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Selected Topics in Child Well-being in India: A Review of Policies, Programmes and Services



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1. Introduction

Child poverty is now widely considered to be both a distinct issue and part of poverty in general (Fajth and Holland 2007: 8-10). In Andhra Pradesh, increased attention to children's issues has been reflected in several recent initiatives, including the Andhra Pradesh State Action Plan for Children (2007-2010), which sets out a state plan for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Hindi for 'Education for All'); and numerous programmes aimed at decreasing child poverty and social inequality more generally. Andhra Pradesh is India's fifth largest state with a population of about 75.7 million in 2001 (Census 2001). Around one third of the population is under the age of 14; the median age is around 25 years old. Children aged 0 to 6 number around 158 million and account for approximately 15.2 per cent of the population (*ibid*). The size and rapid expansion of this age group highlights the crucial importance of children within the country and the need for their rights and interests to be an integral consideration within policy formation.

An in-depth exploration of child poverty is being undertaken by Young Lives, a long-term international research project funded by the Department for International Development (DFID). The study involves tracking the lives of 12,000 children growing up in four developing countries over 15 years: Ethiopia, the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, Peru and Vietnam. Two cohorts of children – a Younger Cohort who were born in 2001-2 and an Older Cohort born in 1994-5 – are being followed, with the younger children being tracked from infancy to their mid-teens and the older children through into adulthood, when some will become parents themselves.

A variety of methods are used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the individual, household and community level. Regular questionnaire-based surveys of all the children and their carers are carried out on a triennial basis, together with more in-depth research using participatory methods with selected children. This is complemented by interviews, group work and case studies with the children, their parents, teachers, community representatives and others. The focus is not only on the children's material and social circumstances, but also their perspectives on their lives and aspirations for the future, set against the environmental and social realities of their communities. The aim of the project is to gain a deeper understanding of the intergenerational transmission of poverty, how families on the margins move in and out of poverty, and the policies that can make a real difference to their lives. It also aims to inform the development and implementation of policies and practices that will reduce childhood poverty.

The purpose of this report is to present a general context for the Young Lives qualitative research being undertaken in Andhra Pradesh on the key themes of child well-being, childhood transitions and children's experiences of services and programmes. Children's well-being is understood in multi-dimensional terms and includes aspects relating to health, economic conditions, educational opportunities, and relationships with family members, peers and others. Other definitions of well-being have highlighted children's freedom from risks such as trafficking, addiction and discrimination, and access to the basic things that one needs to live healthily, safely and happily (UNICEF 2007). The concept of 'transitions' points to critical life-course changes. In childhood, these may include changes related to schooling, work, residence and relationships, among many others. Managing transitions in contexts of poverty and inequality may be a challenge for children and their families.

The report provides an overview of existing literature on a selection of topics relating to services for the welfare of children in India and in Andhra Pradesh in particular. It also explores some of the issues affecting children, including access to and quality of education; transitions, such as beginning school and the onset of puberty; the factors driving child labour as well as the impact it has and attempts to regulate it; nutrition; discrimination and social exclusion, especially in relation to gender and scheduled caste or tribe membership; and migration. Policies implemented to address these issues are also examined. Rather than a detailed policy analysis, this report provides a broad overview of some of the issues which are key to improving our understanding of child poverty in this context and for guiding possible research questions.

2. The Indian government's commitment to the welfare of children

The Government of India (GOI) is committed to ensuring the rights, protection and development of children in the country. To achieve this goal, it has enacted various legislations and has been implementing policies and programmes to improve the status of children and thereby improve their well-being. These include the National Policy for Children, 1974; National Policy on Education, 1986; National Policy on Child Labour, 1987; National Nutrition Policy, 1993; National Health Policy, 2002; National Charter for Children, 2004; National Plan of Action for Children, 2005; The Commission for the Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005; The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1987; Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994; Persons with Disabilities (Equal Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 2000; Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000; and the Commission for Protection of the Rights of the Child Act, 2005.

India is a signatory to a number of international instruments and declarations pertaining to the rights of children to protection, security and dignity. It acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) in 1992, reaffirming its earlier acceptance of the 1959 UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and thus on paper appears fully committed to implementing all the provisions of the UN CRC. The UN CRC influenced India's perspective considerably during the decade 1990-2000 and continues to do so. 'A World Fit for Children', the outcome document of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (May 2002) seeks to globally further the cause of child development, to which India is committed. India, as a signatory to the Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in March 1990 in Jomtien, is committed to the EFA goals, which include expansion of early childhood care and development. In 2005, the Government of India accepted the two optional protocols of the UN CRC, which address the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. India is strengthening its national policy and measures to protect children from these dangerous forms of violence and exploitation. It is also a signatory to the International Conventions on Civil and Political Rights and to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (which are a part of the International Bill of human rights along with Universal Declaration of human rights) which apply to the human rights of both children and adults. The Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is also applicable to girls under 18 years of age, as is the SAARC Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

3. Children and India's five-year plans

The Government of India's Planning Commission was established in 1950. It aimed to secure an adequate livelihood for all citizens and to ensure an equitable distribution of economic wealth (Planning Commission 1951). Since 1951, there have been 11 five-year plans (including the current plan 2007-12) which have adopted various policies and programmes to encourage economic and social development in India.¹

Prior to the fifth Five-Year Plan, the Government of India's focus was on child welfare through the promotion of basic minimum services for children. This culminated in the adoption of National Policy for children in 1974. The fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) saw a shift of focus from welfare to development and the integration and coordination of services after the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) 1975.

The sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) strengthened child welfare and development. It led to an expansion and enrichment of child development services through a variety of programmes. The focus of the eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97) shifted to human development through advocacy, mobilisation and community empowerment. The Government of India declared its commitment to every child in the ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002). The tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) advocated the right of children to participation. The draft report prepared by the Planning Commission for the eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) stated that the 'development of the child is at the centre of the plan'. While continuing the rights-based approach to child development, the plan recognises the importance of a holistic approach, focusing both on outcomes and indicators for child development, as well as political and economic trends and governance issues (Infochange 2007).

4. Educational and health services for children

This section outlines national-level educational and health services for children in India, demonstrating how these have changed over time. It starts by addressing early childhood care, including the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched in 1974. It also describes the Government of India's efforts to expand and improve primary schooling throughout the country, including attempts to improve access for socially excluded groups, such as migrant families and members of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups. The section also examines private and NGO child welfare, health and education initiatives. It concludes by presenting the specific situation in Andhra Pradesh.

¹ See www.planningcommission.gov.in

4.1 Early Childhood Care and Education services (ECCE)

In India, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), along with elementary education, has been assuming increasing importance over the past two decades. Traditionally, early care and education of children has taken place in an informal context within the family, largely through grandmothers' caring practices, stories and traditional infant games handed over from one generation to the next. With growing urbanisation and an increase in women's participation in the work force across the country, there have been tremendous changes in social structures and practices in the last few decades. With the emergence of nuclear families, the care of children is now often left to paid surrogate caregivers amongst higher income families, while in lower income families it is elder siblings (very often female children) who take on this responsibility. These changes in social structure laid the seeds for the introduction of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007: 3). ECCE is an umbrella term which covers several early childhood programmes, described below.

The well-being of children has been an integral part of India's development planning since 1951, when India became a republic. A review of India's five-year plans reveals that ECCE came under the purview of voluntary sectors in the first two five-year plans; it was only in the third Five-Year plan (1961-1966), following the recommendations of the Ganga Saran Committee, that it came under the purview of the government. Moreover, early ECCE programmes focused only on pre-school education and did not have any health or nutrition components. The fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-1979) saw a clear shift in approach from child welfare to development. This shift culminated in the declaration of the National Policy for Children in 1974, with a conceptual move towards Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for children. Since then, as we have seen, successive five-year plans have acknowledged the first six years of life as critical and reaffirmed the importance of the development of early childhood services as an investment in human resource development (Mohite and Bhatt 2008: 309).

