRM process was conducted twice every year, in January and July. The January mission involved visits to specific states and the July mission was primarily a desk review with presentations from different states.

The JRMs provided a forum where achievements could be assessed against targets, where states could share their experiences, and participants could suggest policy changes and interventions. The composition of JRMs in the SSA gave greater voice to the GoI than had been the case in DPEP. Under the SSA, a GoI nominee was now to head each JRM instead of the earlier practice whereby the nominees of agencies and GoI alternated in this role (Ayyar, 2008). A review of the financial management and procurement system was an important part of the JRM. The recommendations that emerged from the review process were incorporated in the planning process and in programme implementation.

The JRM reports provide useful details of the education situation at the times they were undertaken. Taken together, they provide useful insights into what members saw over the years as being valuable within the functioning of the SSA and what they felt could provide useful lessons for SSA.

The SSA framework document, (MHRD, 2001) specified an important role for CSOs in working in partnership with the government. The document was highly appreciative of the work that CSOs had done in the previous decade and gave some examples of such, including pedagogy, mainstreaming out-of-school children, developing effective teacher training programmes, organizing community for capacity development for planning and implementation, expressing gender concerns, and work in the sphere of disability among children, and proposed that these partnerships needed to be nurtured.

The framework document also made what appears to be a revolutionary suggestion: CSOs should be involved in research and evaluation, as well as in the monitoring of SSA activities, since this would lead to greater transparency of programme interventions. Clearly, the government viewed CSOs as having the vision and the competence to play a watchdog role.

During this phase, groups were encouraged to be involved in local level innovations. This included programmes for teacher training, remedial teaching, training of community members and PRIs,

and life-skills based education. For this purpose, each district was initially allocated a maximum of 5 million Indian Rupees (INR) to finance these efforts. This amount was increased over the years.

In 2004–05 there were extensive consultations around the development of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. This consultation process is regarded as one of the best examples of collaboration between the government and the non-governmental sector in India (Banerji, 2011). The National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) set up the National Steering Committee under the chairpersonship of Prof. Yashpal and selected 35 members, including scholars from various disciplines, school principals, teachers, the Central Board of Secondary Education chairman, representatives of CSOs with experience in the education sector, and members of the NCERT faculty. This committee was responsible for preparing the revised NCF document and had access to the reports prepared by 21 national focus groups. Each of these focus groups had several consultations in which they worked with other scholars and classroom practitioners in different parts of the country.

5.2 SSA Phase II (2007–2010)

A mid-term assessment of SSA was conducted in 2005–06, which showed that several of the targets had been achieved, particularly as regards the access and equity targets at the primary level. Significant additional progress was needed, however, before the goals set in the SSA framework could be said to have been reached.

The number of out-of-school children had declined, but retention until grade 8 remained a problem (GoI, 2008). Furthermore, learning achievement surveys conducted by the NCERT highlighted that those who were in school had low levels of learning. In response to the recommendations of the assessment report, the SSA priorities were "reoriented to meet the challenges of equity, retention, and high-quality education" (GoI, 2008).

From this time, the SSA programme had a slightly altered focus. In addition, the duration of the programme was extended until 2011–12 (the end of the 11th Five Year Plan period). To ensure the sustainability of the programme, the good practices that evolved under SSA Phase I were required to be integrated into the mainstream education system. With the changes in focus and priorities, the definitions of eligible activities and financial norms were also modified. Thus, this second phase of SSA was far from simply a continuation of earlier practice.

A very important reason for the programme's successes in the first phase was the availability of the necessary domestic resources. This was largely a result of the 2 per cent education tax levied as an addition to all central taxes from 2004 onwards. The funds collected through this tax were reserved for education. The money was kept in a fund titled the "Prathmik Shiksha Kosh", which was maintained by the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy within the MHRD. The funds could be rolled over from one year to the next and were used exclusively for elementary education, for both the SSA programme and Nutritional Support to Primary Education (the school midday meal scheme).

The state governments were able to mobilize higher amounts than anticipated to meet their 25 per cent share of the SSA costs. The total programme expenditures over the period 2003–04 to 2006–07 amounted to approximately USD 7.8 billion – more than double the expenditure of USD 3.5 billion that had been planned. So the disbursed external aid (around USD 1 billion) was only 13 per cent of the total expenditures rather than the 30 per cent that had been planned.

It was then mutually agreed that the donor partners would contribute around USD 1 billion in the second phase, with no change in conditions. DFID provided a separate grant of USD 10 million to elementary education under its "Technical Cooperation Fund".

A change to the programme in Phase II was a revision of the central and state shares in funding the SSA. The share provided by the states increased gradually in the 11th Five Year Plan period, from 25 per cent up to 35 per cent for the first two years of the 11th Plan, then up to 40 per cent in the third year, 45 per cent in the fourth year and 50 per cent thereafter. There was a special dispensation for the first two years (2005–06 and 2006–07), whereby each of the less-developed north-eastern states (Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya) were required to contribute only 10 per cent of the approved outlay.

In its first phase, SSA had largely focused on the planning, implementation and monitoring of access to schooling and inputs into the elementary education system. During the second phase, greater emphasis was put on the importance of outcome indicators, including retention and dropout rates and student achievement levels. Related to this was a push towards ensuring basic learning conditions met minimum standards and children acquired the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in early primary grades. There was also a greater focus on monitoring key process indicators such as teacher competence, classroom processes and student attendance. Efforts were also made to address all teacher-related problems arising from vacancies, absenteeism, non-teaching assignments, and a lack of training and accountability mechanisms.

An important new focus was using the NCF 2005 and the syllabi prepared by the NCERT to guide the revision of syllabi, curriculum and pedagogy at the state level and to carry out the consequent textbook revisions.

The mid-term assessment had also identified the need to strengthen the decentralization process. In Phase II, therefore, priority was given to improving the role of PRIs and effectiveness of community organizations.

The two dimensions prioritized in this second phase were quality and equity. It had been seen that with improvement in access to schooling, those who remained out of school were usually clustered in specific geographical areas and among specific social groups. Equity issues became a central theme in the discussion and vision for quality improvement. Special focus was given to disadvantaged groups and educationally backward areas within districts. This was translated into higher resource allocation for disadvantaged clusters and into the preparation and implementation of context-specific strategies. Steps towards developing an urban strategy were also planned. Partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations within the SSA framework to support the objectives of quality with equity were encouraged (National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2008).

During the SSA period there was a broadening of the type of organizations working in education. A number of corporations (including information technology companies and banks) had set up organisations to work in the development sector, such as the Azim Premji Foundation and the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India's Foundation for Inclusive Growth (IFIG). Large autonomous organizations also began working in the education sector, including the Pratham Foundation and the Naandi Foundation. Unlike the smaller, local non-profit groups, these foundations tended to be able to access funding to operate on a fairly large scale. The State governments signed MOUs with both the larger foundations and the smaller groups. Thus, the sheer number of organizations working in collaboration with governments at different levels increased considerably, in response to the encouragement provided in the SSA framework (MHRD, 2011). The

type of partnerships that state governments chose to enter into in terms of the area of intervention and the type of organization varied greatly. We will be discussing this in the next section in the context of the two states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

5.3 SSA After the Right to Education Act

In August 2009, following significant pressure from CSOs and other stakeholders, the government passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. The Act provides a legal framework for upholding the right of all children aged 6–14 to an education of reasonable quality. This Act cast an obligation on the government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6–14 age group (MHRD, 2011).

In this context, the MHRD established a committee to suggest necessary follow-up action in the SSA programme in light of the Right to Education Act. It held consultations with state secretaries of education, educationists, representatives of teachers' unions, CSOs and organizations working with children with special needs (CWSN). As a result, the SSA framework was broadened to implement the new Act. At this time, the SSA management structure was integrated with the state education structure.

Funds were required to finance the costs associated with the SSA's additional, expanded activities. The World Bank extended their agreement and provided additional funding in the amount of USD 750 million, while DFID committed to spending an additional USD 220 million on SSA activities. Thus, the donor partners gave almost USD 1 billion in addition to previous funds. The remaining costs were the responsibility of the central and state governments.

The revised SSA Framework (MHRD, 2011) saw CSOs as playing a particularly important role in the changed context in which education was recognized as a justiciable right for the child. In keeping with the Bordia Committee's observations, which encouraged both the NCPCR and the State Commissions for the Protection of Child Rights to work together with CSOs to undertake social audits and hold public hearings in their respective states, the SSA Framework noted that CSOs needed to be viewed as partners in the implementation of the Right to Education Act. The work of CSOs was henceforth expected to include mobilization and awareness-building regarding the Act, social mapping, running special training centres (converted from AIE centres), developing curricula, pedagogy, monitoring and continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

The Right to Education Forum, an independent group with core funding from four CSOs (Action Aid, Care India, Oxfam and Save the Children) and a combined strength of some 10,000 CSOs from all over India, played a critical role in putting pressure on the government to implement the Right to Education Act in its proper spirit and to provide equitable and good-quality education to all children. Social audits, innovative mechanisms that involve the community in monitoring the implementation of the Right to Education Act, were also conducted by CSOs. Some highly effective social audits of schools were carried out by CSOs in partnership with the NCPCR under the MWCD.

5.4 Achievements and Limitations

The SSA programme achieved a great deal, as observed in the earlier discussions of India's progress towards EFA goals 2 and 5. In such a large and populous country, the rapidity of the progress was remarkable.

Access:

Access was improved by building new schools and classrooms and, where necessary, by setting up EGS and AIE centres as temporary arrangements (Second JRM, Sec 2.3). EGS centres were opened in un-served communities that had at least 25 out-of-school children aged 6–14 (15 children in the case of desert and hilly areas), while AIE centres were established for "hard-to-reach" children who could not be directly enrolled in a school or EGS, such as children of seasonal migrants and deprived children in urban locales. These centres played an important role in the initial years of the SSA by providing schooling in the smaller and more remote communities and targeting disadvantaged groups. The EGS and AIE centres have since been converted into formal primary schools.

The mid-term assessment of the SSA indicated access problems at the upper-primary level. Consequently, the following years saw a rapid increase in the number of upper-primary schools through the setting up of more schools or expanding primary schools to encompass class 8.

Following the Right to Education Act, the scope for providing residential schools was expanded. Improved residential facilities for upper-primary girls were provided under the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme, which targeted girls from marginalized social groups who had dropped out of school. Initially, the KGBV was a separate scheme, but it was later merged with SSA. Similarly, residential facilities were provided for tribal children under the Ashram School Scheme. These facilities increased access to education for a significant proportion of vulnerable children.

While there was a large increase in the number of both primary and upper-primary schools (21 per cent and 40 per cent) in the early years of the SSA programme, in the later years the growth in primary schools was lower (6.6 per cent) while that for upper-primary schools remained high (27 per cent). The enrolment in primary and upper-primary classes show a similar trend – high for both in the early years, but only a small increase in primary enrolment in the later years (Table 5).

Table 5: Progress in education in India (2000–01, 2005–06 and 2009–10)

Number of schools	2000–01	2005–06	% increase	2009–10	% increase
Primary schools (in thousands)	638	772	21.0%	823	6.6%
Upper-primary schools (in thousands)	206	288	39.8%	367	27.4%
Elementary schools (in thousands)	844	1,060	25.6%	1190	12.2%
Enrolment					
Primary (in millions of students)	113.8	132.1	16.1%	135.6	2.6%
Upper-primary(in millions)	42.8	52.2	22.0%	59.4	13.8%
Elementary (in millions)	156.6	184.3	17.7%	195	5.8%

Source: Selected Education Statistics, 2000–01and 2005–06, Statistics of School Education, 2009–10

The improvement in access is reflected in the sharp decline in the number of out-of-school children in the 6–14 age group; falling from 32 million in 2002 to only 3 million in 2010–11 (Table 6). Other estimates of numbers of out-of-school children, calculated from other data sources, show different figures, but all show the trend of a rapid decline in the number of out-of-school children over this period.

