UNIT 5 EDUCATION

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- spell out the targets of SDG 4;
- establish link between India's education policy and SDG 4; and
- describe Indian context of education policy aiming to fulfil SDG 4 using select examples.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

When schools closed for the outbreak of the corona virus and went for online learning, teachers were not only worried about how they would make students learn without physical classrooms. They were apprehensive over the fact that majority of the learners did not have access to basic technology. The teaching community and policy makers perceived that the pandemic has not only widened but deepened the gap between the poor and rich (increased inequalities). As per a research study, a school teacher from Bihar reported that only 40 to 50 percent of the students have access to internet and laptops and the rest do not have access to digital devices/internet (UNESCO, 2021). In fact, the study found out that access to digital devices and reliable infrastructure continues to be the greatest challenge for students especially from poor families. Apart from digital divide, children of migrated parents, child labour, preference to support the education of boy siblings of the girl child etc. can be cited as reasons for disrupting learning.

In the past, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on Education had indicated that every child irrespective of gender would receive primary education by 2015. The MDG agenda also called for action to expand and improve early childhood care and education, increase of attendance percentage, and free and good quality of education for the children. For the young and old adults, the thrust areas included lifelong learning, adult literacy, gender equality, and provision for learning opportunities. To illustrate, MDG on Education was able to witness a slight increase in literacy from 87 percent in 2000 to 89 percent in 2012 among

15 to 24 year old learners. At a global level in 2018, as per the UN, nearly, 258 million children and youth were still out of school.

The new education goal propagated by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) made an attempt to reach out more comprehensively than the MDGs with an assertion that "all girls and boys should get complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education" (UN Statistics Division). However, with the temporary closure of schools owing to pandemic and children relying on caregivers at home, it has been stated that nearly 91 percent of poor children and youth were out of school, thus, halting years of progress. The United Nations Sustainable Development Report 2021 reports that the pandemic has wiped out twenty years of education gains. In this regard, United Nations intends to intensify its work with governments across the globe to prioritise education both as a policy and practice, so as to provide free access to school education to all-including the vulnerable and marginalised groups.

In this Unit, we shall discuss the goals and opportunities that are set by the SDG 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", in the context of Indian education policy and initiatives.

5.2 TARGETS OF SDG 4

At the global level, SDG 4 has ten associated 'targets' that can be applied in the context of any country. According to UN, the last three targets depend on the 'means of implementation.'

4.1 Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

4.3 Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education.

4.4 Let the youths and adults possessing relevant skills, technical, and vocational skills grow in number for employment, jobs, and entrepreneurship.

4.5 Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

4.6 Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

4.7 Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for

sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity, and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

4.a By 2030, Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States, and African countries, for enrolment in higher education; including vocational training, and information and communications technology, technical, engineering, and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.

4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island developing States.

5.3 NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to reflect the SDG 4 goals on education. For achieving the SDG targets, the Policy emphasises to reconfigure the entire education system. In anticipation to the growing demand for a skilled workforce, the NEP targets for a multidisciplinary orientation across sciences, social sciences, and humanities. For instance, the overwhelming impact of climate change, depletion of natural resources, natural and human made disasters, pandemic/epidemic etc. on economically and socially deprived sections of the society poses the need for multidisciplinary learning. The Policy points out that more than ever children must be provided ample scope to shift from less content to more learning. In other words, NEP seeks to develop certain skills in a learner like critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking, innovation etc. so as to become employment ready. Indeed, the NEP envisions for "equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background" so that none of the learners are excluded (National Education Policy, 2020). When we make education as inclusive as possible, it enables us to achieve an inclusive society where the members of the society would be able to self-organise and address the increasing development challenges of the nation. To achieve this, NEP seeks to establish multidisciplinary institutions. For instance, NEP aims to groove professionals in the emerging areas like Artificial Intelligence, big data analysis, nanotechnology, neuroscience etc. In fact, at the Under Graduate level, NEP seeks to apply the above mentioned emerging areas in the fields of health, environment, and sustainable living so that it enhances the employability of the learners.

The NEP seeks to achieve the unachieved targets of previous policies like equity and access to quality education. One of the milestones of elementary education in India is the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 through which every child between the age 6 to 14 are to be enrolled in school. Through this Act, education has been made as a child's fundamental right and denying this right would be an offence. While establishing the thrust areas to include the marginalised, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups, the NEP strives to apply education as the pathway to achieve equality, economic and social mobility. To strengthen this pathway, NEP looks upon to the teachers, as the core of the education reforms who would build the next generation of citizens. In fact, NEP is set to recruit the "best and brightest" people to enter the teaching profession at all levels. From this policy target of NEP, we can understand that India is on the road to achieve SDG4.c.