4.2 ECCE programmes in India

The following table provides a summary of government initiatives implemented under ECCE.

Table 1. *A summary of ECCE services*

Date	Programme	Programme Services and Aims
1974	Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and nursing mothers belonging to the poorest families and those living in disadvantaged areas, such as backward rural areas, tribal areas and urban slums • Provides supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-ups and referrals • Provides pre-school education for children aged 3-6 • Provides health and nutrition care for mothers • Runs child-care centres (<i>anganwadi</i>)² –approximately 700,000 in almost every administrative block in the country

² An *anganwadi*, or courtyard garden, is an informal childcare centre run in the courtyard of any village home. The *anganwadi* worker is usually a local woman who receives a small honorarium for the services she provides to the community. She is assisted by a helper, again a local woman, who is responsible for fetching children from their homes (Mohite and Bhatt 2008).

Date	Programme	Programme Services and Aims
1994-2007	District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed to provide primary school access to all children, improve retention rates, increase girls' attendance, increase linkage between pre-school and primary, and raise achievement levels Superseded by SSA (see below)
2000	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides limited 'innovations grants' for ECCE in each district Aims for all 6-14 year olds to be in school by 2005, complete five years of primary education by 2005 and eight years of schooling by 2010 Aims to achieve Satisfactory Quality in elementary education with emphasis on education for life Aimed to bridge all gender and social gaps at primary level by 2007 and elementary level by 2010 Aims to achieve universal retention by 2010
2003	National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A component of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (above) Targets 'hard to reach' girls, especially those not in school Provides a 'model school' in every cluster Mobilises and supervises female school enrolment Trains teachers in gender sensitisation Provides gender sensitive learning materials Provides materials and services such as escorts, textbooks and uniforms
2006	Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides crèches for the children of working or ailing mothers, including sleeping facilities, health care, supplementary nutrition, immunisation, pre-school education, etc.

4.3 Voluntary/NGO initiatives

ECCE services are also provided by voluntary and non-governmental organisations for children living in socially and economically disadvantaged conditions. Such organisations are funded by the government, national and international agencies, and work primarily with communities in difficult circumstances, such as tribal groups, migrants and rural children in specific contexts. Services provided include crèches and ECCE centres which utilise local resources. Some NGOs run mobile crèches that move along with the construction labour from one site to another. In addition, several religious groups run pre-schools, some of which are fairly competitive with pre-schools in the private sector (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007).

For instance, the Deccan Development Society (DDS) is a grass roots organisation working in about 75 villages in the Medak District of Andhra Pradesh. It runs *balawadis* (day care centres) to take care of the young children of the tribal women who are members of this society.³ The effectiveness of programmes run by NGOs/voluntary agencies is not systematically evaluated, but children who attend them are likely to continue to primary school and parents generally have a positive opinion about their outcomes (Swaminathan 1998).

³ See www.ddsindia.com

4.4 Private initiatives

ECCE also includes several fee-charging/profit-making initiatives. While the public-sponsored ICDS cater to children from disadvantaged communities, private initiatives are targeted towards those from economically better-off families. These initiatives include nurseries and pre-primary classes in private schools. This type of pre-schooling is over-subscribed and the competition for spaces in the lead schools is intense, with as many as 300 children competing for a single opening (Prochner 2002). There is a rush for English-medium schools, and even parents from low-income communities in urban areas seek private pre-schools for their children once they have reached the age of 4 years (M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation 2000).

5. Elementary education in India

Universal elementary education has been a national policy goal in India since independence in 1947. It was first legally set out in Article 45 of the Indian Constitution (1950), which obliged the state 'to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years'. In addition, the ongoing series of five-year plans for national development and three National Policies on Education (1968, 1986 and 1992) enshrine commitments to the universalisation of education and provide legal, administrative and financial frameworks for the state (Blum and Divan 2007: 8).

The first comprehensive National Policy on Education was passed in 1968, and was based on the recommendations of the Education Commission (also known as the Kothari Commission 1964-1966), which established the foundations of a common structure for formal education and a national curriculum framework. It also aimed 'to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen national integration. It laid stress on the need for a radical reconstruction of the education system, to improve its quality at all stages, and gave much greater attention to science and technology, the cultivation of moral values and a closer relation between education and the life of the people' (GOI 1992: 2, cited in Blum and Divan 2007: 8-9).

The later revisions to the National Policies on Education conducted in 1986 and 1992 focused on the need to improve the school environment, the availability of basic facilities, improving learning outcomes and encouraging equity and quality in primary teaching and learning.

5.1 Student enrolment

In India, 19 per cent of children do not enrol in school, whilst for every 100 who do enrol, 70 drop out by the time they reach secondary level. Sixty-six per cent of children who drop out of school are girls. Sixty-five per cent of girls are married by the age of 18 and become mothers soon after (Infochange 2007).

In Andhra Pradesh, around half of all schools have a student body of less than fifty. However, the average primary school enrolment is 87 students (DISE 2006). In 2004-05, just over 83 per cent of schools in the state were located in rural areas, and accounted for 71 per cent of total student enrolment (11,122,940 students) (DISE 2007a and 2007b).

The Department of School Education provides enrolment data that indicate that there has been a continuous increase in the number of children enrolled in both primary and upper primary schools. There were 2.5 million children enrolled in 1957 and about 8.5 million in 2006, indicating a 3.3-fold increase. However, it is important to note that these figures do not necessarily reflect actual attendance and that not all enrolled children will remain in school, particularly as Andhra Pradesh is regarded as a state with high drop-out and low retention rates. According to the District Information on School Education (DISE) source, the drop-out rate was around 10.8 per cent for the year 2005-06. However, with the implementation of the midday meal scheme, retention rates have increased (Human Development Report 2007).

There is also a gender gap in enrolment rates. According to Census 2001, nearly 78 per cent of children aged between 6 and 14 years were enrolled in schools in Andhra Pradesh. The enrolment figures for boys and girls are about 81.24 and 74.30 per cent respectively. It may be noted that there are considerable variations in gender disparities among districts.

5.2 Access

Andhra Pradesh rates far better than the average Indian state in respect to physical access to primary schools. Ninety per cent of the population has access to primary schools (i.e., up to 5th grade) within their locality. However, the availability of primary schools for children in areas with a very small population (of, say, below 500) is not sufficient. Incidentally, these areas are predominantly comprised of SC and ST inhabitants. This has led to the exclusion of these children from mainstream education, particularly for ST children. Meanwhile, only 43 per cent of the population has access to upper primary schools (i.e., up to 7th grade) within their locality. Of these, 37 per cent have an upper primary school within the range of 3km while 20 per cent have to walk more than 3km to reach the nearest school (Human Development Report 2007).

5.3 Quality

5.3.1 Infrastructure

Factors affecting the quality of schooling are the frequent absenteeism of teachers and lack of facilities, such as pucca buildings (i.e., permanent buildings made of cement and bricks), blackboards, drinking water, playgrounds and toilets. These deficiencies have an adverse impact on attracting children to school, as well as on their experiences of school. Many classrooms are in poor condition and many schools lack a drinking water supply and adequate sanitary facilities (Human Development Report 2007: 108).

The Seventh All-India Educational Survey (2002) reported that about 4,000 primary schools in Andhra Pradesh were run outside. This represents around 7 per cent of all primary schools (61,167). Further, about 17 per cent of primary schools and 10 per cent of upper primary schools did not have a pucca building. According to DISE 2006, there was only one classroom in about 22,000 primary schools, or 33 per cent of the total. The availability of drinking water in schools is very poor, and about 28 per cent of primary and 11 per cent of upper primary schools did not provide drinking water. About 47 per cent of primary schools did not have any kind of toilets. More than 70 per cent of the schools did not have separate facilities for boys and girls (Human Development Report, Andhra Pradesh 2007: 108).