Table 6: Number of out-of-school children (2002–03 to 2010–11)

Year	No. of out-of-school children
2002–03	32.0 million
2005–06	10.4 million
2008–09	2.8 million
2010–11	2.7 million

Source: JRM, relevant years

Equity

The SSA programme's achievements in terms of bridging social and gender gaps, particularly as regards enrolment rates, were remarkable. The design of SSA with its built-in flexibility allowed implementation of targeted schemes within its broad framework. The SSA programme incorporated several schemes targeted at disadvantaged groups (girls, SC, ST, Muslims, the urban poor, and CWSN) and helped to positively impact their participation. To this end, funds were directed towards educationally "backward" areas – the "Special Focus Districts" and "Educationally Backward Blocks".

The schooling of children from disadvantaged social groups was also supported through various other measures, including the provision of free textbooks to all enrolled children and the provision by some state governments of scholarships and uniforms. With the implementation of the Right to Education Act, school supplies became entitlements for children. In tribal areas, the population norms for setting up schools or EGS centres and residential schooling were relaxed, which had a positive impact on the schooling of tribal children. Attempts were also made to recruit teachers from the same tribal community as the pupils. In areas of Muslim concentration, access to school for these communities was improved by introducing general subjects into *madrasas,* in addition to religious education, and supporting the *madrasas* under the SSA. Urdu was introduced as either the medium of instruction or as a language taught in many government schools in these areas.

Vulnerable children – migrant children, child workers and street children – received various kinds of innovative schooling, with the objective of eventually absorbing them into formal schools. Bridge courses, seasonal hostels and other tailored opportunities were introduced. For CWSN, a three-pronged approach was adopted. The primary approach included trying to integrate them into neighbourhood schools by recruiting special teachers, sensitizing and training regular teachers, and providing schools with the facilities required by CWSN. For the CWSN who could not attend normal schools, special education was provided at AIE centres. Other children were given education support by special teachers through home visits.

Girls from disadvantaged social groups benefited from the measures implemented to increase access. Additionally, the school participation of girls in general was facilitated by appointing more female teachers and constructing separate girls' toilets. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme was particularly important.

One of the major initiatives with positive effects on equity was the Midday Meal Scheme. This was a centrally sponsored scheme under which all students studying in the elementary classes of government or aided schools were provided with a hot meal each day they attended school. Although this scheme was not a part of the SSA, it was implemented within its framework.

Over time, the focus of the SSA shifted from an input-based approach to a process-based approach. The emphasis on eliminating discrimination in the classroom and exclusion from school brought benefits. As Table 7 shows, much was achieved in terms of enrolment of children from disadvantaged communities, both at the primary and upper-primary levels. The dropout rates also declined significantly, and the differences between the different social groups and between boys and girls narrowed. High dropout rates remain a source of major concern, however, indicating that children from vulnerable groups require continued targeted support.

Table 7: Decreasing social and gender gaps (2000–2010)

Indicators	Enrolment in primary (Classes 1–5)		Enrolment in upper-primary (Classes 6–8)	
	2000–01	2009–10	2000–01	2009–10
Proportion of girls	45.1	50.0	42.9	48.2
Proportion of SC students	18.6	19.5	15.7	18.4
Proportion of ST students	9.7	11.2	7.2	8.6

Indicators	Dropout rates – Classes 1 to 5		Dropout rates – Classes 1 to 8	
	2000–01	2009–10	2000–01	2009–10
Boys	39.7	30.3	50.3	40.6
Girls	41.9	27.3	57.7	44.4
All students	40.7	28.9	53.7	42.4
SC students	45.2	29.3	60.7	51.3
ST students	52.3	34.5	68.7	57.8

Source: Selected education statistics, relevant years

Quality

The mid-term assessment of the SSA highlighted relatively poor progress in terms of improvements in the quality of education. The national achievement surveys had gathered information about levels of learning achievements and the findings of these surveys were that learning levels were low. As Table 8 shows, there was an improvement of only 2 percentage points in learning achievements of Class 5 children over the six-year period between 2002 and 2008. The low learning achievements were only one indicator of school quality, however. Other poor outcomes were seen in terms of high dropout rates and low retention rates, as reported in the JRM reports.

Table 8: Learning Achievements of Class 5 Children, 2002 and 2008

Average score in subjects	Round 1 (2002)	Round 2 (2008)
Language	58.9%	60.3%
Maths	46.5%	48.5%
Environmental Studies	50.3%	52.2%

Source: NCERT, 2008

Increased inputs

Under the SSA, textbooks became universally available in 2008, and the timeliness of textbook distribution improved, though some irregularities remained. In addition, separate grants were made available for every school for purchasing teaching-learning materials. Each new primary school was given a grant of 20,000 INR and each new upper-primary school was given a grant 50,000 INR. Materials purchased with the grants included science kits, mathematics kits, maps, charts on different subjects, globes, atlases, dictionaries, storybooks, library books, and sports equipment.

Decline in pupil-teacher ratios

Teacher shortages had been a major problem since the early 1990s with new schools being built and a rapid increase in school enrolment. More teachers were recruited during the SSA, as reflected in the decrease in the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) from 46 in primary school and 35 in upper-primary school in 2004–05 down to 32 and 29 in 2010–11 (Table 9). But the decrease was not uniform and PTRs remained very high in several states, such as Bihar and West Bengal.

Table 9: Pupil-teacher ratios (2000–01 and 2010–11)

School level	2000–2001	2010–11
Primary PTR	43	32
Upper-primary PTR	38	29

Source: Selected education statistics, relevant years

The 1990s saw a new trend, following the Shiksha Karmi project's approach of recruiting para-teachers – individuals without teacher education qualifications, recruited locally on short-term contracts, at lower salaries than regular teachers (Pandey, 2006). Recruitment of contract teachers was initially adopted as a transitional procedure, but during the SSA this policy came to be adopted long-term in many states. It was found that increased recruitment of teachers lowered PTRs, and the lowered requirement for educational qualifications led to the recruitment of more female teachers, with positive effects for the enrolment and retention of girls. The impact of para-teachers on school quality was questioned, however. It was argued by some that the positive impacts may be offset by the inadequate training of such teachers (SSA Edcil, 2009). With the implementation of the Right to Education Act, a Teacher Eligibility Test was introduced as a necessary process for teacher recruitment, but its impact on teaching quality is yet to be assessed.

Changes in curricula, planning, training and monitoring

The renewed focus on the quality of education in the second phase of the SSA led to the development, by the NCERT, of the National Curriculum Framework in 2005, which emphasized the need to provide useful and relevant education. States revised and redesigned their textbooks, and several states, including Kerala, Orissa and Chhattisgarh, also developed state-specific curriculum content (MHRD, 2011). Some specific innovations in improving learning levels included the 3R's Guarantee programme (EQUIP) in Maharashtra, the GAP in Gujarat, the Integrated Learning Improvement Programme in West Bengal, the Learning Achievement Tracking System in Orissa, the School Grading system in Uttaranchal, the Summer Camp programme in Bihar and the Children's Language Improvement Programme in Andhra Pradesh.

Planning for quality was emphasized, and states were encouraged to prepare comprehensive three-year Quality Plans as part of their annual work plans and budgets. The Learning Enhancement Programme was allocated 2 per cent of total district outlay of the SSA, with the aim of enhancing learning levels in language, mathematics and science. Activities included establishing baseline learning levels, developing graded reading materials, training teachers on Learning Enhancement Programme strategies, providing a mathematics laboratory in each school, providing remedial after-school teaching in standards 1–2 and ensuring quarterly tracking of learning levels in standards 1–2 in mathematics and reading. Several state-specific initiatives such as activity-based learning (ABL) in Tamil Nadu, Nali-Kali in Karnataka and Nai Disha in Uttar Pradesh were promoted as good practices and were adapted and introduced in other areas. The Technical Cooperation Fund was set up in 2008 under DFID to develop the capacity of members of the NCERT and the State Council of Education, Research and Training (SCERT) to monitor learning achievements and evaluate quality interventions.

Regular in-service teacher training became a part of the SSA. For decentralized teacher training, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) were established in the 1990s. With the setting up of BRCs and CRCs, regular in-service training to primary school teachers was taken further. As of 2010, India had around 6,600 BRCs and 70,805 CRCs (11th JRM, 2010). The BRCs were to conduct trainings in cascade mode and also keep track of the total number of days of training received.

The cluster resource persons were supposed to do follow-up of the trainings to ensure that they were implemented. However, criticisms were made of the cascade mode of training and the lack of expertise of the trainers (Approaches to School Support and Improvement, Draft Report, 2011). While significant emphasis has been on regular in-service training since 2008, independent evaluations suggest that this training has had limited impact on teaching practices, and the main teaching-learning methods have remained rote learning and copying from the board or the textbook.

Institutional changes

Systemic changes in finance, administration and management in schooling took place over the SSA decade, but more quickly in some states than in others.

The active involvement of community-based bodies such as PTAs, VECs, school development management committees and urban local bodies was expected to make teachers more accountable and to enable the whole schooling process to function more effectively. The bodies (formed at the school or village level) varied from state to state in terms of their responsibilities, size and composition, but in most cases there was an attempt to ensure that parents, including parents from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, were represented and that members of bodies were elected rather than nominated. The process of establishing and developing these bodies was not smooth, however. These bodies were introduced in the context of existing hierarchies of power in village communities, and existing relationships between the communities and local leaders with the head teachers of the schools.

The effectiveness of these committees depended not only on the context in which they were introduced, but also on the capacity of the members to undertake their responsibilities. The bodies were not always effective, but positive outcomes were seen in some areas. School development expenditures, particularly those for civil works, were under the responsibility of these bodies, and the work of these bodies led to better infrastructure in many schools. Also, where the involvement of parents was possible in these community bodies, the schools and the communities were brought closer together in meeting educational needs.

As various studies have indicated, both student and teacher absenteeism remained critical problems in many states. Other gaps in school functioning and school quality have also been identified, indicating that the SSA had limitations.

After the enactment of the Right to Education Act, all states were asked to replace their existing governance systems with a SMC, with a standard membership. Schools were now considered to be the decision-making unit rather than the national or local government. The SMCs were expected to formulate annual school development plans and undertake the implementation of local schemes. Panchayati Raj Institutions and local bodies were also assigned specific roles, as a part of the SMC or VMC and independently. Their responsibility was primarily in community mobilization and conducting household surveys to find excluded children (such as girls and children in marginalized communities) and bring them into school. These institutions were also permitted to issue guidelines and give directions to the SMC to facilitate implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Increase in education expenditure

During the SSA decade the central and state expenditures on education increased sharply. Between 2003–04 and 2010–11, total expenditure on elementary education increased at a compound annual rate of 17.6 per cent and in real terms the expenditure increased at a rate of 10.5 per cent per annum.

Table 10: Public expenditure on elementary education, in INR millions (2003–2011)

Year	State	Centre	Total (current price)	Total (constant price)
2003–4	311,620	52,030	363,650	383,190
2005–6	384,310	117,510	501,820	484,380
2008–9	595,190	194,820	790,010	636,080
2009–10 (RE)	776,060	208,930	984,990	754,780
2010–11 (BE)	855,240	250,660	1,105,910	771,210
Growth rate	16.5%	21.7%	17.65%	10.5%

Source: MHRD, Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure

Changes in financial allocation and utilization processes made the system more efficient. Allocations were made on the basis of annual plans drawn up by the states. Analysis of the allocations and expenditure between 2001–02 and 2006–07 by Mukherjee et al. (2008) indicate that planned expenditure was initially a small proportion of the amount actually allocated and approved by the relevant governments. The expenditure to approval ratio increased steadily over the years, however, increasing from 15 per cent in 2001–02 to around 70 per cent in 2006–07. The contributions of the state governments also increased and reached the requisite 25 per cent of total SSA funding by 2005. In later years, the ratio of actual to planned expenditure fluctuated between 65 per cent and 79 per cent, but utilization as a proportion of funds released was higher. Both central and state government expenditures increased in the later years of the SSA programme, and state expenditure was consistently over 30 per cent of the total.

