Fighting disparities through children’s education

India’s education system has made significant progress in recent years to achieve universal primary education. Yet over 8 million children are still out of school. Ensuring that all children are enrolled is just one of the key challenges being addressed by UNICEF’s programme in cooperation with the Government of India: lack of quality teaching and learning, persistent disparities among children from different backgrounds and a gender gap that prevents 3 million girls gaining access to education are critical issues that need immediate action to reach the unreached, transform policy into practice and achieve sustainable and more inclusive economic growth.

**DURATION:** 2015-2018

**CHALLENGE:** Access to Basic Services

**COUNTRY:** India

**PARTNER:** UNICEF

**CONTEXT**

India’s education system has made significant progress in recent years to achieve universal primary education, especially since the passing of the Government’s flagship Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. The Right to Education Act guarantees every child the fundamental right to eight years of quality education. Yet over 8 million children are still out of school, and this number jumps to 20 million when one includes students who enrol but do not attend classes, or drop out during the course of the year.

Ensuring that all children are in school is just one of the key challenges that need to be addressed: the quality of teaching and learning, the persistent disparities in children from different backgrounds, a gender gap that still prevents 3 million girls from gaining access to primary education - all require immediate action to reach the unreached, transform the national Right to Education Act into practice and achieve sustainable and more inclusive economic growth.
**ACTION**
UNICEF’s programme strengthens the Government’s and partners’ efforts to provide quality education and increase enrolment, retention, achievement and completion rates in primary education, with a special emphasis on girls and children from socially disadvantaged groups. The programme also aims to increase the transition rates from upper primary to secondary education. The programme follows a comprehensive approach that fully integrates national, state and district-level initiatives:

- At the national level: it mobilizes support to help make the Right to Education a reality, specifically focusing on policy advocacy initiatives and technical support for standards and guidelines development, planning, implementation and monitoring, including the organisation of high-level policy forums, the establishment of better data collection mechanisms, the harmonisation of methodology for the identification, tracking and measurement of out-of-school children, and the acceleration of multi-lingual education and mother-tongue instruction.
- At state and district level: it intervenes directly in 15 states and territories with the poorest developmental indicators to:
  1. Identify and track out-of-school children, ensuring their return to school through special training programmes.
  2. Promote child-centred and child-friendly schools (where children develop their full potential, interact with teachers, feel safe and secure and use creative tools for improved learning).
  3. Strengthen community-based school management committees and village education committees to ensure ownership and invest in children’s schooling.
  4. Help improve school infrastructures and water and sanitation facilities (that are gender sensitive and socially inclusive).

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

- Make primary and secondary education available for all segments of society, with a focus on children vulnerable to dropping out of school, and out-of-school children (girls in particular) belonging to socially-excluded groups. Measurable targets include reducing dropout rates by 8% at primary level and by 5% at upper primary level.
- Significant improvements in the quality and equity of education in 15 of the least developed states.

**LONG-TERM STRATEGY**
UNICEF supports the Government of India, in particular the Ministry of Human Resource Development, to increase its institutional capacity to implement the Right to Education Act and to ensure quality education with equity for all girls and boys. UNICEF works closely with various departments at state level, with district administration and with civil society, NGOs, professional bodies and academic institutes to advise, design and help shape constructive standards and practices, strengthening systems and networks, empowering communities and local groups and inspiring them to adopt appropriate behaviours and practices.