The prime goal of the schooling system is to ensure that children, especially, from low-income families attend and complete school education. For perspective, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Grades 6 to 8 was 91 percent, whereas for Grades 9 to 10 and 11 to 12 stands at 79.3 and 56.5 percent. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) states that in India nearly 3.22 crore children were out of school in the age group 6 to 17 years. This means the children, who were school drop outs, are to be brought back to school and make education free and accessible for all including the drop out children. Schemes like Samagra Shiksha have been envisaged to provide such educational opportunities for the underprivileged children. To keep track of those student drop outs to re-enter schools, the NEP suggests the idea of connecting schools with Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, state and district level functionaries and alike. At the ground level, NEP suggests counsellors, well trained, and qualified social workers from civil society organisations to connect with teachers, parents, and communities so as to motivate the drop out children to consistently attend school so as to improve their learning capacities.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

For reaching out to the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and those who are unable to attend a physical school, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes can be the effective pathway. In fact, NEP suggests strengthening and expanding school ODL programmes that are offered by National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools.

Vocational Education

The Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) stated that in India less than five percentage of young workforce (age group 19-24) have received formal vocational education. However, the percentage of young workforce who received vocational education in developed countries has been phenomenal *vis-à-vis* South Korea (96 percent), Germany (75 percent), and United States of America (52 percent). The above data reveals that there is a desperate need to accelerate

progress of vocational education in India. In line with SDG 4.4, NEP seeks to expose at least 50 percent of learners in school and higher education systems to vocational education by 2025.

Adult Education

With the aim to improve the adult education and literacy, a curriculum framework for adult education has been suggested by NEP with five inclusive programmes, such as:

a) foundational literacy and numeracy

b) critical life skills like financial literacy, digital literacy, healthcare and awareness, child care and education, family welfare

c) vocational skills

d) basic education

e) continuing education (holistic adult education courses in arts, sciences, culture, sports, recreation etc.)

The above mentioned discussion is in line with SDG 4.6: "ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy".

Having briefly discussed about NEP, the ensuing section makes an attempt to look into some of the initiatives of India through select examples.

5.4 INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES: SELECT EXAMPLES

Samagra Shiksha

With the aim to holistically handle school education from pre-nursery to Grade twelve, the Union Budget 2018-19 came up with the initiative called Samagra Shiksha in 2018. The purpose of this scheme is to improve the effectiveness of school in terms of providing equal opportunities without any discrimination and equitable learning outcomes. Equitable learning outcomes refers to that each student irrespective of gender, place of birth, caste, religion, community, disability etc. are ensured opportunity to achieve their fullest potential. For example, one of its thrust areas is to deliver education through digital technologies like smart classrooms, digital boards, Direct-to-home channels etc. Notably, Samagra Shiksha has subsumed previous schemes, such as, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE).

The scheme seeks to synchronise the implementation strategies and resources at the systems level *vis-à-vis* state, district, and sub-district levels. Indeed, the mandate is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality school education in line with SDG 4.1 and 4.5. The major objectives of the Scheme are to bridge social and gender gaps in school education, promote vocationalisation of education, play

based learning, smart classrooms, and support states in implementation of Right to Education Act, 2009. In order to reduce gender gaps, the scheme focuses on up gradation of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas from Class 6-8 and Class 6-12. In addition, it seeks to strengthen and upgrade the nodal agencies of teacher training like State Institutes of Education and District Institute of Education and Training (DIET). Above all, it has also made its commitment to comply with 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' Scheme.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched in 2015 to address the issues related to empowerment of girl child and women. Besides survival and protection of the girl child, one of the prominent objectives of the Scheme is to ensure her education and participation. For example, nation-wide campaigns have been organised at district level to re-enrol drop out girls at secondary level. For perspective, one of its intended targets is to train elected representatives/ grassroots functionaries in mobilising communities for girls' education. Indeed, the role of Department of School Education and Literacy is to activate School Management Committees (SMCs) so as to ensure universal enrolment, retention, and completion of secondary education for girls. BBBP also mobilises campaign for re-enrolment of girl drop outs in secondary schools and for girl child friendly schools. The Department is also involved in construction of girls' hostels for secondary and senior secondary schools. For achieving the intended outcomes, BBBP seeks to engage with various stakeholders, such as, district administration, schools, colleges, higher educational institutions, local Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Community-based Organisations (CBOs), and other civil society groups to organise sensitisation campaigns regarding the value of a girl child and enabling her to get educated.

Open School

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) was started in India in 1979 with a mission to offer continuing education from school stage to pre-degree stage. Specifically, it provides distance learners access to Open Basic Education (OBE), secondary education course, senior secondary education course, vocational education courses, and life enrichment programmes. With the objective to cater to the vocational needs of learners including differently-abled, NIOS offers nearly 103 skill based courses to the students of Grade X to XII, such as, cookery, Information Technology (IT), horticulture, agriculture, carpentry, home science, engineering, paramedical, yoga and wellness, tailoring etc.