The composition of expenditure changed with the change in SSA priorities (Table 11). In the first phase of SSA, the emphasis was on closing the infrastructure and human resource gaps; therefore, allocations for civil works and teacher provisioning were a higher share of programme expenditures than first estimated at appraisal. With the enactment of the Right to Education Act, allocations for teacher salaries were increased considerably, reflecting the higher salaries and recruitment drives, while civil works had a lower share. It should be noted, however, that while the amounts spent on quality-improvement initiatives increased in absolute terms, the proportion spent on these initiatives did not change significantly.

Table 11: Percentage distribution of SSA expenditure (2003–2010)

Components	Distribution of expenditure		
	2003–04	2006–07	2009–10
Civil works	36%	46%	24%
Teachers' salaries	16%	21%	46%
EGS/AIE	10%	7%	4%
Teacher training	5%	3%	2%
Textbooks	6%	3%	7%
BRC/CRC	3%	3%	3%
TLE	4%	1%	1%
Management costs	3%	4%	3%
Innovative activities	3%	2%	2%
Others	14%	10%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: * out-of-school children and remedial teaching

Source: Calculated from SSA statements on state-wise and component-wise allocation and expenditure

The uniqueness of the SSA framework was its ability to absorb all existing investments and interventions in the elementary education sector that were merged into the programme over time. The various context-specific or location-specific schemes, which were initiated in states to address specific weaknesses, were implemented and monitored within the same framework. While the ownership of the programme was in the hands of the central and state governments, the planning and implementation processes were decentralized to school and community levels. CSOs and other organizations played an important role in supporting the government system in the decentralized implementation process.

6 Partnerships in the Implementation of the SSA

As noted earlier, an important aspect of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme was the participation of multiple actors. Prominent among them were the CSOs. In this section we focus on how the education situation was impacted during the SSA period by government partnerships with CSOs and other organizations on a range of activities.

In terms of service provision, initially the role of CSOs was to provide education to specific groups in AIE centres and through bridge courses and special camps. Partnerships between the state governments and CSOs were invaluable in reaching the "hard-to-reach" and "excluded" categories of children, including migrant children, child labourers, dropouts, girls from disadvantaged groups and children living in areas of civil strife.

CSOs were involved in providing special education to CWSN outside the school environment, as well as training teachers and supporting special educators to work with CWSN in the regular schools. They also worked with governments to provide assistive devices.

These organisations also played a critical role in the Midday Meal Scheme. Small CSOs, women's groups and self-help groups were involved in the preparation and distribution of hot midday meals in individual schools in rural areas, while large CSOs, such as the Naandi Foundation and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, used large automated kitchens to provide midday meals to urban schools in several states across the country.

An important barrier to the process of decentralization was the lack of required capacity to carry out the new roles and responsibilities envisaged at various levels, particularly among education administrators and resource persons at the district, block and cluster levels. The CSOs played an important role in developing training modules and imparting trainings at various levels. CSO involvement was also significant in community mobilization and in building the capacity of members of PRIs and community-level education committees.

CSOs also played an important role in state-level monitoring. Some of the CSOs conducted social audits and their reports were useful in identifying the gaps in performance of the government schools.

The structure of the SSA allowed for CSOs to make a contribution not only in terms of partnerships with the state governments and independent initiatives, but also in terms of research and evaluation. The work of CSOs in this area was considered to be crucial for progress within the SSA framework. Research studies by CSOs provided useful information on learning outcomes, and on parameters such as levels of teaching activity and the functioning of SMCs. Government institutions such as the NCERT, the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) and the Technical Support Group of Educational Consultants India Limited, commissioned CSOs to carry out various research studies and the findings of these and other independent studies by CSOs were used to inform policy. Studies by CSOs were also shared at the biannual JRMs and influenced decision-making. At the Twelfth JRM, for example, the Annual Status of Education

Report (ASER) and the Student Learning Study of Education Initiatives report were found useful for their insights on learning achievements. Similarly, the Fifteenth JRM noted the importance of ASER's findings on the role of providing independent monitoring of the system and the issues the report raised about its methodology. The Sixteenth JRM cited the findings of the PROBE Revisited study on levels of teaching activity in schools and the lack of effective functioning of SMCs in monitoring this.

Independent efforts by CSOs in the areas of developing curricula for bridge courses for out-of-school children, and for training teachers were also valuable, with the suggestion that their experiences be used to inform future action. For example, the Fourteenth JRM suggested that the MHRD develop a concept note on special training that would suggest strategies to address the learning needs of out-of-school children, and that this should be informed by an analysis of various approaches by CSOs that have demonstrated results, such as the 11-month bridge course implemented by CARE India for their Udaan project. The JRM also asked the MHRD to prepare a guide based on teacher training courses by NGOs such as CARE India, Digantar and Bodh, as well as specific courses run by universities, all known for their "comprehensive and integral approach to quality and equity" (11th JRM).

6.1 Role of CSOs in SSA Implementation in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh

The roles played by the CSOs in the implementation of the SSA were not the same in each state. The flexibility of the SSA framework allowed the states to decide who they wished to collaborate with and for what purposes. The differences between the states reflect political compulsions as well as the historical evolution of education in each state prior to the SSA. This section examines the contributions of CSOs in the two states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh were selected for this case study for two main reasons. First, when education was included in the concurrent list and the central government began playing a greater role in elementary education, these two large states were on the list of educationally "backward" states. Female literacy was as low as 11 per cent in Rajasthan and 19 per cent in Madhya Pradesh in 1981. Both states have made remarkable progress in the last 30 years (see the appendix for a socioeconomic background of these states). Given their "backward" status, these states received a larger share of central assistance than other states, through centrally sponsored schemes.

Second, both states have a rich history of civil society working in education. As early as 1972, the Madhya Pradesh government allowed the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme, conducted by two volunteer organizations, the Friends Rural Society and the Kishore Bharati, onto the premises of government middle-schools to implement their innovative science training programme. CSOs in Rajasthan have also worked in the education sector for many decades, but in this state the CSOs, such as the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) and Digantar, which implemented micro initiatives in education in the 1970s and 1980s, initially worked largely outside the formal education system. Later, however, the SWRC's work was up-scaled and several other CSOs were drawn into educational reform programmes implemented by the central and Rajasthan governments.

Both state governments have long been open to collaboration with CSOs. While initially not many CSOs in Rajasthan worked with the government on education projects, there was significant collaboration between CSOs and the state government on other development projects. For

example, the Rajasthan state government launched the Women's Development Programme in 1984, whose aim was to form women's groups to work for the empowerment of women. The programme enabled the evolution of women's collectives under the leadership of the *sathin*. (grassroots workers) (India Together, 2002).

The next two sections examine the education initiatives implemented in these states prior to and during the SSA period, and the critical role that CSOs played. Beginning with Rajasthan, we will first look at the education initiatives pre-SSA, to get an idea of the education context prior to the programme's implementation. We will then look at government-CSO partnerships in the education sector during the SSA period. The education initiatives are not evaluated here, though references to existing evaluations are made where relevant. Instead, we look at the important features of the partnerships and the challenges for the CSOs involved, and we then suggest recommendations for how future partnerships could be more effective.

6.2 Partnerships in Rajasthan during the SSA Period

Rajasthan is one of the pioneering states to have established partnerships with civil society organizations. The genesis of these partnerships and their evolution during the SSA period derived from a number of factors including: the extremely poor development indicators in the state, the presence of CSOs doing excellent work in the development sector, and the government's willingness to collaborate with these organizations.

Pre-SSA

CSO-government partnerships began in Rajasthan's education sector in 1987. Table 12 presents the major government initiatives in Rajasthan in the pre-SSA period. This section does not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these projects, but describes the projects and focuses on the nature of the collaborations between the CSOs and the state government. Interviews with the organizations found that the collaborations were not limited to these government initiatives. They also initiated several other interventions to improve the quality of education for children from deprived communities.

Table 12: Major initiatives involving government collaboration with CSOs in Rajasthan – pre-SSA

	Rajasthan	Funding	CSO/NGO/Foundation
1987	Shiksha Karmi	SIDA and the Government of Rajasthan	28 CSOs – prominent were Sandhan and the SWRC
1992	Lok Jumbish	SIDA, GoI and the Government of Rajasthan	52 CSOs – Ajmer Adult Education Association, Bhartiya Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Rajasthan Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad, the SWRC, Urmul Trust, Sewa Mandir, Astha, Sandhan, Digantar.
1998	Janshala	GOI and 5 UN agencies	Bodh, Digantar
1999	DPEP	IDA funding	Digantar, Bodh (and others)

The Shiksha Karmi project was launched in 1987 as part of the state's strategy for achieving universal primary education. It was based on a successful micro-initiative by the SWRC in Tilonia where the teachers in three experimental primary schools were recruited locally and provided with ongoing training. The curriculum was related directly to the local context and needs.

The core of the initiative was the idea of tackling teacher absenteeism in remote areas through recruiting teachers locally. These teachers, referred to as "*shiksha karmis*", were accountable to the local community. In this partnership, the local NGOs shared with the state government the responsibility of recruiting and monitoring the *shiksha karmis*. In addition, the project sought to bring about a qualitative change in primary education in remote villages by "adapting the form and content of education to local needs and conditions" (GOI and UNDP, 2002). Key features of the project included the *shiksha karmis* being given intensive training through an induction programme as well as periodic refresher courses (Rajagopal, 2000). Here, too, both the government and the CSOs played important roles. The project was jointly funded by the Government of Rajasthan and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The Shiksha Karmi project had several phases, with SIDA contributing 90 per cent of the budget in the first phase and 50 per cent in the remaining phases. By 1998–99, the Shiksha Karmi project was functional in 2,715 villages in 146 of 237 blocks in all 32 districts of Rajasthan.

The Lok Jumbish project, launched in 1992, aimed to achieve universal primary education through mobilization of the community and facilitation of their participation in the education process (GoI and UNDP, 2002). The project placed special emphasis on the education of girls and disadvantaged children and viewed education as a tool for empowerment. It sought to ensure that all children completed primary schooling, and that this education was of good quality – meaning that it would involve active learning and be child-centred – ensuring significant learning achievements for children. It was funded by SIDA, the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan, in the ratio of 3:2:1. Initially it began in five blocks with partnerships with five CSOs and by 1998 it had expanded to 75 blocks in 13 districts with 52 CSOs involved.

Lok Jumbish drew upon the previous work done by both the government and CSOs in the fields of primary education and women's development, particularly the work SWRC in Tilonia, Urmul Trust in Bikaner, and Sewa Mandir and Astha in Udaipur (Ramachandran, 2003). One of the most important Lok Jumbish innovations was the village mapping exercise, which went beyond identifying the location of schools and roads to establishing the social and cultural problems faced by local communities in accessing schools. A second important innovation was the micro-planning process, while involved family and child monitoring by teachers and the VEC. The VEC used the Village Education Register to ensure regular school attendance by children who were considered in danger of dropping out. The micro-planning process was initiated after the necessary education infrastructure was provided to the village. The project also sought to improve the quality of education through the introduction of competency-based education or the Minimum Levels of Learning scheme. In addition, it introduced a number of initiatives in response to the specific needs of unreached children, including the provision of non-formal education initiatives, such as a flexible education programme for tribal children and short-term residential camps for adolescent girls.

Unfortunately, donor funding for this project ended abruptly in 1999 when the Swedish government withdrew support because of the decision by the GoI to begin a nuclear programme. DFID later provided funding, but the there was a time lag and this period of uncertainty affected the CSOs involved and the work they could do. By the third and final phase of the project it had stopped functioning effectively (Ramachandran, 2003).

Janshala was a collaborative effort between Government of India and five United Nations agencies. It provided programme support to the states towards the achievement of universal elementary education. At the state level, the programme was implemented through the existing structures of educational administration. The programme involved establishing a number of alternative schools in small and remote communities and in urban slums, with community participation. Other major

areas of intervention were in teacher training, multi-grade teaching, education of children with special needs, setting up of block and cluster resource centres and strengthening capacities at the state, district and block levels.

DPEP, a major centrally sponsored scheme of educational reform, was introduced in phases across India and reached Rajasthan during the programme's third phase, in 1999. As in other states, the goal of the programme was to achieve universal primary education. Specifically, it aimed to reduce overall dropout rates and raise achievement levels, and to bring about greater gender and social equity in enrolment, retention and achievement.