5.3.2 *Teacher-related factors*

The Seventh All-India Educational Survey (2002) reported that 10 per cent of primary schools in Andhra Pradesh had a single teacher and another 42 per cent had only two teachers. The latest DISE data for 2006 indicates that the percentage of 'single teacher' schools is in fact higher, at around 12 per cent, and that drop-out rates are particularly high in such schools. However, the situation has improved in recent times, as there has been large-scale recruitment of teachers given external aid and central assistance under different programmes. Andhra Pradesh has a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:24 in primary schools, which is one of the lowest among Indian states (DISE 2006).

In Andhra Pradesh, the gender of teaching staff is also an important issue. Lack of female teachers is one of the reasons for the non-attendance of many girls, especially as they approach adolescence. As girls' enrolment continues to be a serious concern in India, this is an area which deserves more attention. The DISE (2006) data show that there are about 18,000 primary and another 2,000 upper primary schools in the state in which there are at least two teachers, but where neither is a woman.

5.3.3 *Growing demand for private schools*

The growing awareness of the value of education, coupled with rising expectations from parents about the quality of schooling and the general feeling that public schools are not offering good quality education, has led to an increasing demand for private schools. In Andhra Pradesh, the number of such schools and enrolment in them has been increasing rapidly. In 2005, there were 62,000 primary and 17,000 upper primary schools, accounting for 15 per cent of the total number of schools and representing 30 per cent of total enrolment. Such schools cater to a substantial section of the primary school-going population in rural India, particularly where the public system is dysfunctional (PROBE Team 1999; De et al. 2001; Tooley and Dixon 2003; and Mehta 2005). According to Muralidharan and Kremer (2006), two major attractions of private schools are the fact that they start teaching English early and that a greater amount of teaching is given.

Table 2: *Quality improvement initiatives under SSA aimed at improving the educational services provided to children in Andhra Pradesh*

Date	Programme	Programme Services and Aims
2005-06	<i>Badibaata</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A component of <i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i> (see Table 1) • Aims to provide education to children not in school, particularly those who are 'hard to reach' • Holds awareness-raising rallies and processions • Identifies and targets activities towards households with children engaged in child labour • Admits children with no formal education to Residential Bridge Courses • Mainstreams children with some formal education back into school
2005-06	Children's Language Improvement Programme (CLIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to improve basic literacy and numeracy among children at the elementary stage (1st to 5th grade) • Provides an accelerated learning programme for the enhancement of achievement levels in language and mathematics • Introduction of a special reading period in school • Strengthening school library with children's literature • Grading of classrooms and schools on the basis of children's performance

Date	Programme	Programme Services and Aims
2006-07	Children's Learning Acceleration Programme for Sustainability (CLAPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to accelerate children's learning in various areas, focusing on expected learning outcomes at primary school level (i.e., 1st to 5th grade) • Focuses on learning processes involved in development of various subject competencies (languages, maths, science and social studies) • Also focuses on capacity building of teachers with on-job support • Appropriate literature on teaching and learning is supplied to teachers and students • Monthly review at school, mandal, district and state levels (ssa.ap.nic.in/C_CLAPS_2006_07.pdf)
	School on Boat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses those children from fishing communities identified as the 'most difficult to reach' at Uppalanka Mondri, Kakinada, East Godavari • An innovative programme on a beautifully decorated boat, provided with play materials where children play, listen to stories, sing local songs and dance • A motivator-cum-instructor collects children who are found helping their parents on their boats (<i>donelu</i>) • Two motivators from the local fishing community are appointed to teach the children the basics of letters and numbers for a few hours a day • After three months of orientation, a group of 'readied' children are enrolled in a nearby Residential Bridge Course Camp. Textbooks, note books, clothes and other facilities are provided
2006-07	Other Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential bridge course camps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For children affected with HIV/AIDS • Alternative schooling at Brick Kilns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For children of seasonal migrant workers who migrate along with their families from Bolangir, Naupada and Kalahandi Districts in Orissa to the Brick Kilns located in the Ranga Reddy, Medak and Nalgonda districts of Andhra Pradesh • The SSA in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, with an NGO called Action Aid, provides assistance in the establishment and running of residential and non-residential bridge courses to prevent the children of these migrants being pushed into child labour • The children enrolled in the NRBCs/RBCs are provided with an eligibility certificate to enable them to be admitted in the next class back home • Door Step Schools for children of construction labour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and the adjoining district of Ranga Reddy where migrant labour is used at construction sites • Initially a survey of major construction sites is taken up to identify the number of children aged 6-14 years • Contractors and site owners are contacted to sensitise them to the importance of education for the identified children • With the permission of the contractors and site owners, an alternative education centre is established • Some of these children are mainstreamed in nearby schools. Parents who migrate with their children are again encouraged to continue their children's education at the migration destination • Drive against Domestic Child Labour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door to door survey conducted to identify domestic child labour in Vijayawada City, Andhra Pradesh • Sensitisation of parents and employers on the issue • Provides psychological rehabilitation to the released children. (http://ssa.ap.nic.in/innovation_notes.pdf)

6. Child nutrition

Malnutrition in pre-school children remains a significant problem in India, despite many efforts to redress the issue. These have included the implementation of the ICDS, along with global efforts to improve Maternal and Child Health (MCH) through Primary Health Care (PHC). A substantial proportion of India's annual child deaths are still the result of malnutrition, and a large section of the child population suffers from protein deficiency (Gopalan et al. 2002). The reality is that 40 per cent of child malnutrition in the developing world is in India.

Tribal pre-school children are particularly affected by malnutrition. Das Gupta et al. (2005), in their study on improving child nutrition outcomes in India, found that being underweight was most prevalent amongst girls in the poorest STs, whilst stunting mainly affected girls in all lower socio-economic groups. Meanwhile, Mitra et al. (2007) conducted a cross-sectional survey among the Gond and Kavar pre-school children of Chattisgarh, comparing them to other ST and SC children of the same area. The study revealed a lower consumption of several macro- and micro-nutrients than the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for India, which was reflected in the high prevalence of nutritional deficiencies among the children. Findings also revealed that, irrespective of sex, Gond pre-school children suffered more malnutrition than Kanwar, and that both suffered more malnutrition than the Brahmin pre-school children of central India. The authors believe that insufficient nutrition may be due to mothers' illiteracy, lack of awareness and other socio-economic and social factors.

Further evidence linking child nutrition to maternal education comes from Sharma and Nagar (2006). In their study, they aimed to provide educational intervention to mothers on childcare and nutrition. All mothers were first pre-tested regarding their knowledge on nursing, neonatal and infant care, health, child growth, behaviour and nutrition. Intervention consisted of educating mothers in the experimental group for a period of one-and-a-half years. All the mothers were then post-tested on the above aspects. Significant differences were seen in all aspects of childcare and nutrition between the experimental group mothers and control group mothers. Likewise, a study by Prinja et al. (2008) on the functional integration of *anganwadi* and health workers in the Rohtak district of north India concluded that problems of under-nutrition continued to persist where there was low maternal involvement.

Although several initiatives have been introduced to reduce the prevalence of child malnutrition, the effectiveness of these has been patchy. Gragnolati et al. (2005) found that, although the ICDS appears to be well-designed and well-placed to address the multidimensional causes of malnutrition in India, it suffers from a disjunction between its aims and its actual implementation. This prevents it from reaching its potential, and means that it faces substantial operational challenges and suffers from a lack of high-level commitment, an issue which needs immediate attention. However, Trivedi et al. (1995) found that ICDS services were underused by the community in Sanwer, Madhya Pradesh, perhaps accounting for the scheme's failure to achieve its objectives. More positively, Vaid and Vaid (2005) in their study on the nutritional status of ICDS and non-ICDS children in the Resham Ghar colony of Jammu city (Jammu and Kashmir States) found that children who attended the *anganwadi* centres had good health and an adequate dietary intake compared to those who did not attend.