> **Example 1:** Ms. Sudha was a housewife till her spouse passed away. Eventually, she was given the job of a police constable. As she had to raise her two children, Sudha accepted this offer. Although, a secondary school dropout, Sudha's children insisted her to join NIOS. She went on to complete her secondary education and the qualification enabled her to feel confident and empowered

From the above example we can infer that India is on the path to "eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education…" (SDG 4.5).

Example 2: Mr. Charles, a school drop out at the senior secondary level completed his senior secondary course at NIOS in humanities. After completion, he could enrol for Under Graduate programme and simultaneously pursued a certificate course in Electronics. Equipped with both academic and vocational skills, Charles was offered employment with a private organisation. He strongly asserts that the flexibility offered by NIOS had enabled his career development (NIOS success stories).

From the above examples, we can infer that the Ministry of Education through NIOS intends to fulfil SDG 4.3: "substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship" and SDG 4.4: '…equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education....'

Pre-Matric Scholarship

Pre-Matric scholarship for minority students was launched in 2006 to encourage parents from minority communities to send their children to schools and enable them to support their children to complete school education. Indeed the objective of the scheme is to 'empower through education'. Scholarships are awarded to minority students who have secured not less than 50 percent in their final exam and whose parents' annual income does not exceed Rs. 1 lakh. For perspective, during the year 2017-20, nearly, 3000004 pre-matric scholarships have been distributed across India (Minority Affairs Website).

Job Readiness through Coaching Classes

With the purpose to prepare economically backward students for competitive exams, especially, from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 'Free Coaching Scheme for SC and OBC Students' was launched in 2016. Its objective is to enable them to secure an appropriate job either in public or private sector. To illustrate, coaching classes are being held for Group A and B examinations, Staff Selection Commission (SSC), bank examinations, engineering and medical entrance examinations, etc.

Persons with Disabilities (PwD)

According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, it is stated that government and local authorities need to ensure that every child with benchmark disability is able to access free education up to eighteen years in an appropriate environment. The Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, provisions that children with benchmark disability between the age group six to eighteen years can opt for their schools *vis-à-vis* neighbourhood school or a special school. Besides providing scholarships for school students with

disabilities, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities also provides scholarships for the higher education learners. For example, the scholarship 'Top Class Education' benefits the aspiring diploma/graduate/post graduate students in the institutes of excellence, as notified by the concerned authorities. The Scholarship for Top Class Education was started in 2015-16. In addition, 50 percent of the total scholarships (in pre-matric, and top class education category) have been reserved for women students with disabilities. In case the number of girl/women students do not adequately avail the scholarships, the unutilised scholarships can be reallocated for eligible male students with disabilities.

Example 1:

Under the Scholarship for Top Class Education, the Department reimburses the tuition fees of up to Rs. 2 lakh per annum. Based on the type of disabilities, special allowances of Rs. 2000 per month can be availed by the learners. Also, the learner with disability can be reimbursed (up to Rs. 30000) for purchasing his/her aids and assistive devices. For instance, for visually challenged learners, assistive devices include Braille typewriter, laptop and screen reading software, talk software for mobile phone accessibility, etc.

Example 2:

To prepare the PwD for competitive examinations either for recruitment or entrance examinations, the Department offers 'Free Coaching for Persons with Disabilities'. For example, recruitment examinations conducted by Union Public Service Commission's Group A/B examinations, Staff Selection Commission (SSC), bank examinations or entrance examinations for securing admissions to higher education courses like engineering and medical entrance examinations, law, management, etc. Further, Free Coaching has been implemented through reputed coaching institutions that are run by state/central governments, higher educational institutions, registered private institutions etc. Under the scheme, fee component would be directly released to the coaching institute where the student with disability has been coached.

From the above discussion it can be inferred that the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities through various entities intends to achieve SDG 4.5: '…ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities...'

ACITIVITY

Read some of the newspaper/magazine articles about the issues and concerns that are faced by students with disabilities. After reading the articles, discuss their plight with your family and friends.

5.5 CONCLUSION

According to United Nations, "Education helps reduce inequalities and reach gender equality and is crucial to fostering tolerance and more peaceful societies." The significance of education can be best understood through the words of our former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi: "Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances". From the above, it can be inferred that if a child is educated, it means s/he would become an empowered adult to decide about their employment, family, and other choices of life etc. In the absence of such empowerment opportunities it would inhibit socioeconomic mobility and it would be difficult to reduce inequalities. In line with SDG 4, the Indian government has committed itself in ensuring equitable access to education for all, including the socially and economically deprived sections of the population.

5.6 REFERENCES

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