These initiatives in Rajasthan were implemented with the contribution of several CSOs, including Sandhan, Digantar and Bodh, three of the CSOs interviewed during this case study. These CSOs established a working relationship with the GoR that has gone beyond the initial projects they were involved in. Although these three CSOs have followed different pathways, their knowledge and experience in working in the field have contributed significantly to education in the state. Discussions with these CSOs were illuminating and gave an insight to the complexities of the programmes they implement. The organizations went through a process of experimentation, learning and capacity building in the 1990s, and emerged as valuable resource organizations to support new education initiatives.

Sandhan's origins date to 1983. Driven by a vision of equity and justice, the CSO started working with children from marginalized social groups and assisting them to enter into mainstream education. In the Shiksa Karmi project, Sandhan was responsible for training the local teachers (*shiksha karmis*). The CSO served as a resource agency for the Lok Jumbish programme and supported the state government in designing its multi-pronged approach of school mapping, micro planning and provision of alternative schools. Sandhan was also involved in training 7,500 non-formal education teachers and 4,700 school teachers. As part of the Lok Jumbish forums, Sandhan supported the mid-term correction of the programme, and helped in conducting 280 evaluation workshops. During the 1990s, members of Sandhan prepared around 110 research and discussion papers to advise the management of Lok Jumbish.

Teacher and students in KGBV. © Sandhan.

Digantar began working in the education sector in 1978 when it established a small school in Jaipur. Over the next decade, the members of the organization developed a thorough understanding of

elementary education in general and classroom practices in particular. The CSO focused primarily on providing good-quality education for children from deprived communities. Alternative education was always at the core of Digantar's work and in 1986 they decided to set up schools in rural areas and since then have been running their own schools. Their philosophy of education is radically different from that of the formal public education system. They seek that children learn with understanding and gain skills in self-learning and cooperation with fellow students. Furthermore, they give children freedom in terms of pace of learning, based on the understanding that that children learn at different speeds and in different ways. Hence, their schools are organized in learning-groups that are multi-level and multi-age in composition (Digantar, 2008). In the 1990s, Digantar contributed to several government-managed projects, including Lok Jumbish, Janshala and DPEP. It was also involved in providing training and developing curriculum for the EGS schools and the alternative schools under the government-run Rajiv Gandhi Prathmik Shiksha Mission in Madhya Pradesh.

With a focus on improving the quality of education and reaching the most marginalized, Bodh began in a similar way to Digantar, by establishing a community school (*bodhshala*) in an urban slum in Jaipur in 1987. In 1989, Bodh received funding from the GoI to open five more community schools in five other urban slums in Jaipur. The project to set up these *bodhshalas* provided Bodh with the opportunity to understand and innovate in terms of community mobilization, contextual teaching-learning processes and teacher development.

Bodh's first partnership with the Department of Education in Rajasthan was the Mainstream Intervention Programme (1992–98), which was funded by the Aga Khan Foundation. The programme focused on utilizing and assessing the effectiveness of the Bodh pedagogy in 10 government schools in Jaipur city. Bodh's resource teachers used the Bodh teaching methods and curricular materials, and worked directly with government teachers and children. An evaluation showed positive results and paved the way for future partnerships between Bodh and the state government.

Bodh was a partner in the eight-state Janshala initiative set up by the GoI and the United Nations to provide primary education to deprived communities (1998–2002). The project involved eight CSOs, aiming to reach the urban deprived in four cities in Rajasthan, and set up 193 community schools. These were subsequently converted into formal government schools. The lessons learned from this programme led to the development of the Janbodh programme, which was implemented in Madhya Pradesh.

Apart from these government programmes, Bodh worked on two other initiatives in schools and communities: the Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE) (1999–2007), implemented in the districts of Jaipur and Alwar, and the Shikshanchal programme (1999–2004), implemented in Thanagazi Block of Alwar District. These programmes were funded by the European Union and the Aga Khan Foundation. The Shikshanchal programme was also funded by CARE India. Within PESLE, Bodh worked with more than 30 *bodhshalas* across Jaipur and Alwar, and focused on refining and scaling up its innovative pedagogic strategies as well as on documenting and disseminating them. Shikshanchal was Bodh's first rural intervention and reportedly laid the foundations for the subsequent Jan Pahal programme in Thanagazi Block and the Shikshak Pahal programme in Umrein Block. The key objective of the Shikshanchal programme was making education accessible to all children in the remote block of Thanagazi, with a special emphasis on access to education for girls. With the support of communities and the PRIs, Bodh was able to set up 27 *bodhshalas* in remote areas. Over this period, Bodh became a point of reference for improvement of teaching methods, as well as a resource agency for the Rajasthan government. DPEP Rajasthan asked Bodh to train teachers to work in its alternative school initiative. Through negotiations with the government, Bodh had the opportunity to replicate and scale-up its work (Jagannathan, 2001).

Computer classes in Bodh. © CORD.

SSA Phase I

With the launching of the SSA, all the existing government projects initiated in Rajasthan before 2002 (Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish and DPEP) were absorbed into it. This resulted in a period of uncertainty for the CSOs when the administrative structures of earlier projects were dismantled and new ones brought in. CSOs that had been part of these donor-funded projects faced an acute financial crunch. According to the CSOs affected by this, this situation affected them in different ways, but overall there was a change in the role of CSOs in these early years of the SSA.

Sandhan went through a reorganization process and the "analysis of the past experiences and the emerging challenges gave Sandhan a fresh agenda" (Sandhan, 2004. p. 6). In 2000, Sandhan had decided to shift its focus to the education of adolescents. With the advent of the SSA, Sandhan decided to also act as a research centre by generating benchmark studies and needs assessment reports, and it also provided technical support to the Doosra Dashak Initiative (focusing on 11–20 year olds) and supported several other micro-initiatives.

When the SSA was launched, Bodh was already involved with small-scale initiatives under Shikshanchal and PESLE, which continued until 2004 and 2007, respectively. Both of these initiatives were partnerships with the Rajasthan government and funding came from non-governmental donors and foundations.

Digantar reportedly experienced "a phase mostly of survival" (Digantar, 2004) following the launch of the SSA. The organization recovered from the crisis, however, and became involved in a large number of studies on education, ranging from evaluating grassroots-level interventions to comparing the quality of schooling in various rural areas. The Academic Resource Unit was revived in 2003–04, to provide academic support to its own and other initiatives, if and when required.

In 2002, the GoR approached UNICEF to initiate a project to provide education to the large number of out-of-school girls in the state. UNICEF involved NGOs such as Digantar and the Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials in this project, which was titled Pehchan. The programme was implemented in two blocks of Jaipur District by Digantar and in Tonk and Banswara districts by the Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials . Digantar was the technical support agency. Pehchan aimed to change the prevalent attitudes towards female education and provide education for out-of-school girls. This involved setting up alternative modes of education or bridge courses (*pehchanshalas*) and working with formal government schools to bring about improvement in the education they provided.

SSA Phase II

With the first phase of SSA funding coming to a close, evaluation studies were carried out along with planning for SSA II. As noted above, following these evaluations the focus of the SSA programme shifted from improving access to schooling to improving the quality of education and retention of all children in school to complete eight years of education. An important development at this time was the publication of the new National Curriculum Framework. This focused on a number of aspects of education quality,

It was at this time that the Rajasthan Education Initiative (REI) was launched. The REI emerged from discussions that the then Chief Minister of Rajasthan had with business, political and CSO leaders at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January 2005. Based on the lessons learned from the Jordan Education Initiative, Rajasthan evolved for the REI its own definition of public-private partnerships in the field of education.

The REI was an innovative multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at improving the quality of education through engaging global and local partners from CSOs as well as foundations and organizations from the private sector to support education in the state of Rajasthan. The initiative gathered multiple sources of funding, including from the GoR, the GoI, the private sector and donors. The core funders of the REI were the GoR, the World Economic Forum, the Confederation of Indian Industry, and the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GeSCI). The objectives were set by the state government while the other three funding partners were to facilitate and assist in the implementation, monitoring and reporting of individual projects within the REI and evaluate the success of each of them so as to learn lessons from the experience.

The REI was planned for a period of five years and the initiative aimed to cover around 5 per cent of the schools in the state. The state government signed MOUs with multiple partners for various types of projects. These included focused technological interventions for effective delivery of educational processes for students and teachers (with support from corporate organizations and foundations including Microsoft, Intel, HiWEL and the Azim Premji Foundation) and socially-relevant, innovative interventions for improving teaching-learning processes. The latter projects involved the work of local CSOs such as Bodh, large autonomous groups such as Pratham and the Naandi Foundation that were working in many states, and non-profit wings of corporations, such as the Azim Premji Foundation, the Bharti Foundation and the IFIG. These partnerships took different forms in terms of funding, duration, geographical spread and focus areas.

Evaluations of the implementation of the REI highlighted the need for adequate leadership in a complex initiative of this nature. A review by GeSCI points out that there was no real precedent to the REI and that in many ways it was an extremely ambitious undertaking. A large number of partnerships were initiated and it became too broad-based to be handled by the frequently-transitioning government staff and officials. Though it was inspired by Jordan Education Initiative, it soon became clear that the context of the REI was very different so the model could not be replicated. According to GeSCI, a strong project management unit and a set of clearly articulated goals, objectives and outcomes at the beginning of the initiative would have helped (GeSCI, 2009). A major criticism was that emphasis was put on information and communication technology (ICT) interventions and ICT-related partners while the problems in Rajasthan schools were more related to equity and the quality of basic education.

In spite of the issues, with the introduction of the REI a new type of multi-stakeholder partnership had come to stay. The MOUs established at the time between the state government and local CSOs were not all discontinued. Partnerships continued in the form of small-scale interventions that were

planned and implemented by the CSOs in selected government schools, with funding from the non-government sector. Collaboration between the Rajasthan government and organizations attached to corporate partners, including the Azim Premji Foundation and the IFIG, and with autonomous organizations that had a multi-state presence, reflecting access to considerable funding, including Pratham and the Naandi Foundation, became more common after the REI. Such initiatives were implemented both on a small scale and on a large scale.

This type of collaboration was viewed as a dramatic change in the education sector. The modalities of interventions and setting up of initiatives shifted from being driven by community – and volunteer – based CSOs to being driven by a managerial understanding of project design and implementation. At the same time, this development brought in a multi-stakeholder partnership model for achieving the EFA Goals and the "freedom of using innovation" (Draxler, 2008) to meet specific needs.

Bodh worked in partnership with the Rajasthan government under the REI on an initiative titled the Programme for Universalisation of Equitable Quality Elementary Education for Deprived Urban Children in Jaipur city (the Janbodh programme). Like Bodh's programmes in the 1990s, which focused on facilitating the mainstreaming of innovative child-centred pedagogic practices and processes in government schools, Janbodh focused on providing good-quality education for disadvantaged urban children in 60 government schools (Pachauri, 2012).

In the second phase of the REI, 2008–10, Bodh signed an MOU with the GOR to be the technical support agency for the development of the SSA programme's Jaipur Million City Plus Plan. Bodh's engagement was part of its larger mandate as technical support agency for the urban component of the SSA. Although the main focus was initially on learning processes and teacher training, the emphasis was later on community and PRI ownership and decentralized education development. This shift is very likely linked to the SSA mid-term review that prioritized the decentralization process, with emphasis on the role of PRIs and community organizations (NUEPA, 2008). With its extensive experience of working with government schools and communities, Bodh has come to be regarded by several state governments and non-governmental organizations as a resource for providing good-quality education to all children.

Sandhan, with its new focus on adolescents, decided to work with KGBV residences in selected districts of Rajasthan. Its interventions included providing technical support in terms of capacity building of SSA functionaries, teachers and head teachers, and Sandhan continued on-site support to schools (on a monthly basis) as a follow-up to teacher training. The group worked in 10 KGBV residences in Tonk and Udaipur districts in collaboration with the SSA and UNICEF. Through their work they were involved in action research, pedagogy development, field testing and reinforced learning. They later worked with KGBV residences in Bikaner and Ajmer districts. Sandhan's work was not confined to this partnership with the government; it strengthened its networking with grassroots organizations and national and international bodies and conducted research and analysis work. In this period, The Sandhan Resource Centre worked with the NCERT, UNESCO and UNICEF to produce papers on educational trends and gender differences in access to education.