Malhotra and Jain Passi (2007) conducted a study to assess the diet quality and nutritional status of 209 rural adolescent girls under the *Kishori Shakti Yojana* (KSY) scheme in north India. The KSY scheme, a component of the ICDS programme implemented by the Ministry

of Women and Child Development, aimed to improve the development, nutrition, health status, literacy, numeracy and vocational skills of girls aged 11-18 years. Results revealed a high incidence of thinness, stunting, under-nutrition and inadequate energy/micronutrient intake, leading the authors to conclude that sustained efforts are needed to strengthen the scheme and to improve its field level implementation.

6.1 Midday Meal scheme

The Midday Meal scheme provides all children attending primary classes in government schools a cooked meal of no less than 300 calories and eight to 12 grammes of protein each school day. Historically, the scheme was first informally and partially launched in the *adi dravida* (indigenous people of Dravida land) community schools of Tamil Nadu in 1956 as the 'poor feeding' programme. It was then implemented on a state-wide basis in 1982 in a phased manner in pre-schools and primary schools in the rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu. Since then, Tamil Nadu has become one of the most literate states in the country, with an adult literacy rate of 73.5 per cent (Parikh and Yasmeen 2004). In addition, primary school enrolment rates shot up from 5.04 million in 1985-86 to 6.59 million in 2002-03. Furthermore, upper primary school drop-out rates decreased from 24 per cent to 13.85 per cent during the same period (Parikh and Yasmeen 2004).

The Midday Meal scheme was officially implemented at national level in 1995, though most states did not participate until after the Supreme Court Order of 2002. The aim of the programme was to increase the participation of children in primary classes in government, local body and government-aided schools, and to improve their nutritional status. This was later extended to cover children in Education Guarantee Schemes and alternative schools. Currently the cost per child is Rs. 2 (less than two pence) per day, of which Rs. 0.5 is borne by the state Government and the rest by the central Government. This provides 450 calories and 12 grammes of protein per child, against the 300 calories and eight grammes of protein stipulated earlier. According to the Annual Report of the GOI (2007b), around 106 million children benefited from the Scheme in 2003-04. Andhra Pradesh started providing midday meals in 2003 to children in all primary and upper primary schools, local body schools, aided schools, alternative innovative education centres and *Madrassas* (schools for learning the Arabic language).

Malnutrition in children is often cited as an important contributing factor to the high morbidity and mortality rates among children in developing countries. Malnourished children are more likely to grow into malnourished adults, and face a heightened risk of disease and death. Inadequate or inappropriate food intake and repeated episodes of infectious disease adversely affect children's nutrition status. It is reported that one in every eleven children dies in the first five years of life due to malnutrition (Antony and Laxmaiah 2008). Gragnolati et al. (2006) and Shiva Kumar (2007) opine that economic growth alone is insufficient to bring about significant reductions in the prevalence of malnourishment among children. The provision of adequate facilities for children to realise their full potential in both mental and physical development is also necessary to achieve this end (Nair 2007).

In a country in which poverty and malnutrition are continuing problems, the provision of free school meals is a powerful incentive for increasing school participation. These meals may improve children's nutritional status and also indirectly lead to improved levels of learning (Jacoby 2002; Afridi 2005; Afridi 2007; Drèze and Goyal 2003; Vermeersch 2004; and Kremer and Vermeersch 2004). According to Singh (2008), most of India's population depends on agriculture for their livelihood and as such are subject to agricultural shocks. Drought is one of the most prominent forms of shock in many parts of India, including

Andhra Pradesh, and can lead to a decline in household food availability and consequent worsening of child nutrition and health. School meals can therefore cushion children from such shocks and reduce the intra-seasonal variability of their food intake (Singh 2008).

A study conducted by Drèze and Goyal (2003) at the Centre for Equity Studies, Delhi School of Economics, clearly indicated the nexus between improved school enrolment and retention and free midday meals. A study of 81 schools in which free meals were introduced in 2001 showed a 15 per cent increase in first grade¹ enrolment within the year. Particularly impressive jumps were made in female enrolment in Chattisgarh (17 per cent) and Rajasthan (29 per cent) (Parikh and Yasmeen 2004).

State governments have also realised the need to involve India's massive number of NGOs. For instance, the Naandi Foundation, an NGO in Andhra Pradesh, has created the largest central kitchen at Hyderabad, through which the midday meal is supplied to 1,01,394 children in 891 schools in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The same NGO also provides food to 35,734 children in 111 schools in the Visakapatnam district, where the Bhagavathula Charitable trust further provides for 75,000 children in 70 schools. Meanwhile, ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) provides a midday meal to 8,500 children in 65 schools in Tirupati rural and urban areas, while a philanthropist provides a midday meal to 3,825 children in 27 schools in Tadipatri rural and urban areas in the Anathapur district.⁴ Drèze and Goyal (2003) report full implementation of the scheme in 2003, while Thorat and Lee (2005) and Pratham (2007) report 98 per cent coverage in the government schools in Andhra Pradesh during the periods of their studies.

The United Progressive Alliance Government's cooked Midday Meal covers around 12 million children in over 95,000 schools. Since 2006, provisions have been made to construct kitchens-cum-stores in about 6 million primary schools and to provide financial support for cooking/kitchen devices (such as kitchenware or required utensils) in a phased manner. The plan increased more than five fold to Rs.7,324 million in 2007-08, and a move to extend the programme to upper primary levels in 3,427 economically backward blocks has been commenced (Report to the People 2004-2008).

Quite clearly, the introduction of nutritious, good quality, free midday meals for children in all government schools is a long overdue and urgent necessity. Though there is some scepticism about the cost benefits of the scheme and the pressures involved in implementing such a massive programme while maintaining minimum quality standards, there is strong national support for the Midday Meal programme.

4 See pib.nic.in/archieve/flagship/pf_mdm1.pdf

7. Education and excluded groups of children

7.1 Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)

The Government of India supports EFA goals and, as has already been described, prioritises education as one of the key programmatic foci for children. It is therefore important to identify groups of children who are excluded from education, and to recognise the impacts this may have on their well-being and life trajectories, as well as on the reproduction of social inequalities more generally. In its division of society into endogamous groups, arranged in strict hierarchical order, the caste system remains a major source of inequality in India (Reddy 2004). It remains so despite its abolition under the Indian constitution in 1950.

SCs and STs, who occupy the lowest rungs of the caste system and are among the most socially and educationally disadvantaged groups in India, refer to the communities listed in the Government Schedule as 'outcasts' and 'tribals', respectively. SCs have also been referred to as 'untouchables' by Hindu caste society and as 'Harijans' (children of God), a term popularised by Mahatma Gandhi which was rejected later as being derogatory and paternalistic by the SCs themselves. The term *dalit* (meaning broken, oppressed, downtrodden) emerged from within the SC community to highlight their oppressed status and establish their unique identity and consciousness as 'Other' within Hindu society. The caste-based ideology of hereditary occupations prescribes the most menial and lowly of occupations to SC groups, wherein a majority of SC individuals work as landless agricultural labourers or are engaged in what is considered 'coolie' work. While SCs have traditionally been denied education, even those with education have experienced very limited social mobility due to caste-based opposition to their occupational mobility (Sedwal and Kamat 2008: 1).

STs are similarly distinct from mainstream Hindu society, with their own lifestyles, languages and cultural practices. According to Vinoba:

The Indian Constitution assigns special status to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Traditionally referred to as adivasis, vanbasis, tribes, or tribals, STs constitute about 8 per cent of the Indian population. There are 573 Scheduled Tribes living in different parts of the country, having their own languages, which are different from the one mostly spoken in the State where they live. (Vinoba 2003: 2)

There are numerous tribal communities in India, mostly living in forested, hilly and mountainous areas in a close relationship with nature that isolates them from mainstream Indian society. Though this has afforded them a measure of cultural autonomy and economic independence, modernisation and accumulative processes of production have resulted in massive encroachment upon their traditional lands. This has in turn resulted in displacement, poverty and heightened levels of exploitation through a system of bonded labour. The term 'double disadvantage' has been used to characterise the socio-economic and spatial marginalisation of STs in India. The term *Adivasi* (meaning original inhabitants) has been self-consciously adopted by the tribal communities in an effort to reclaim their history and a unique place in Indian society (Sedwal and Kamat 2008: 3).

