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Improving India's Performance in SDG-4: Some Observations and Policy Lessons for Addressing Education Inequality

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Abstract

The study traces the progress of states and union territories of India in the Goal 4 of SDG, ensuring quality education for all, for the years 2018 to 2023-24 and focusses on NFHS-5 period for further analysis. It uses database from secondary sources- NITI Aayog's SDG India Index Reports, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) Reports; Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2022, and UDISE Plus Report (GoI, 2021). It is found that there are huge disparities in schooling outcomes, in terms of literacy, enrolment, dropout and grade-adequate learning proficiency, across states and UTs. Economic status, social background, physical and human infrastructure in schools together with child health and women empowerment are found to impact education outcomes. The policy must focus on quality of education as measured by achievement of desired learning proficiency and years of completed education as objectives and not mere literacy; and make use of public campaigns and community engagement programmes to overcome the barriers related to mindsets that generate any biases related to gender, caste, and religion. Since economic status is an important factor and lack of adequate financial resources are found to dampen schooling outcomes, policies for improving household income and reduced costs of education will be needed to uplift education outcomes.

Keywords: SDG-4, Education, Literacy, Learning outcomes, Dropout, School Quality, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Education, a crucial component of human capital, is indispensable for economic growth, economic development as well as social progress. The importance of education is highlighted in the global policy sphere by its inclusion as one of the seventeen Sustainable Development goals (SDG), Goal 4 - "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"¹.

The vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047', transforming India into a developed country within a century after its independence, encompasses development in its truly comprehensive and sustainable sense with its path converging with the 17 SDGs adopted by UN member nations under 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' in 2015. Alongside the focus on faster economic growth, India aims to ensure adequate nutrition, health, education, and work opportunities for all sections of people without any discrimination and prejudices. In addition to providing a decent and dignified life to its people, the environmental issues are also on the priority list. Finland, Sweden, and Denmark are among the top

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