Use of teaching aids in KGBV. © Sandhan

Digantar continued its involvement with the state government through several projects. One such project was the Quality Education Programme, which began in 2006 in 78 schools in two blocks (Ataru and Shahabad) of Baran District. This was a multi-stakeholder initiative that included the state government, Digantar, Vidya Bhawan Society and the IFIG. The objectives were to strengthen the capacity of the DIETs to provide stronger academic support to government school teachers, to strengthen the BRCs and CRCs for academic support and supervision and to support CRCs to develop "Pacesetter" schools.

In 2007, Digantar worked in 44 government schools in Shahbad and Kishanganj blocks in Baran District through the Sandarbhshala project, which was funded by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. The aim was to develop an appropriate and effective package of educating tribal children through action research. Digantar was also part of the Shiksha Samarthan project, supported by Wipro Applying Thought in School, which was implemented in 100 schools of Phagi block in Jaipur District. Digantar's core activities were not confined to these projects. In 2011, Digantar set up a Centre for Teacher Knowledge in Jaipur. The centre initiates dialogues about whether elementary education is just an endeavour to develop literacy and numeracy skills in children, or whether it should develop skills that contribute to economic development. Digantar also runs the Alternate Education Programme in three schools of its own. It also has an Academic Research Unit through which it implements a Certificate Programme in Foundations of Education. Digantar also publishes a bimonthly magazine in Hindi titled Shiksha Vimarsh, which discusses both the theory and practice of education.

Another change in government-CSO partnerships came with the need to implement the Right to Education Act. The Act required major changes in pedagogy and classroom processes, as well as capacity building of teachers and community organizations. The transformative changes required by this Act presented the state governments with many challenges as they had to implement and scale up the changes in a short time. The governments sought support from CSOs to enable them to move towards greater compliance with the Act.

KGBV students acting in a play. © Sandhan

One of the major initiatives in this period was to replace the Quality Education Programme in Baran with a six-year project by the GoR and the IFIG that aimed to carry forward their work at the state level. A key feature of this project is that all interventions were implemented and monitored by groups that included equal numbers of personnel from the state government (in SIERT and DIETs) and the IFIG, and that it was the state government that had the final say in key decisions. This had implications for the way in which the interventions were embedded in the system. The goals of the state-wide programme were quite ambitious and included revision of the curriculum for pre-service teacher training, developing reading materials, revision of textbooks for grades 1–8, developing the in-service teacher training curriculum to facilitate the use of these textbooks, and supporting 150 schools in three districts to become compliant with the Right to Education Act. NGOs did not have a direct role in this project but the IFIG used educationists from several CSOs and universities as resource persons.

UNICEF has long been an active partner of the GoR and plays an important role in the implementation of the Right to Education Act. According to one of the informants for this case study, UNICEF is the state government's most important partner. UNICEF supported the government in the formulation of the "State Rules" on the Act and the government has up-scaled a number of interventions that were jointly piloted with UNICEF, including activity-based learning as part of the new syllabus and the new textbooks, and continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) as a tool for improving the quality of education. Since the Right to Education Act was enacted, UNICEF has played a major role in involving experienced CSOs in SSA activities. UNICEF has organized regular consultations on out-of-school children and special training for such children, as well as on implementing the CCE, with these resource groups and representatives of the education departments from several states.

In implementing the requirements of the Act, the state government has ongoing partnerships with large, well-funded organizations such as the Azim Premji Foundation as well as with local organizations like Bodh. The state government is open to receive support in resources, administrative skills and technical expertise to implement the Act and chooses partners who can provide these inputs. Bodh was given the task of developing CCE in such a way that it is part of the curriculum and pedagogy in schools on a pilot basis. This will later be implemented in all districts in Rajasthan. Bodh is also an important resource group for the special training programme for out-of-school

children. Resource persons from other CSOs with experience and technical expertise, who are not in partnership with the state government, are often asked to be part of consultations, particularly for pedagogical support for implementing the Right to Education Act, either directly by the government or indirectly by other groups who are partners of the government.

To sum up, this section discussed how, with the launching of the SSA, there was an initial period of termination of existing projects in primary education and with it the dissolution of existing partnerships with CSOs. This process changed in around 2005, when the state government entered into partnerships with a variety of CSOs. The initiatives launched during the second and third phases of the SSA period included focused interventions in technology-assisted learning and systemic interventions (such as curricular reform). The more common interventions were focused on improving classroom processes and the overall quality of education in government schools, as well as on retention in schools of children from vulnerable population groups. Some of these initiatives came after the SSA mid-term review when the state government set up the REI, and other changes came in with the passing of the Right to Education Act. These initiatives were implemented in collaboration with Rajasthan-based CSOs, with large autonomous groups working in the development sector across many states, and with large groups that are the non-profit wings of corporations. These partnerships were modified over time with changes in the education policies of the state government. While the partnerships were usually been between the state government and one organization, in some cases there were multiple CSOs involved in the implementation of projects. UNICEF played an important role in the implementation of schemes, particularly after the passing of the Right to Education Act, and their work was in collaboration with the state government and with CSOs from various states. The SSA framework was flexible enough to accommodate all the changes in education policy and the different forms of partnerships.

6.3 Partnerships in Madhya Pradesh during the SSA period

Pre-SSA period

An examination of the education situation in Madhya Pradesh prior to the SSA finds some similarities with Rajasthan. As noted earlier, both states have had a history of CSOs working actively in the development sector. The Madhya Pradesh government began partnerships with CSOs in the education sector earlier than the Rajasthan government, however.

For both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Total Literacy Campaign, was an important programme, which resulted in increased demand for school education. This campaign was managed by the central government, which worked closely with the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, an India-wide organization that aimed to empower communities through the spread of science and literacy. The objective was to use *kalajathas* (performing arts groups) to encourage communities to become literate and to enrol children in school. The work was based on the model provided by the work of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad in raising the literacy rate in Ernakulam District in Kerala to 100 per cent.

One key project in Madhya Pradesh involving partnership between the state government and CSOs was the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Project (HSTP) (Mukund, 1988). This initiative began in 1972 when a partnership was established between the state government and two CSOs, Friends Rural Centre and Kishore Bharti. These organizations were already involved in areas such as farming and

cattle development and non-formal education. Under the new project, the two CSOs provided science courses in 16 middle schools (formal schools) in rural Hoshangabad. Participants in the project included scientists, educators and research students from leading institutions.

An important feature of this partnership was that initial funding came from the CSOs themselves, with the government only giving a grant of 25,000 INR to cover incidental expenses. Furthermore, the groups had complete freedom in terms of curriculum, books, materials, teacher training and examinations; and the community and the block level educational officials were all engaged in the process. In 1977, five years after the programme was initiated, it was extended to cover 220 middle schools in Hoshangabad District, under the joint auspices of the state government and the NCERT. The costs of the expanded programme were taken up by these institutions as well as the University Grants Commission and the two CSOs.

In 1982, it was decided to set up an autonomous organization, Eklavya, (Raina, 1997, Balagopal, 2003) to take the work of the HSTP forward to cover the entire state and to develop curriculum and teaching-learning materials for social science classes in eight middle schools in Harda, Hoshangabad and Dewas districts. Eklavya had a coordination centre at Bhopal and field offices in several districts of Madhya Pradesh. Core funding for this organization in the first three years came from the state government and the Department of Science and Technology.

At the same time, an integrated curriculum (Khushi Khushi) was developed for the primary grades. The development process was undertaken through working in 40 schools in tribal and non-tribal districts over a period of eight years, and was completed by 1994. "The basic approach continued to be activity, discovery and environment-based, incorporating … many child development criteria keeping in mind the younger age of children compared to that in the HSTP" (Raina, 1997).

In the late 1980s, two other projects on primary education were initiated: Roopantar, led by the Education Department and implemented in 14 districts, and Dhumkuriya, led by the Tribal Welfare Department and implemented in five districts. These projects were in the process of winding down in 1993 when the externally-funded centrally sponsored scheme DPEP was introduced in the state (NIEPA, 1997) and the state government decided to merge these two projects into DPEP. In Phase I, DPEP was implemented in as many as 20 educationally "backward" districts in Madhya Pradesh. These constituted almost half of the 42 districts covered in that phase. Another 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh were covered in Phase 2, beginning in 1997.

Some of the key education programmes implemented in Madhya Pradesh with government-CSO partnership are listed in Table 13.

Table 13: Major initiatives involving government partnership with CSOs in education in Madhya Pradesh – pre-SSA period

Year	Rajasthan	Collaboration and Funding	CSO/NGO/Foundation
1993–4	DPEP	IDA, European Union, GOI, GOMP	Several CSOs
1996	Technical Resource Support Group – Seekhna Sikhana education material	GOMP	Several CSOs Eklavya's earlier work on Khushi Khushi had a major role.
1996	Lok Sampark Abhiyan	GOMP	Several CSOs, including Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi and Eklavya
1997	Education Guarantee Scheme	GOMP	Digantar had a major role in curriculum and teacher training.

As noted earlier, DPEP was a widespread and systematic effort to achieve universal primary education. Madhya Pradesh received a larger proportion of the resources under DPEP compared to many other states on account of the large number of districts covered in this state.

An important development in the education sector in Madhya Pradesh during the implementation of DPEP was the gradual introduction of para-teachers. Pre-service teacher education was not required for these contract teachers, who were locally recruited and paid at low rates.

At this time, the Government of Madhya Pradesh decided to set up a state-level Technical Resource Support Group (TRSG), an apex policy-making body for academic decisions for the entire elementary education sector of the state (Raina, 1997). This group included eminent practitioners and educationists, supportive of innovations, from all over the country and the state, which resulted in "some radical policy initiatives" (Raina, 1997). The TRSG decided that material for each class was to be developed "through field work, in experimental schools and with the active participation of the teachers in such schools, utilising at least one year for the development of material for each class" (Raina, 1997). This process was followed to prepare the "Seekhna-Sikhana" package. The approach, methods and contents of Seekhna-Sikhana closely resemble those of Eklavya's Khushi-Khushi, but the new package was not an experimental effort of a particular group, but a product of the state government.

Another significant policy decision of the TRSG, accepted by the state government, was that all new education initiatives would be implemented in the entire state (in both DPEP and non-DPEP districts). Consequently, a state-level training structure, going from the block to the cluster level, was set up.

Around the same time, in 1994, the government introduced the Panchayati Raj system into the state. The state government brought its primary education programme under its own Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission. This mission and the interventions under DPEP brought about much-needed changes in access and equity, particularly for tribal children in remote villages.

The setting up of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission was followed by the Lok Sampark Abhiyan (LSA) in 1996, which involved a door-to-door survey and mobilization campaign. It was a government-CSO partnership implemented by teachers, elected members of the *panchayat samitis* (local village councils) and literacy activists and organizations. The project collected data on children in school and out of school, with the intention of persuading parents to send their children to school. It found that only 70 per cent of communities in Madhya Pradesh had access to a primary school (Mehrotra, 2006).

The Lok Sampark Abhiyan created demand for schooling while revealing gaps in the provision of schools. It led to an important initiative to improve access to schooling in remote rural areas, the Education Guarantee Scheme. This scheme, which was launched in 1997, gave local communities the power to demand a school if the community had at least 40 children who were out of school and no school was within one kilometre walking distance. More than 25,000 EGS schools were opened between 1997 and 2002. Local teachers, selected by the communities, were appointed to teach in the new schools, and more than 13,000 local teachers were recruited (Srivastava, 2010). The curriculum for these schools was developed by Digantar, the Rajasthan-based CSO with experience in the field of alternative education. Training of the teachers of these schools was reportedly also provided by Digantar. The schools contributed to a surge in enrolments of children.

The EGS innovation earned Madhya Pradesh a Commonwealth Innovation Award. A micro-study found, however, that the EGS schools were not necessarily based on demands voiced by the

community and that the local teachers were not always accountable to the community (Srivastava, 2010). Nevertheless, the EGS schools were reported to function well, and most were subsequently upgraded to formal primary schools.