Both children and adults from ST and SC groups in many ways remain disadvantaged, despite government efforts to implement 'positive discrimination' (for example, allocating special seats in schools to children in these groups and other targeted interventions).

Sedwal and Kamath (2008) have also highlighted a number of issues affecting the education of children from SC and ST communities. They found that while SC children face the problem of 'untouchability', ST children face the problem of physical and cultural isolation. Moreover, the cultural norms of tribal communities may conflict with dominant norms imposed in formal educational settings. For example, the value placed on tribal children's freedom and interaction with nature (World Bank 1997) may be in tension with schooling environments in which children are expected to be highly disciplined, follow rigid timetabling and be confined to the classroom.

Caste-based differences have been identified as one of the most important contributory factors for inequality in education. Children from ST and SC groups may have limited options for their schooling (e.g., poor quality, multigrade and single teacher classrooms), as well as facing discrimination in their interactions with peers and teachers at school. Nambisan (2000) describes the 'hidden curriculum' that underlines school processes, i.e., the message of social inferiority conveyed by teachers and other pupils to ST children. She also cites various studies which detail the overt discrimination faced by SC children. They are made to sit separately in one corner of the classroom, are refused drinking water and made to dine separately. They are also spared physical punishment for fear of pollution and excluded from singing songs and worshipping gods. It is also reported that teachers look down upon the mental abilities of the *dalit* children and may even regard them as 'uneducable'. Promoting and favouring upper caste children reflects the biases of the teachers, who are themselves predominantly upper caste, and is brought out in many research studies (Jha and Jhingran 2002; Nambissan 2000; PROBE Team 1999; Ramachandran 2003; and Kaul 2001). This highlights the importance of recruiting teachers from marginalised communities in order to render services more accessible to excluded groups.

Language is another factor contributing to the marginalisation of *dalit* children within education. Teaching usually takes place in the regional language, which may not be understood by ST children. Moreover, as Nambissan (2000) points out, tribal languages are seen as 'backward' and inappropriate, and their use is discouraged in schools. Because of this, the children may find it difficult to establish communication links with their teacher, potentially leading to low attendance and high drop-out rates (Sujatha 2002; Nambissan 2000). Further, children are ridiculed and humiliated for speaking their own language. Such treatment can be gravely damaging to their self-worth, leading to poor comprehension and low overall learning levels (Vasavi and Mehendale 2003).

Social discrimination against SCs and STs in the community over a long period of time has led to a collective distance from education. It has been argued that the adverse learning environment affects the overall confidence and self-esteem of these children, leading to lower aspirations and consequently lower achievement levels (Jha and Jhingran 2002; Nambissan 2000).

There have been many efforts by governments and NGOs to support the inclusion of children from these groups in formal schooling through the expansion of educational facilities, employment opportunities, and political and social mobilisation. The Government of India acknowledged the disadvantaged status of the SC/ST population in education in the National Policy on Education 1986 (updated in 1992). This declares that 'the central focus in the SC's educational development is their equalisation with the non-SC and -ST population at all stages and levels of education' (GOI 1986). The policy focuses on incentives, scholarships, reservations, recruitment of teachers, location of school buildings and constant micro planning and verification to ensure the enrolment, retention and successful school completion of SC students (GOI 1986). The need to address disparities in education between castes is

reiterated in the Government of India's eleventh Five-Year Plan for 2007-2012.

Recommendations include provision of incentives such as free textbooks, uniforms, use of primers in tribal languages and inclusive education has been included in the draft report.⁵

At state level, the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development programme has boosted food security and raised the income of tribal families. In terms of natural resource management, the most significant activity of the project has been the attempt to use settled irrigated agricultural systems to replace the traditional methods of *podu* (shifting) cultivation.

This has translated into funds for construction work, teachers' salaries and educational equipment at community schools. The direct involvement of parents in the management of schools has improved attendance rates in all districts by an average of 20 per cent and improved the gender balance of students, with 40 per cent of new enrolments being young girls. School dropout rates have fallen. Even in cases where resources were extremely scarce, community schools have continued to operate on a voluntary basis, highlighting the strength of local commitment towards the education of children (IFAD 2001).

While the introduction of such initiatives has brought some positive changes to classroom practices, a lot of ground still has to be covered to ensure the full participation of all children without discrimination. This is because, even while teaching processes have become more child friendly, the discriminatory practices and attitudes of teachers and of more advantaged children often persist.

7.2 Undocumented children

Amongst the many children who might be excluded from education, a substantial number seem to be unaccounted for and unregistered. These children might be migrants whose parents move for economic reasons on a seasonal basis, or children living on the streets or in unauthorised urban slums. They are scattered and heterogeneous but their numbers are not small. In addition, children who are physically and mentally challenged might also be unaccounted for or unregistered, and therefore risk educational exclusion. Studies show that only a very small proportion of mentally and physically challenged children, who account for around 2 per cent of the total (around 20 million), have access to schooling. There has been some progress in reaching these chronically under-served groups. However, as an arguably 'hidden population,' at least from the perspective of data, it is difficult to draw a conclusive picture of their circumstances and educational access.

7.3 Migrant children

According to a UNICEF Report (2007: 56), roughly 20 per cent of the Indian population is considered migrant, of whom the majority are women and children. They are often thought to be at greater risk of exploitation and tend to accept jobs on unfair terms. These migrants are generally deprived of family and community support networks at the site of migration. Migrants often experience longer working hours, poor living and working conditions, and poor access to basic facilities, such as education, health and food distribution systems.

Venkateswarlu (2006) reported that Andhra Pradesh figured prominently among those states with high rates of rural-to-urban labour migration. In a study conducted in slums in Hyderabad city, Eluru town and eight villages in the Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh on the impact of migration on children's well-being, it was found that children who

5 See planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/India/India_wg11_scst.pdf

migrate often become child labourers, discontinue their studies and have no access to basic services such as drinking water and sanitation. Furthermore, their health is poor, making them susceptible to diseases, and they are left out of government schemes as they are constantly on the move (Venkateswarlu 2006).

7.3.1 *NGO efforts*

There have been many recent efforts by NGOs to address the negative impact of migration on children. For example, site schools have been established at the places where children migrate to work, and some seasonal hostels take in the children of migrants so they can stay in their communities while their parents seek work. Summer bridge programmes target children who cannot access the above programmes. NGOs and other organisations emphasise the need for local schools to be more adaptable and accommodating of children experiencing migration, either as migrants or as children of migrants; thus interventions in villages of origin are highlighted. NGOs have also stressed the importance of revamping government schools in migration-prone areas in order to motivate children and parents towards education. However, to identify a sustainable, workable proposition, large-scale experimentation and in-depth empirical studies are required.

One example is the DFID-funded Migrant Labour Support Programme which was initiated in 2002 by Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT) in eastern and western India to support migrants not only in locations of origin but also at destinations. This support programme, which is implemented under the Western India Rainfed Farming Project (WIRFP), aims to address the immediate needs of migrants, such as shelter, water, health, childcare and education in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. DFID-supported Rural Livelihoods Projects in India are also formulating migration support programmes in their respective states (Rao et al. 2006: 21).

Sadhana, an NGO in Andhra Pradesh supported by the state government and UNICEF, has been running residential bridge schools for the children of seasonal migrants in the state's Medak district. Children who participate in this programme return to their usual schools once their migrant parents return to the village. Some trade unions have also taken up issues relating to migrants' rights. For instance, CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) has been lobbying with government agencies to protect migrants' rights and has represented the problems that the migrants face to political leaders, ministers and key officials (Rao et al. 2006: 21). Other programmes focus on training and registration of migrants (e.g., Sudrak in Rajasthan) or on facilitating the efficient flow of remittances (e.g., CARE India in Gujarat and Orissa) (Rao et al. 2006: 21).