Representatives of CSOs interviewed for this study attributed progress towards educational reform to highly engaged bureaucrats in the central and state governments. Continuity played an important role. Many bureaucrats in the state's education sector were reportedly not transferred to other sectors during the decade beginning in 1993–94 (Ramachandran, 2004). Madhya Pradesh thus had, for a long period, a bureaucracy that was well-versed in handling externally-funded education projects. In addition, the state government was very proactive in education planning and implementation for the state as a whole.

The administrative and managerial structure also helped. In Madhya Pradesh, the agency implementing DPEP (Rajkiya Shiksha Kendra) was integrated with the education department in the state (the SCERT). This allowed initiatives under DPEP to be more firmly embedded within the system, and thereby have greater impact in the long run.

The Government of Madhya Pradesh formulated an important institutional framework in 2002. This was the Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, a legal framework for education reform. It covered a range of issues, including the fundamental right of every child to basic education; parental responsibility for compulsory education until a child is 14; rules and responsibilities of parents, teachers, local bodies and government; the need for a PTA in every primary school; and the need for an education committee at the *panchayat* level. It represented an effort to establish and entrench a framework to facilitate elementary education.

SSA phase I

Elementary education in Madhya Pradesh at the start of the SSA programme was greatly influenced by the work that had been done during phases 1 and 2 of DPEP. The state government's partnership with Eklavya in the previous decades also played a critical role. This very fruitful collaboration had led to the government developing its own innovative package of teaching-learning materials (Seekhna Sikhana). Furthermore, large numbers of teachers had become skilled in the use of innovative science and social science teaching-learning activities for primary school children and middle school children. Unfortunately, in 2002 Eklavya's long-standing partnership with the state government was abruptly ended by the government. At the time, Eklavya was providing science classes in 1,000 middle schools in 15 districts in the state, and the social science classes were ready to be up-scaled.

Eklavya's strategy had been to work within the government system rather than start its own schools or work in private schools, but in 2002 it had to rethink its role. From 2002 onwards, Eklavya worked in private schools in Bhopal and also set up Shiksha Protsahan Kendras (SPK), centres that functioned as areas for curricular research. In the SPKs, Eklavya worked on developing materials for teachers to use in classrooms including for science teaching at high school level. Eklavya's work was focused on the quality of the child's experience in school and Eklavya's pedagogical approach remained one of teaching-learning through child-friendly activities, which was the basis of its Prashika curriculum for primary education. This positively impacted retention of children, including those from groups previously out of the system. An important objective was to provide support for first generation learners from the most marginalized tribal communities living in remote areas of Madhya Pradesh. In 2003, the members of Eklavya who wanted to focus on rural development set up a separate organization, Samavesh, which subsequently also worked in partnership with the state government.

During the first phase of SSA, in what appears to be a unique case, the government of Madhya Pradesh invited the Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) from Andhra Pradesh to work in Madhya Pradesh. The MVF had been very successful in its efforts to reduce child labour and mainstream out-of-school children in Andhra Pradesh. The project implemented in Madhya Pradesh was powerful for many reasons: it was based on the non-negotiable principle that every child has a right to education; it engaged with multiple stakeholders to draw children away from child labour and into schooling; and it provided a model of a safe and stimulating environment for children through providing a residential bridge course over a minimum period of nine months. These courses prepared children for entry into formal school in an age-appropriate grade. Children were taught a condensed curriculum, developed especially for this purpose. Exposure visits to Andhra Pradesh were an important part of the project, as was orientation and training for the personnel and the teachers in the residential bridge camps, which was provided by the MVF staff. The MVF implemented the project in 21 districts in the state. A study based on visits to three of these districts found that the partnership was successful (Wazir, 2007). By March 2007, a large number of residential and non-residential bridge courses had been set up. The Government of Madhya Pradesh subsequently set up additional residential bridge courses based on the success of the MVF programme.

While the state government had ownership and responsibility for the programme, the resource persons acted as facilitators and catalysts (Wazir, 2007). The costs of the residential bridge courses were borne by the state government. The MVF paid its staff through raising funds from other sources, which reportedly allowed it to maintain a level of autonomy from the government. This had implications for the sustainability of the initiative, however. The government initially signed a one-year MOU with the MVF and extended this twice, resulting in a three-year partnership: from 2004 to 2007. But the short-term nature of each MOU brought in uncertainty for the CSO and for the project.

The impact of the MVF extended beyond its direct involvement in the 21 districts in which it was working. For example, the MVF trained staff of other NGOs in Madhya Pradesh, including staff of Action Aid and Samavesh, to enable them to run similar programmes.

It was during the early years of the SSA that the Azim Premji Foundation entered Madhya Pradesh with its Learning Guarantee Programme, which was based in Datia and Vidisha districts. The state government is reported to have ended this programme abruptly, however.

At this time, the state government launched an innovative programme named the FundaSchool Programme, which aimed to raise resources from the global community to improve education facilities in the state. It had an online facility for donations from any individual or organization interested in promoting school activities, developing school infrastructure and becoming a partner in supporting a school in a village in Madhya Pradesh. The Imperial Tobacco Company of India Limited is reported to have adopted 100 schools in Madhya Pradesh for five years under this programme (Nair, 2004). Overall, however, the programme generated limited financial support.

SSA phase II

In the second phase of SSA, the Government of Madhya Pradesh decided to expand its partnerships with CSOs. This was in response to the pressure to push harder towards meeting the SSA goals and to bring in more funding to achieve this. The state government set up a partnership cell within its education department to facilitate this policy and MOUs were signed with several organizations, including with organizations that had worked in other states, including Pratham and the Naandi

Foundation, as well as with local organizations such as Eklavya, Samavesh and Muskaan. These partnerships only lasted for short periods of time, however.

Pratham, a CSO that originated in Mumbai, signed an MOU with the government of Madhya Pradesh in 2005 to implement a programme that it had already put into practice in several other states. The programme aimed to improve reading achievements through providing schools with young volunteers. Under this programme, reading classes were held in the community before and after school hours. While the programme had some success, the initial MOU was not extended for subsequent years. This was because of lack of continuity in the management of the SSA, with three different heads of administration appointed over the 18 months between March 2006 and September 2007. By 2008, Pratham was running the reading campaign in only 17 districts in Madhya Pradesh.

The Naandi Foundation also signed an MOU with the Government of Madhya Pradesh in 2005. The programme implemented under this partnership, which continued until 2010, aimed to improve the quality of education in 338 schools in three blocks in a tribal-dominated district (Sheopur). Project staff (*bal mitras*), recruited from within the community, provided academic support to teachers through implementing activities, including demonstrating the use of child-friendly teaching and learning methods and pedagogy. The programme set up an Academic Support Centre in each school and also invested in selecting individuals who would be willing to be part of active village education committees and who would work on producing work plans for improving the schools. Another component of the programme (Nanhi Kali) was to provide additional teaching for girls, before and after school. This component was piloted in one block.

The programme was in line with the objectives of the SSA – to increase enrolment and reduce dropout rates, particularly among children from marginalized communities, and to strengthen the involvement of the local community with the functioning of the school. The programme had many good practices worth noting: it began with a baseline survey, the *bal mitras* had some degree of accountability to the community as 50 per cent of their salary came from the community; the VEC members were chosen on the basis of their interest in being part of such an initiative; local resource groups such as Bodh from Rajasthan were brought in as consultants; and a data collection system was put in place to enable regular monitoring of the impact of the project.

In 2006, Eklavya signed a three-year MOU with the state government to implement a project to improve pedagogy using the NCF of 2005 and the Right to Education Act as a basis. The objective of the programme was to build the capacity of government school teachers and to build capacity within the community to support education efforts in schools. Eklavya implemented the programme in classes 3 to 8 in 22 government primary and middle schools in Bhopal. The method adopted was one of on-site resource support to BRCs, CRCs and schools. In 2010, Eklavya signed another MOU with the government to implement a project to provide libraries to communities in 10 clusters distributed over three blocks in Hoshangabad. Libraries and a number of activity centres were set up to provide a venue for children, teachers and the community to read, discuss and take part in creative projects and regular workshops. Funding came from non-governmental sources within India.

At this time, Samavesh signed a five-year MOU with the government to implement a programme that sought to improve the quality of education provided in 50 schools in 50 villages of Dewas and Harda districts. One *bal mitra* was placed in each of these schools to start using activity-based teaching, and one *jan mitra* was appointed to supervise a number of schools. Regular trainings were organised for the *bal mitras* and *jan mitras*. The *jan mitra* and *bal mitra* teams organised PTA

meetings in the schools to sensitise parents and teachers regarding monitoring and supporting the schools and its activities. Funding for this initiative also came from non-governmental sources within India.

During the second phase of the SSA, Muskaan worked in slum communities in Bhopal where there are a high proportion of out-of-school children. Muskaan found that even when they enrolled these children into government schools, the children soon dropped out. Therefore, Muskaan decided to work in government schools to make necessary changes so that children from slum backgrounds would feel welcome there. Their intervention was aimed at improving interactions between teachers and students, as well as improving learning levels at all primary grades. They also set up alternative schools for children who were not able to attend formal schools. Muskaan worked in 10 slums in Bhopal and was able to positively impact the lives of children from over 800 households. It also provided remedial education to children with learning difficulties in 19 public schools (Sir Ratan Tata Trust, 2013). This project played an important role in meeting the SSA's objectives.

Students in Muskaan. © CORD.

Several other government-CSO partnerships were operational in Madhya Pradesh during this period. For example, the Sir Albert Howard Memorial Trust worked in government schools in Kesla District in Hoshangabad. Its focus was supporting the education of children from tribal communities. Another initiative was that implemented by the CSO "Room to Read", which provided libraries to schools in two districts of Madhya Pradesh – Betul and Tikamgarh.[1]

An example of a public-private partnership was Microsoft's work in the area of computer training for DIET faculty and teachers. This programme was known as Project Shiksha, and under it an information technology academy was established in Bhopal. Seven regional-level computer training centres were identified and training was conducted year-round at these centres. More than 4,000 teachers were trained during the academic year 2007–08, and 2,500 teachers were trained in 2009–10.

The state government set up a partnership cell to review proposals from CSOs and to negotiate with them about deliverables and reporting processes. According to government representatives, the state felt it was in a fortunate position, in which highly reputed groups come to the government

1 See www.ssa.mp.gov.in/partners

to work in partnership with it. Heads of the CSOs interviewed reported that the government does not fund their work, but there is cost-sharing involved in the work of the larger foundations, as indicated by their annual reports.

UNICEF works closely with the state government in Madhya Pradesh. Key areas of UNICEF's work include providing education to disadvantaged groups and building the capacity of PTAs and SMCs to monitor schools. The overall focus is on quality improvement and improving learning achievements of children with special focus on disadvantaged groups. UNICEF was involved in supporting the rollout of activity-based learning in primary schools and the initiation of ALM in upper-primary schools. UNICEF was also involved in training academic staff at the cluster level on the use of mapping tools.

In recent years UNICEF has reduced its role in the implementation of projects and has focused more on providing technical support for strengthening policy and programmes related to the implementation of the Right to Education Act. UNICEF has worked with various CSOs, which have served as resource organisations. UNICEF supports both pilot interventions and up-scaling of initiatives related to generating awareness of the Act among parents and the wider community. It also provides support for the development of child-friendly schools as models for replication. In addition, UNICEF's support to the activity-based learning programme, reaching about 16,000 schools in the state, has continued. UNICEF also supports capacity building of school principals, building their leadership and management skills; and assists efforts to strengthen CRC and BRC in terms of academic support functions. Another area of collaborative work is the programme for girls' education, which includes the roll-out of the "Meena" radio programme. UNICEF also supports life skills education in all middle schools in the state, and supports the Sports for Development programme in the KGBV residences.

As of May 2014, the Madhya Pradesh government has partnerships with only a few organisations. Ongoing initiatives include a project to establish women's hostels, CWSN hostels and girls' hostels, based on successful initiatives such as the KGBV residences; a programme to set up "Platform" schools; the Paraspar Scheme, which has established 13 schools for out-of-school children; and a project implemented by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi to mobilize communities with regard to implementing the Right to Education Act.

Madhya Pradesh state government officials interviewed as part of this study observed that the government no longer pursues partnerships. Rather than partnering with organizations, the government now prefers to bring in technical expertise by hiring consultants as required. One example is the Sports for Development initiative. Nevertheless, as of 2014, an MOU with Azim Premji Foundation was in the pipeline for a partnership to facilitate CCE in government schools in the state.

Summing up, this section examined the education projects and partnerships in Madhya Pradesh before and during the SSA period. Progress towards better educational outcomes is attributed to highly engaged bureaucrats in the state government (and at the central level), with continuity of service and government pro-activity playing important roles. The state government worked in partnership for a long period with Eklavya and later with the MVF. Subsequently, the state government entered into a number of partnerships with CSOs, but these tended to be of short duration. These partnerships mostly focused on improving school quality, bringing out-of-school children into formal schools, and capacity building of communities, teachers and district and block level coordinators. In recent years the Government of Madhya Pradesh has preferred to hire individual technical experts as individuals rather than entering into partnerships with organizations, but new partnerships are still an option when the CSOs have access to funds for their activities.

6.4 Key features of the partnerships during the SSA in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh

As noted earlier, the SSA framework encouraged interventions by CSOs in many areas. In the above sections, it was demonstrated that the two states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh took somewhat different approaches towards partnerships under the same overall framework. The Rajasthan government, with the REI, set up a new institutional mechanism for collaboration. It was open to collaborations not only for micro-interventions in schools and interventions to bring in children from vulnerable population groups, but also to partnerships to implement larger-scale initiatives with partners that could provide financial and technical resources. The Madhya Pradesh government appears to have been less open to large-scale and long-term partnerships. Although it set up a partnership cell to facilitate partnerships, during in the SSA period CSOs played a limited role in terms of the type of intervention and their spread across the state.

Responses from interviews with government officials indicate that during the SSA period, except in rare cases such as the partnership with the MVF, state governments generally did not approach CSOs seeking collaboration. Organizations that were keen to work with the state government approached the government with proposals and, following discussions of the project design and work plan, the government agreed to the partnership only if the intervention was considered to be relevant and useful. Funding usually came from independent sources.

Government-CSO partnerships were initiated in various spheres, including providing good-quality education to children in remote areas and to special-needs children, bringing in and retaining out-of-school children, training of community bodies and PRI members, and introducing computer-aided learning in schools. The Government of Rajasthan also entered into partnerships to develop textbooks, provide in-service teacher training, develop a pre-service teacher training curriculum, and provide leadership training. During the SSA period, both the state governments worked in partnership with UNICEF and CSOs to implement the Right to Education Act, which translated into the development of child friendly schools, the provision of special training for out of school children, and the setting up of CCE.

The previous sections explained that the launch of the SSA led to major changes in the nature of partnerships between state governments and CSOs. Subsequently, two interrelated processes were observed in these two states.

First, the partnerships between the CSOs who had a long history of working with the state governments in the education sector underwent a change. Some of these partnerships continued, but on a smaller scale, while other partnerships ended because of various factors, including internal restructuring of CSOs at the time. Later, several of these CSOs became resource organizations for the state governments, providing technical expertise to the central and state governments and to other CSOs and foundations. Some of these organizations (Bodh, Sandhan, Digantar and Eklavya) set up formal resource centres.

Though many interventions were reduced in scale over time, these organizations continued to be important because of their innovative approaches and their expertise in handling the challenges faced in the education sector. Their work was valuable in chalking out pathways for vulnerable groups to be able to access schooling and in improving the quality of schooling through making it more activity-based as well as more relevant to children's needs. The projects were funded by both single and multiple donors; in a few cases funds were provided from the SSA.

Apart from interventions in the schooling system, the CSOs that partnered with state governments made a major contribution to policy formulation during the SSA period. They played a significant role in the consultative process around the development of the NCF, during the advocacy process for the pushing through the formulation of the Right to Education Act, in the ongoing implementation of the Act, and in monitoring its implementation. They also contributed to policy through action research and evaluation. Their inclusion in the process of new policy formulations was vitally important as it allowed their experience in the education sector to be taken on board.

The SSA period also saw the emergence of government collaborations with a different type of organization. These included foundations with direct links to corporations and non-profit foundations. These organizations often had access to greater funding, particularly following the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility Bill, which requires companies to utilize a proportion of their profits for initiatives in the social sector. These organizations also had significant management expertise and a macro perspective. This offered opportunities for larger-scale activities. For all organizations, stronger emphasis on measurable deliverables during the SSA period brought in a greater level of accountability.

Such changes reflected the wide scope of the SSA programme. In the pre-SSA period, initiatives were smaller, funds were available from government sources, and small CSOs could collaborate with the government in the planning and implementation of the programmes. But with the advent of the SSA, a large-scale nationwide programme, the nature of the activities changed. Access to greater financial support was important and the larger organizations, which had their own money or could access funds from non-government sources, had an advantage.

An important characteristic of the new organizations that entered the education sector during the SSA period was that they had experience in working in a number of states. Both the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments had MOUs with organizations that had worked in other states, including the MVF, the Azim Premji Foundation, Pratham, the Naandi Foundation and the IFIG. Among the initial CSOs working in the education sector (local, non-profit CSOs), while some had begun working in other states in the pre-SSA period, this became a common attribute of most CSOs during the SSA period.

While the new organizations that partnered with state governments during the SSA period had experience in other states, they often had little experience in working in the education sector. Interviews with members of local CSOs who did have such experience revealed two main concerns. The first concern was regarding the outcome of the initiatives implemented by the new entrants (as a result of their limited experience) and the second concern was the need to ensure accountability of these groups to the people of the states in which they worked.

The models of collaboration differed according to the roles of the funding organization. In certain cases MOUs were signed between the state government and the implementing organization, while a donor provided the resources. Here, the implementing organizations could be CSOs with experience in the sector, as seen in initiatives supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trust in Madhya Pradesh. Another model included the donor organization as an implementing partner. In such situations, the donors recruited staff with appropriate skills and experience to implement the activities. In both states, CSOs had been working at the school and village levels for decades and in the process had developed the capacities of many teachers and education workers. Thus, a pool of local people with experience in working in education projects existed. Staff were sometimes poached from local CSOs, however, leaving these CSOs in a situation in which there was high staff turnover and a need for regular recruitment and training of new staff.

An important issue in the government-CSO partnerships was the extent of government involvement and ownership of the programme. This influenced whether the intervention would be able to make a lasting impact. Equal involvement of the parties often resulted in the best outcomes. An example is a current partnership between the GoR and the IFIG on a project in which the activities are implemented and monitored by groups composed of equal numbers of staff from the government and from the foundation. Although setting up such groups has its challenges, this type of cooperation allows for the strengthening of government institutions at state and district levels, as the programme contributes to simultaneously using and building the technical and managerial capacity of all staff involved.

Role of CSOs in implementing the Right to Education Act

The passing of the Right to Education Act put pressure on the state governments to make schools more child-friendly and improve education quality at all levels. State governments looked to non-state players to provide the necessary expertise in areas such as activity-based learning and in new methods of evaluation such as CCE.

The state governments also needed large amounts of resources and support to ensure they could uphold the right to education for all children. The challenge facing the states was not only one of scale, however. States such as Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have diverse populations and a significant proportion of children are from vulnerable population groups and are at risk of dropping out of school, thus not completing the minimum eight years of education. The state governments faced, and continue to face, an enormous task in providing good-quality education to all children, many of whom are unlikely to have any support from their homes or communities. Partnerships with CSOs have been valuable in building the capacities of administrators, teachers and community members to enable decentralized planning, implementing and monitoring of interventions. While providing support to government initiatives in this way, it is also important that CSOs continue to work on pilot projects, to put in place innovative micro-initiatives and to look for opportunities to take them to scale.

CSOs must also play a watchdog role when micro-initiatives are scaled up and when new policies are implemented. Compliance with the Right to Education Act is a critical area for social auditing by CSOs and community groups. On the basis of such monitoring, CSOs will be able to raise critical issues with the government, particularly related to child development and child rights, especially for children of socially marginalized groups.

Challenges for CSOs

This case study showed that CSOs in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh were extremely active both before and during the SSA period. Under the SSA framework, the state governments gave them some space to make interventions, while keeping the reins of control very firmly in their hands. While CSOs are appreciative of the space they were given to work, they reported that they struggled with the uncertainty that was an inherent part of these partnerships, as the agreements needed to be renewed at relatively short intervals and the parameters on which decisions were taken were not clearly spelled out. The stability of the partnerships was very dependent on state priorities and the personalities involved. Thus, many CSOs were vulnerable to being closed down as a consequence of political pressures, changes in the mindsets of government officials or the transfer of bureaucrats working within the education sector. This case study showed that even partnerships with robust organizations such as Eklavya ended suddenly. It is a concern that there has been no change in the system to prevent such abrupt decisions from occurring again.

CSOs interviewed for this case study reported that they were wary of accepting funding from the government because of the possibility of unnecessary bureaucratic interventions and delays that could weaken their ability to achieve their goals. But in the absence of long term financial support from the government, organizations without strong links with the corporate sector regularly struggle to get funding.

It would be useful for the state governments to look proactively at what CSOs can contribute in terms of micro- and macro-initiatives. State governments could also facilitate the work of their CSO partners by having a system in place for regular reporting and renewal, and to ensure conditions that would allow the partners to work effectively.

7 Lessons from the SSA Programme

This case study's examination of the progress in India towards achieving the EFA Goals and the role of the SSA in this process found that there have been impressive achievements over the past two decades in most states of India. In spite of this progress, however, universal elementary education has not yet been achieved. Also, while school participation levels have increased, dropout, retention and transition rates are still high, as are student and teacher absenteeism, and there is much to be done in terms of improving learning achievements

While all states showed progress towards achieving the EFA Goals over the SSA period, the extent of progress was not uniform. Less developed and large states, which had larger gaps in capacity, lagged behind not just because of the size of the problem in these states, but also because the high degree of social inequality reduced the degree of accountability that public servants had towards their jobs, and this percolated down to the teachers in government schools.

Although the SSA has not remedied all the issues faced in the education sector in India, this programme is being showcased as a promising one because the SSA is a good example of planning that is coordinated at the macro- and micro-levels, and a good example of a mechanism for successfully scaling up good practices.

The unique feature of the programme is its inclusive and flexible framework, which promotes a decentralized planning process, modification of initiatives to suit local contexts and meet local needs, identification of new funding sources, and monitoring and evaluation at various levels. The flexibility of the SSA framework allowed state governments to adapt strategies according to local requirements, while seeking to meet uniform norms and targets. Thus, although the SSA was primarily a centrally sponsored scheme, its flexible framework allowed the states to develop their own strategies according to their priorities. This flexibility was also useful in the context of the rapid changes that took place in the education sector.

Both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are large states. The diversities and inequalities that exist within these states and within the districts mean that effective implementation of macro-initiatives is difficult. The constitutional amendment of 1992, which gave recognition and responsibilities to local governments, and the decentralization of education administration as a part of the SSA, played crucial roles in providing states with the opportunity to address the needs of diverse populations.

This case study found that the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments used partnerships with CSOs towards achieving the goals of the SSA programme. The process of collaboration was not always smooth or positive, however. The degree and duration of cooperation depended on political compulsions and on the bureaucrats at the central and state government levels, as well as on the extent of managerial and administrative expertise at the level of implementation. The study found that partnerships with the state governments depended largely on the CSO partners' motivation, vision and capacity. The approval of the projects and their continuity depended largely on the governments' decisions, however, leading to uncertainty among CSOs, with negative impacts for the education initiatives implemented in the field. Furthermore, the state governments did not

make optimum use of the technical expertise they could access through local CSOs. The findings of this study also indicate that state government collaborations with the new organizations entering the education field may not have always had the desired outcomes. These partnerships have not yet existed for sufficient time for their impact to be fully evaluated, however.

A valuable feature of the SSA programme was its capacity to assess the impact of its policies and to change strategies when considered necessary. For example, several states initially relied on EGS and AIE to improve access to schooling in remote areas, but when evaluations indicated the need to prioritize improving the quality of education, the emphasis shifted towards improving formal schools and retaining learners.