All of these initiatives have shown some important steps towards mainstreaming migration support in India. The recent change in government in India has ushered in a new policy environment where the government is expected to adopt further migration support policies. On 17th December 2008, the Indian Parliament passed the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Bill, which seeks to provide welfare measures for unorganised workers. The House of Representatives in Parliament has described the Bill as the first major step in 60 years that will benefit the poor. Amongst those to be covered under the Act are agricultural workers, migrant labourers and workers in the informal sector. It is estimated that 94 per cent of the working class in the country employed in the unorganised sector will now be able to benefit from health, life and disability insurance, old age pension and the group accident scheme (Nichenametla 2008).

8. Gender and childhood

Many studies have reported that female children are looked upon as a source of invisible child labour within the home. It is reported that, irrespective of economic status, the female child's role in housework and cooking is constant (Karlekar 2000). Studies also show that girls spend twice or even sometimes thrice as much time engaged in domestic work as boys (Karlekar 2000; Bhatta 1998; Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1991). Birth order also frequently determines the educational chances of girls, as the eldest daughter often has to take over responsibility for housework. By doing so, a young girl may release her mother for work and enable her brothers to attend school, thereby contributing to the household economy (Ramachandran et al. 2003; Burra 2001). Household duties may not be easily reconciled with schooling. Hence, opportunity costs of a girl's time are high and she may be educationally disadvantaged in comparison to boys.

It has also been found that female children are more likely to be neglected by their families, who may fail to provide in equal measure the basic necessities of life in terms of food, clothing, love, shelter, supervision, education and medical care (Tewari 2005). It has been argued that this neglect impacts upon girls' physical, intellectual and emotional development (Indra et al. 1999). Moreover, family structures and values function in such a way as to compel daughters to internalise a view of themselves as inferior and docile as they grow up.

By contrast, boys are more likely to be engaged in outdoor work, often relating to agriculture, taking on different responsibilities at different ages. In Jha and Jhingran's study (2002), findings revealed that the younger boys (6 to 9 years) are used for cattle grazing and collecting the forest produce, whilst the older boys (9 to 13 years) are used for seasonal work on the family farm or for waged agricultural work. Younger girls (6 to 9 years) are involved in sibling care, household work and forest produce collection. Older girls (9 to 13 years) also work on the family farm and are involved in agricultural farm work with their mothers (Jha and Jhingran 2002).

Studies also reveal that the time spent by children on household work increases as they grow older, though the number of hours spent on work (household and productive) varied from study to study (from an hour and a half to four hours in children aged up to 7 years, and four to seven hours in children aged from 6 to 12 years) (Karlekar 2000; PROBE Team 1999; and Bhatta 1998).

8.1 Gender discrimination

Historically in India, a child is believed to be a gift from God to be nurtured with love, care and affection not only within the family but also within society as a whole. Unfortunately, due to socio-economic factors, the incidence of neglect, abuse and deprivation, particularly in the case of female children, has gradually increased. Gender is a strong determinant of position in Indian society and amongst both upper and lower castes, girls are discriminated against, ranked unequally and prevented from realising their potential (Indra et al. 1999).

The Government of India, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, New Delhi, launched a countrywide programme in 1991. The National Plan of Action for Children (1992) includes the objective of removing gender bias and improving the status of girls, so as to provide them with equal opportunities for survival and development and to help them achieve their full potential. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) set its major objective as the elimination of gender discrimination.

In India, high prestige is attached to the birth of a son. The superior position accorded to the son in the Hindu family is due to the patrilineal, patriarchal kinship system, prevalent in most parts of India, where continued land ownership requires sons, since property is passed down from the father to the son. Sons are also desired to continue the family lineage. Furthermore, the birth of sons is also seen as a cultural necessity, as they are needed to perform the parents' last rites (Reddy 2004: 27).

Families also prefer to have more sons than daughters because the former are regarded as 'economic assets', providing financial assistance and security to parents in their old age. Despite this preference, many families also desire at least one daughter for her short-term contribution to household work; for the emotional support she traditionally provides; and for the fulfilment of the religious obligation of *kanya daan* (giving daughter away at the time of marriage), which enables the parents to attain *punya* (the bettering of oneself with righteous actions) (Tatva 2007; Reddy 2004: 27).

The prominent status accorded to sons means that an inferior position is accorded to girls within the Hindu family. Research has highlighted different aspects of this gender bias, for example, with regard to provision of medical care (Kulkarni et al. 1999; Sundar et al. 2002), education (Chakrabarty 2001), food and nutrition (Ghosh et al. 2001; Gopalan et al. 2001) and food distribution (Levinson et al. 2003). All of these studies clearly indicate that there is a general tendency to give preferential treatment to boys over girls.

Tewari (2005) analysed the gender bias prevalent in the slum areas of Allahabad city of Uttar Pradesh. The sample consisted of 130 children aged 5 to 10 years old (60 of higher caste, 60 lower caste; with 30 boys and 30 girls in each category). The data was collected through interviews administered to the mothers. To study the gender gap, a Gender Disparity Index (GDI) was calculated. Results indicated a strong gender bias in both the higher caste and the lower caste slum dwellers regarding the fulfilment of children's demands, the type of work assigned to them, the mode of punishment, etc. Interestingly, the GDI values revealed a slightly better position for girls of lower caste in comparison to girls of higher caste.

Velaskar (2005) examined the implications of the interaction between caste, class and patriarchy for *dalit* girls in Maharashtra in terms of educational access. Traditionally, urban upper caste girls in Maharashtra had access to education, whilst girls and *dalits* were largely excluded. The study concluded that in Maharashtra, gender continues to be a formidable structural obstacle in accessing education. In addition, the influence of caste has certainly not disappeared and class is also an exclusionary factor for many. While some *dalit* girls are able to access *dalit* pre-matric scholarships, which were previously taken mainly by boys (Wankhede and Velaskar 1999), the majority ended up accessing poorly equipped schools located at some distance, causing dropout as well as low attendance. In view of this, Velaskar stressed 'the mass inclusion that has been achieved by the state system of education is an incredibly weak inclusion' (Velaskar 2005; Velaskar 2006: 478). Echoing this perspective, Ray (2000: 3519) has suggested that measures to improve schooling infrastructure and enhance social awareness of adults would prove more effective in increasing school enrolment rates, particularly among girls, than current measures.

Mehrotra (2007) offers another example. This study examined the impact of gender discrimination on girl's schooling in four states of India. Interviews and group discussions with a few hundred children, observation of a few thousand children, and interviews and group discussions with teachers, school heads, parents and other community members formed the basis of the study. She found that gender discrimination is wide-spread in all the selected areas, and that factors such as poverty, marginalised caste/religious affiliations, death of a parent and drought conditions have a palpable effect and make gender

discrimination more visible. There are also gender-based stereotypes regarding work and activities, overwhelming importance attached to marriage and the social sanction of gender-based violence; as well as biases in textbooks, lack of female teachers, and classroom and school environments which are male dominated and socially hierarchical.

Gender also limits access to schooling, with female enrolment rates much lower than those of boys. This has improved in recent years, with gender disparities in enrolment having been reduced substantially, but a gap still persists. There is a large body of research from different parts of the world that suggests that within families, boys are favoured over girls in the provision of education and other resources, an imbalance which it is critical to redress for human right reasons. Ayanwale (2002) noted that more money was invested in education for boys than girls, and boys are more likely to be educated beyond the basic primary school level.