While SSA data and government documents were compiled and shared online, little has been done to facilitate the analysis of this data and, thus, the programme had a limited scope for intra- or inter-state sharing of micro-level experiences. A state-level forum to enable interaction and sharing of information between the various partners and the government would allow the organizations to learn about each other's work and could lead to better cooperation and on a larger-scale. This would also be a way to ensure lessons learned are disseminated and new initiatives do not repeat mistakes from the past. Another valuable action would be for state governments to discuss with their partners the main shortfalls in terms of achieving the EFA Goals and the priority areas for future interventions.

The SSA was developed on the basis of lessons learned from the experiences in educational reform in the preceding decade and its evolution cannot be separated from those earlier developments. The SSA also built on the experience gained from implementing various education initiatives in the previous decade. Thus, this case study of the SSA programme shows that the EFA Goals cannot be achieved through "quick fix"' strategies, but instead need long-term focused interventions.

Annex: Socioeconomic background – Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh

Rajasthan is a large state in the north of India. It has an area of 340,000 square kilometres and a population of 68 million. Madhya Pradesh is also a large state, with an area of 300,000 sq. km. It is located in central India and has a larger population than Rajasthan, with 72 million inhabitants. The density of population in Rajasthan is thus lower, at 201 per square kilometre, as opposed to 236 in Madhya Pradesh. The states are contiguous.

The states are among the worst off in India as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender Development Index (GDI). Rajasthan is slightly better off than Madhya Pradesh in terms of economic indicators such as per capita Net State Domestic Product, the poverty headcount ratio and the Gini coefficient of inequality. But Rajasthan's economic indicators are below the average for India, except with regard to the poverty ratio (Table A1).

Female literacy is below the average for India in both states, with Rajasthan's rate markedly lower. The low levels of female literacy in both states reflect the states' histories of educational deprivation and gender discrimination. The lower female literacy rate in Rajasthan reflects the fact that gender issues are more pronounced in Rajasthan. The GDI tells a slightly different story, however, with Rajasthan being a bit better off. Pronounced gender bias in both states is reflected in the lower than average female-male ratios and a lower than average GDI in both states.

Table A1 presents the measurements of socio-economic indicators for selected years between 2004 and 2011 for the two states and for India as a whole.

Table A1: Socio-economic indicators in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and India

Indicators	Rajasthan	Madhya Pradesh	India
HDI (2007–8) HDI Rank (out of 23)	0.434 (17)	0.375 (20)	0.467
GDI (2006) GDI Rank (out of 35)	0.526 (31)	0.516 (33)	0.590
Literacy rate (%), 2011 Male Female	 80.5 52.7	 80.5 60.0	 80.9 64.6
Female Male Ratio, 2011	926	930	940
Per capita Net State Domestic Product (Rs), 2009–10	23,669	19,736	33,731
Poverty headcount ratio (%), 2009–10	24.8	36.7	29.8
Gini coefficient, 2004–5 Rural Urban	 0.25 0.37	 0.27 0.39	 0.30 0.37

Source: UNDP

Note: HDI has been reported for 23 Indian States, while GDI has been reported for 35 Indian States.

Female Male Ratio is number of females per 1000 males. Comparable state-level data is not available for all years.

Rajasthan has a high level of social inequality. Politically, the upper caste groups and the Jats are the dominant groups in a highly stratified society (Jaffrelot and Robin, 2009). A substantial proportion of the state's population belongs to the Scheduled Castes (17.8 per cent in 2011) and Scheduled Tribes (13.5 per cent in 2011), both of which are disadvantaged groups. Rajasthan also has a substantial proportion of minorities (8.5 per cent in 2011).

In the past decade, the Right to Information movement and social audits were active in Rajasthan, particularly in rural areas, and were led by vigorous members of civil society, which led to some empowerment among historically disadvantaged groups.

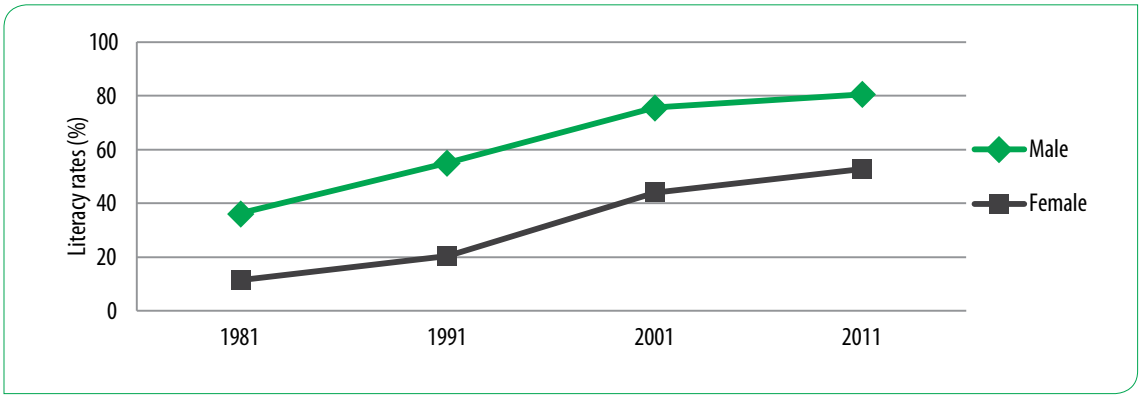
Madhya Pradesh was once India's largest state but reduced in size with the creation of Chhatisgarh. Madhya Pradesh has several highly forested areas and has a large number of districts populated by tribal groups. In 2011, more than one fifth (21.1 per cent) of the population, was classified as Scheduled Tribes and 15.4 per cent was classified as Scheduled Castes. Indications are that even though Madhya Pradesh was the first state to set up three-tier local governing bodies at the rural and urban levels, local communities are not empowered enough to demand accountability from the government. Control over the government rests with the upper castes (Jaffrelot, 2009), unlike in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where groups in the middle of the caste hierarchy ("Other Backward Classes") have been able to wrest some degree of power.

The two states are extremely interesting from the point of view of EFA. In both states, the size of the problem of providing education to children from excluded groups is enormous. There does not appear to sufficient pressure from civil society to ensure that all children are able to access education of good quality, however. There are enormous variations in government schools, with some schools well-staffed with empty classrooms while other schools have enormous teacher and classroom shortages. Micro-studies indicate that it is children from the marginalized groups who are more likely to access the more poorly resourced schools.

While there has been some success in bringing in children from disadvantaged groups into the formal schooling system, it is difficult to keep them there. It is a challenge to recruit qualified teachers; to find qualified persons who can staff DIETs and provide training for teachers; and to find qualified persons to provide academic support to teachers at the sub-district levels. It is particularly difficult to find qualified teachers in rural and remote areas, as most teachers prefer to live in areas with more facilities. It was in Rajasthan that a CSO first developed a "functional alternative" (hiring of local teachers) to the perennially absent qualified teachers. Social inequality in these states plays a role in teachers feeling a lack of accountability to their students and even in allowing schools to be sites of discrimination. Poverty makes it difficult for children of disadvantaged groups to attend school regularly throughout the year, as they are often required to work during times of peak demand for labour. Social norms against girls' education require the recruiting of female teachers (to encourage parents to send girls to school), but also add to the difficulty of being able to recruit female teachers (as few local girls have the necessary qualifications). Girls in many districts are either not enrolled at all, or are only allowed to study up to a certain grade because they are required at home to do household chores and because the education of girls is not seen to be of value. Early marriage also plays a role in taking girls out of school, as do expectations that girls will not be sent for paid employment outside the home so do not need to complete school.

Despite the issues, both states have made considerable progress towards achieving the EFA Goals. A comparison of literacy rates since 1981 is an indication of the progress and improvement over the past two decades. Rajasthan saw some growth in the period 1981–1991, but a huge jump came in the period 1991–2001 and continued in the decade 2001–2011 (Figure A1).

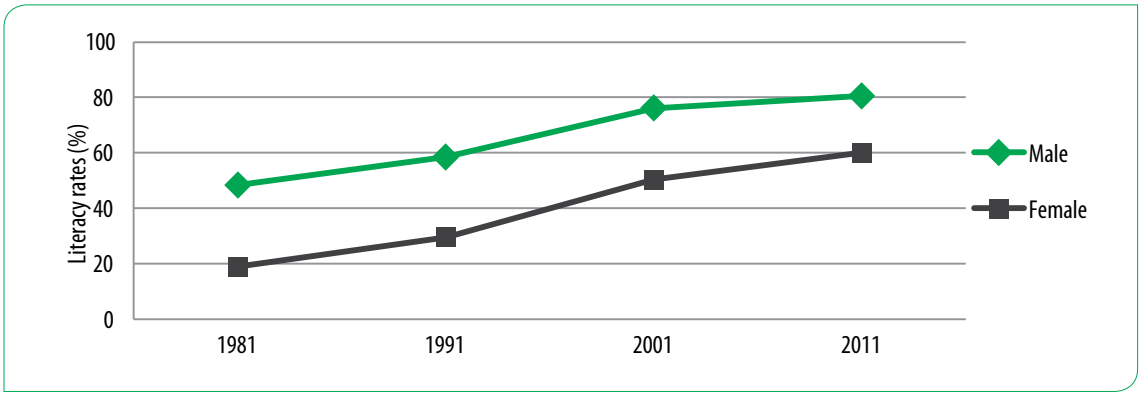
Figure A1: Literacy rates in Rajathan, by gender (1981–2011)



Source: Census data

Growth in male literacy rates in Madhya Pradesh was slower than in Rajasthan, but the female literacy rates in Madhya Pradesh grew more sharply than male literacy rates (Figure A2) and remain higher than in Rajasthan.

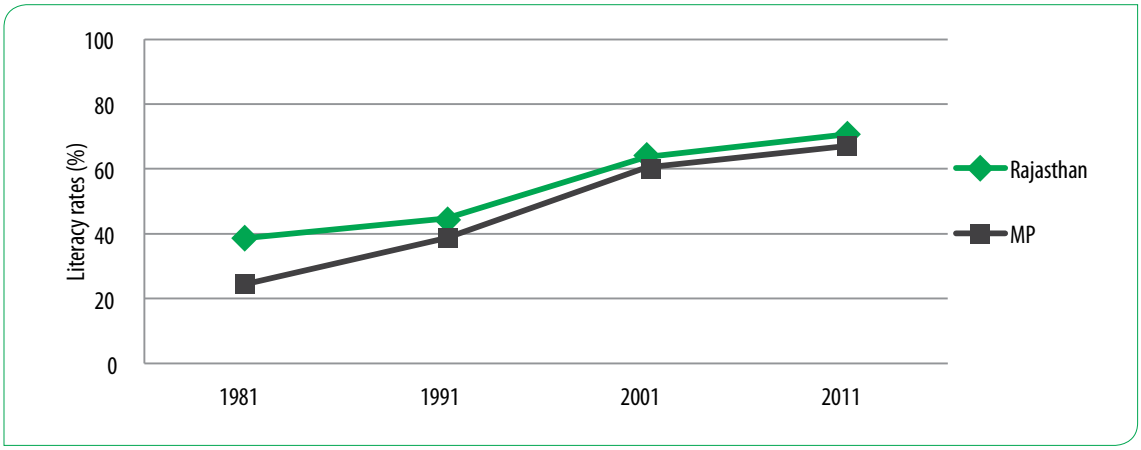
Figure A2: Literacy rates in Madhya Pradesh, by gender (1981–2011)



Source: Census data

Literacy rates in Madhya Pradesh were higher than those in Rajasthan in 1981, but by 2001 the two states had similar rates (Figure A3). In 2011, the literacy rates were 67 per cent and 71 per cent in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, respectively.

Figure A3: Literacy rates in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (1981–2011)



Source: Census data

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UNESCO Bangkok Office
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

Mom Luang Pin Malakul Centenary Building
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Klongtoey
Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Email: appeal.bgk@unesco.org
Website: www.unesco.org/bangkok
Tel: +66-2-3910577 Fax: +66-2-3910866