Duraisamy (2004: 493) points out that economic factors, such as benefits derived from children and the differential in market returns to educational investments in boys and girls, may be important reasons for the observed gender inequality in educational investment (2004: 493, 505). Similarly, Ray (2000) found that, in addition to gender, household location has a close association with educational access. Studies show that considerable reductions in gender disparities can be achieved with even simple adjustments to the location and infrastructure of schools. In addition, Duraisamy's 2004 study in Tamil Nadu indicates that improvements in parental education, particularly that of the mother, can contribute substantially to the reduction of the gender gap in schooling.

Venkatanarayana's study in Andhra Pradesh (2004) points out that girls belonging to SC/ST groups in rural areas are the most disadvantaged in terms of education. The study also highlights a more complex interaction between location, gender and caste that crucially influences schooling access.

8.2 Girls and the onset of puberty

The onset of puberty is another transition which may introduce dramatic life changes, especially for girls. As Dube (1998) points out, it signifies that the threshold of childhood has been crossed. Young girls are given the freedom to attend school, but this freedom is often curtailed at the onset of puberty, which is attended by special rituals and confinement. Dube also points out that it is during the period between puberty and marriage that female sexuality becomes a particular issue. The main concern is to protect her 'purity' and control her sexuality in the direction of motherhood (Dube 1998). Thus restrictions are imposed on her movement and interactions with male members of society. She is kept away from attending school or even going out. Research has also been conducted on puberty rituals, reproductive knowledge and the health of adolescent girls (Narayan et al. 2001), age at menarche in different social groups (Sharma et al. 2006) and the place of menarche in the lives of rural women (Singh 2006).

Literature also points out that the onset of menstruation can be a traumatic and negative experience for young girls in many parts of India (George 1994; Garg et al. 2001), and a considerable number of researchers have focused on the physiological problems associated with the onset of puberty (Koenig et al. 1998) and beliefs and superstitions associated with menarche (Bhat et al. 2004). The initial reaction of the majority of girls to the first episode is one of fear and apprehension (Narayan et al. 2001; Singh 2006; Bhattacharyya 1980, 1996). In ancient India, menstrual rites were widely prevalent, but extensive public celebration of the onset of menarche has all but disappeared from much of central and northern India, although it is still observed among Tamilians and some other groups in south India.

Narayan et al. (2001) describe the onset of menstruation as an important rite of passage marked by a series of ritual practices. This begins with a period of seclusion, which sees the girl confined for between nine and 13 days in a specially prepared *kudisai* hut. Her threatening status is affirmed at this stage in a series of prohibitions which include not entering the prayer room, and not touching flowers, lest they wilt, nor food, lest it perishes. She also receives instructions on menstrual hygiene practices and on the newly-imposed curtailment of her freedom of movement and relations with the male sex. This seclusion is followed by a purification ritual (*puniya-thanam*). Finally, a grand celebration (*manjal-neeru*) takes place, usually three months later. Prayer rituals are held and a lavish feast is provided for the girl's friends and family, who present her with gifts of food and jewellery. Great importance is attached to this event, and poor families will borrow money in order to ensure that it is a grand occasion.

The above-mentioned practices belong predominantly to the rural areas of south India, and are variously found in different parts of Andhra Pradesh. Ceremonial changes in attire symbolise a girl's transition to womanhood, and friends and relatives bless her for a bright future. In rural areas, people also sing folk songs which praise womanhood and include details about her responsibilities, her duties, and 'do's and don'ts'. This custom is not widely seen in urban areas, though some people still follow certain basic customs like informing the relatives and conducting a small function.

9. Child work and child labour

India is home to the highest number of child workers in the world. Many are employed in 'non-hazardous' sectors, which may include paid or unpaid work in agriculture, domestic work, roadside restaurants and shops, automobile mechanic units, rice mills and Indian-made Foreign Liquor outlets, although there is no clear data as to numbers. There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that more and more children are entering the labour force and are being exploited by their employers.

The need to eliminate child labour and provide access to formal education has been a priority for the Indian government since independence. Article 39(e) enshrines state duty to protect children from exploitation and to afford them freedom and dignity. Similarly, Article 15(13) permits state governments to enact laws that prohibit child labour and protect child rights. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below 14 years of age in any factory, mine or any other hazardous employment. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) prohibits employment of children only in certain occupations and processes and is less concerned with the prohibition of child labour than its regulation. Further, this legislation fails to recognise the largest category of child labourers: those who are engaged in activities related to agriculture. There are a large number of children who are engaged in agricultural work and the absence of any legal or legislative covers makes it easy to employ children in this sector.

With effect from October 2006, the Ministry of Labour included domestic work and employment in *dhabas* (road-side food stalls), tea stalls and restaurants in the schedule of prohibited occupations under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986). As a result of this, a large number of children may be laid off, especially in metropolitan cities and big towns, and may be pushed into other, potentially worse working conditions. The rehabilitation of these children, including provisions for their shelter, education, food and health, needs to be ensured and a return to families expedited based on a review of the situation.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has initiated a number of steps to address the problem of child labour in the state. The state legislative assembly in March 2001 passed a resolution to end all forms of child labour and achieve universal elementary education in the state by 2004. Various programmes have been initiated to achieve this goal, including the Back to School programme, residential and non-residential bridge course centres for children aged between 9 and 14 years under the DPEP and District Poverty Initiative programmes, the National Child Labour project and the ECCE centres (Venkateswarlu 2004).

The persistence of child labour is inextricably linked to the conditions surrounding adult labour. Kaushik Basu and Pham Hoang Ban (cited in Sinha and Reddy 2008) argue that 'if parents had higher wages or better employment prospects, children would not be sent to work'. As a result, they argue that the Government should focus on improving the adult labour market in order to reduce the demand for child labour. The sector in which a child's parents are employed also has an impact. For example, Kanbargi and Kulkarni (1991) found that the number of working children was greater in labour-intensive activities like agriculture, cattle rearing and other household-based economic activities, whilst those belonging to non-agricultural households and whose parents were working in the formal sector were more likely to attend school (Unni 1996).

Abusive child labour is inextricably connected with poverty, displacement, illiteracy, adult unemployment and social deprivation, amongst other factors. It is therefore an issue that cannot be addressed in isolation. Contributing factors include rapid population growth, adult unemployment, bad working conditions, lack of minimum wages, exploitation of workers, low standards of living, low quality of education, lack of legal provisions and enforcement, low capacity of institutions, gender discrimination and the way in which childhood is conceptualised. Several studies have recognised the connection of child labour with human deprivation, illiteracy, food insecurity, distress, displacement, gender inequity, social and human underdevelopment, conflict and poor governance (Nambissan 2000, 2003; Jha and Jhingran 2002; Vasavi and Mehendale 2003). However, efforts to protect children from hazardous and exploitative labour should avoid preventing them from participating in activities which are socially valued (including by children themselves) or accessing appropriate opportunities to contribute to their households and learn useful skills.

9.1 Example: Child labour in the cottonseed industry

In rural India, one of the most common forms of child work is in the cottonseed industry. Numerous studies have been conducted on the magnitude of child labour in the production of hybrid cottonseeds in India, their working conditions, the reasons for large-scale employment of children in the sector and the role of large-scale national and international seed companies in contributing to the problem (Ramamurthy 2000; Venkateswarlu 2001, 2003, 2004; Venkateswarlu and Corta 2001; Tarannum and Reddy 2006; Katiar 2006).

Cottonseed production is a labour intensive activity in which a crucial step is cross-pollination, a process which is carried out manually, mostly by children. A village-level study in Gujarat and Karnataka revealed that children below 14 years of age account for 34.9 per cent of the total labour force engaged in this area, with girls outnumbering boys (Venkateswarlu 2000). An estimated 248,000 children are employed in the cottonseed industry in Andhra Pradesh. Many do not attend school, either because they have dropped out or because they have never had the opportunity to attend. Those who are in education are compelled to be absent for several months of the year in order to work in the fields. Most of the children who work in these fields belong to SC, ST and other backward classes (i.e., those who are socially and educationally 'backward', and have inadequate or no

representation in government services, trade, commerce and industry) (Venkateswarlu 2001). Farmers employ children, especially girls, to minimise costs, as the wages paid to children are much below the market wages for adults in other agricultural field work and even further below official minimum wage levels. Moreover, girls are especially employed for cross-pollination work because it is a delicate task and they can handle it better than adults (Venkateswarlu and Corta 2005).

Employment of children in cottonseed work poses risks to their health as a result of the poisonous pesticides used and to which children may be exposed for prolonged periods. Reported health risks include severe headaches, nausea, weakness and respiratory disorders (Venkateswarlu 2003) and delay in onset of puberty (Morrow 2009).

The manner in which many children are employed in this industry often violates national laws and international conventions. For instance, securing their labour by giving loans or advances to their parents and compelling them to work until the loan is repaid is clearly a form of bonded labour, which is internationally illegal. Long hours and payment of less than the minimum wage are also violations of laws, including the Children (Pledging of Labour) Act (1933), the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1976), the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) and Article 21a of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees every child a fundamental right to free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years. Employing children in these poor conditions also violates the ILO convention No. 138 regarding the minimum age of admission to employment; Convention No. 182, which prohibits the worst forms of child labour; and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Venkateswarlu 2007).

The issue of child labour in cottonseed production has received attention from NGOs, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and recently in Gujarat. The exploitation of child labour in cottonseed fields was first brought to light in Andhra Pradesh in 1988 by the MV Foundation, an NGO. In Rangareddy, Kurnool and Mehaboonaagar districts, where Andhra Pradesh's cottonseed production industry is concentrated, the MV Foundation, with the support of the local community, initiated a campaign against the employment of children in the late 1990s. Hundreds of girls working in cottonseed fields were withdrawn from work and sent to school. Special bridge course camps for older girls (10 to 14 years) were conducted to bring them into the fold of mainstream school education.⁶

Other NGOs in Andhra Pradesh who have been actively involved in the campaign against child labour in cottonseed farms include World Education Inc., who are working in partnership with an NGO called Care to raise awareness of the hazards of working in the cotton fields, mobilising support for schools through outreach programmes and sensitising teachers, parents, local leaders and others to the benefits of education.⁷

According to Venkateswarlu (2007), the exploitation of child labour in cottonseed farms is linked to larger market forces, with large-scale national and multinational seed companies perpetuating the problem. With the total area taken up by cottonseed production increasing year by year, there is an ever-greater demand for labour. This means that the number of children employed in cottonseed farms is likely to increase further unless serious efforts are made to prevent this at the field level (Venkateswarlu 2007).

⁶ See www.mvfindia.in

⁷ See www.worlded.org

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to highlight several themes relating to child well-being in India and to point to some of the underlying factors and processes that may explain inequalities in childhood. Poverty was shown to interact with other dimensions of difference, namely caste and gender, to constrain opportunities for well-being for certain groups of children. While education is increasingly valued by children and families, and in some cases recognised as a universal 'right', some groups of children are still missing out. Children in the lower caste groups and female children experience more exclusion from school. This may reflect poverty and difficult household decisions around resource allocation. It may also reflect discriminatory institutional practices and attitudes. Deep-seated beliefs about the differing value of boys and girls in families within the context of patriarchy may also be a factor. And of course, schools may not have sufficient 'pull' to keep certain children enrolled, due to, for example, chronic teacher absence and other markers of poor educational quality.

The report also highlighted the many efforts of NGOs and the Governments of India and of Andhra Pradesh to tackle inequalities in childhood. Their responses have demonstrated some creativity – for example, the boat schools and on-site schools for working children that actively seek to reach marginalised groups.

There is also an intergenerational dimension of child well-being. The experiences of children are related to the circumstances of their families. For example, the report pointed to research suggesting a relationship between child work and poor adult employment conditions (e.g., low wages). There is also research confirming the positive relationship between mothers' education and various child well-being outcomes, for example, nutrition. The report also touched on the role of children in their households and how their well-being is shaped by social expectations, such as those based on gender; and family circumstances, such as migration. These change over the course of childhood, and for different groups of children. Here, we highlighted the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for providing nutritional and learning opportunities for young children and the importance of interventions aimed at the early years of life.

A great deal is being done at the policy level by governments, and many programmes are targeted towards some of the most vulnerable groups of children. However, more research is needed to better understand how children experience these services and programmes and their impact on outcomes in the short-, medium-, and long-term, across the life-course and intergenerationally. Greater attention to children's perspectives on what they consider and experience as 'risks' may also provide a more nuanced research base for policy aiming to improve their lives and life chances. We conclude by summarising a few possible suggestions which arose from this review and which we believe warrant further consideration. These are not to be taken as policy recommendations, but rather questions for policy. These are to:

- Ensure provisions for child workers who have been made redundant, including shelter, education, food, healthcare and a safe return to their families based upon an assessment of their situations
- Introduce field-level initiatives to counteract the incremental growth in demand for child labour in cottonseed production
- Improve the conditions surrounding the adult labour market in order to reduce the demand for child labour

- Raise awareness amongst ST mothers and address the socio-economic factors facing them in order to reduce the disproportionate amount of malnutrition affecting their children
- Ensure the provision of female teaching staff in order to facilitate the school attendance of girls
- Recruit teachers from marginalised communities in order to improve STs, SCs and other excluded groups' access to education
- Ensure adequate water supply and sanitation facilities are available within schools
- Address the gender imbalance in provision of care and resources within families
- Improve educational access for physically and mentally challenged children

Child labour is a human rights issue and the plight of child workers in India is indeed desperate. It is suggested that a comprehensive assessment of child workers who have been made redundant be conducted in order to tailor the provision of services they may need, such as shelter, education, food, healthcare, and to promote a safe return to their families. Child labour in cottonseed production is a particular area of concern in India. Field level initiatives (e.g., awareness campaigns; the establishment of residential and non-residential bridge course centres; new policy documents on child labour recognising the link between elimination of child labour and universalisation of education; draft legislation which ensures elimination of all forms of child labour and makes school education compulsory for all the children below 15 years of age; booking cases against seed farmers found using child labour, etc.) that have been undertaken by NGOs and other organisations need to be strengthened and new actions initiated so that the incremental growth in demand for child labour in cottonseed production can be counteracted. Further, in view of the inextricable link between the conditions prevailing in the adult labour market and the demand for child labour, there is an urgent need to improve adult working conditions too.

Maternal education and household socio-economic conditions have been found to be strong predictors of malnutrition in children. This remains a significant problem in India, especially among pre-school children, resulting in their being underweight and stunted. There is an urgent need to sensitise mothers from socially disadvantaged groups about child care and nutrition-related issues in view of the disproportionate amount of malnutrition affecting their children. For example, nutrition demonstration camps, exhibitions and awareness lectures could be arranged to raise the awareness levels of young mothers belonging to SC and ST communities.

Girls' education has been established as a priority for the Government of India, and various initiatives have been brought forth in this regard. Girls, especially those from rural areas, feel more comfortable attending classes taught by a female teacher. It is therefore recommended that effort is made to engage female teachers, especially in high schools in rural areas, in order to improve the enrolment rates of girls at that level and thereby pave the way for improved female literacy levels in India. Similarly, for ST and SC children, teachers belonging to the same community could be recruited in order to increase their access to school. Further, with due recognition of the innovations introduced under the SSA, it is suggested that school authorities ensure adequate water supply and sanitation facilities on the school premises, particularly for female pupils. There is also a need to improve education access for physically and mentally challenged children.

Girls continue to face discrimination in the Indian family structure. In view of the globalisation and liberalisation policies of the government, these gender imbalances need to be

addressed. Girls in typical Indian families should be assured of an adequate supply of resources on a par with their male counterparts, as well as receiving the support of their families in continuing their education, seeking a vocation of their choice and contributing to the overall development of their society.

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