



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

Overcoming Exclusion Through Quality Schooling

**R. Govinda
Madhumita Bandyopadhyay**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS
Research Monograph No. 65**

May 2011



**National University of Educational
Planning and Administration
NUEPA**



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Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AIE | Alternative and Innovative Education |
| ASER | Annual Status of Education Report |
| CREATE | Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions & Equity |
| DPEP | District Primary Education Programme |
| GOI | Government of India |
| GMR | Global Monitoring Report |
| GPMS | Government Primary and Middle School |
| GPS | Government Primary School |
| EFA | Education for All |
| EGS | Education Guarantee Scheme |
| NCERT | National Council of Educational Research and Training |
| NPE | National Policy on Education |
| NIEPA | National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration |
| NUEPA | National University of Educational Planning and Administration |
| SSA | Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan |
| TLM | Teaching Learning Material |
| UEE | Universal Elementary Education |
| UEGS | Upgraded Education Guarantee Schools |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

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Preface

India and its states have made considerable efforts in enhancing initial access to schooling and enrolment of all children at the elementary level. This has happened not only due to the implementation of several programmes during the past few years including Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Education for All Movement), leading to unprecedented expansion of schooling infrastructure across the country, but also because of a large number of initiatives that are being taken to improve the education system particularly at the state, district and sub-district level. This paper is based on primary data collected through the Community and School Survey (ComSS) as part of CREATE to understand how the lack of access to quality education impacts on processes of exclusion of children from school. The study has also attempted to examine the role of school related factors and the nature of school functioning in this process of exclusion, affecting participation behaviour and learning levels of children in 36 villages and 88 schools located in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Finally, The paper also highlights policy interventions that might improve the situation.

Professor R. Govinda
CREATE Partner Institute Convener
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This monograph provides a detailed and evocative insight into the realities of changing patterns of access to education in 88 schools serving over 6,000 households and 10,000 children. It is both encouraging and disturbing. Most children are enrolled in school in the case study areas, but it is clear that after ten years of SSA there are still significant numbers of school age who fail to complete primary school to grade 5, and many more who do not reach grade 8 and proceed to secondary school. Though most children have access to purpose built school buildings it is clear that more construction is needed and the condition of much of the existing stock is unsatisfactory. Too many schools in the sample have insufficient furniture and equipment, lack appropriate sanitation and clean water, and do not provide a learning environment conducive to high levels of achievement. Testing confirms that many children remain a long way from achieving appropriate standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy. Though learning materials are generally available their patterns of use are very varied. So also is the time spent on learning and teaching with substantial absenteeism leading to the loss of 25% or more of time on task for some children. Distributional equity remains a critical issue with, for example, pupil teacher ratios varying from over 130:1 to below 10:1 across the schools. Many of the schools are small with one or two teachers, five grades and less than five classrooms.

The paper lays out the challenges and the opportunities that remain for SSA which still has a road to travel if the evidence from the case studies is reflected more widely in other districts. The districts chosen were identified because they were amongst the poorest and because a similar study had been undertaken twenty years ago by Professor Govinda. CREATE can make comparisons over time and these suggest that there has indeed been considerable progress in expanding access to education, but that this has neither succeeded in realising the dream of universal participation and completion of basic education to age 14 years now enshrined in the Right to Education Act, nor has it succeeded in reducing large disparities between and within clusters and administrative blocks. More studies of this kind are needed to provide in depth and independent insights into why it remains the case that in many parts of India the dream has been realised, but that in too many locations, especially in the Northern States, the dream remains an aspiration not a reality. The opportunity is there for

my colleagues Professor Govinda and Madhumita Bandyopadhyay to build on the base provided by the large scale data sets that have been collected, continue data collection in future years to chart the unfolding patterns to 2015 and beyond, and to extend the study to other locations now newly challenged by the mandate of the Right to Education Act.

Keith Lewin
Director of CREATE
Centre for International Education
University of Sussex

Summary

In the era of globalisation, provision of quality education is increasingly gaining importance across the world. Like elsewhere, it has already been realised in India that equal attention is needed simultaneously on access, equity and quality to achieve the goal of universal elementary education. It has also been experienced that although the majority of children in India today have access to school education, all of them are not receiving quality education for various reasons, leading to poor learning level, repetition and gradual exclusion from school education. Large achievement gaps are found among different groups of children attending schools located in different regions and managed by government and private providers. Using the primary data collected from 88 schools of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, this paper attempts to critically examine the extent to which the quality of school affects access and participation of children particularly in rural areas. It also investigates problems of inadequate infrastructure and academic facilities: how these are affecting the quality of education; who are the children most affected by poor quality schools and therefore facing problems of locational disadvantage; and the influence of gender and social background of children on their access to quality education.

Overcoming Exclusion Through Quality Schooling

1. Introduction

The level and intensity of activities in the field of basic education observed in the last two decades is unprecedented. Beginning with the 'Education for All' slogan adopted in the Jomtien Conference the world began to pay attention to basic education as never before. The World Conference held in Dakar ten years later in 2000 reiterated the commitment of the countries and international agencies to take forward the agenda and ensure that the goal is achieved by 2015. A monitoring process was put in place to report on the progress year after year. The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) on Education for All (EFA) published every year by UNESCO gives a picture of the progress made and the prospects of reaching the goal of universal primary education by 2015. The Dakar Declaration put quantitative progress and quality of education in two different baskets by creating a separate goal on quality distinct from universal schooling provision.

The picture of progress painted by the GMR midway from 2000 to 2015 was a mixed one. While it indicated substantial enhancement in provision of infrastructure facilities and reduction in out-of-school children, the pace of progress had been too slow to reach the target. The assessment shows that approximately 13% of children will be out of school in 2015. The diagnosis largely placed the blame on poor levels of investment made by national governments and international development partners. Where did the issue of quality fit in this diagnosis? In fact, quality was cited in every report, but as a matter for reporting on one of the goals of the Dakar Declaration. Further, one whole report (for the year 2005) of the GMR was devoted to quality. Yet, the focus of analysis remained generic and somewhat philosophical as though it remained beyond the limits of concrete action:

Quality must be seen in light of how societies define the purpose of education. In most, two principal objectives are at stake: the first is to ensure the cognitive development of learners. The second emphasises the role of education in nurturing the creative and emotional growth of learners and in helping them to acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. Finally, quality must pass the test of equity: an education system characterised by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission. (UNESCO, 2004:6)

The quote from the GMR is only illustrative of the general state of contemporary discourse on quality. While such a description of quality could legitimately be a part of the academic discourse on 'quality of education' it would not be of much help in transforming the system where quality would be an integral part of the definition of education. Literature on quality of education, (eg. Hanushek and Wofimann, 2007; Temple, 2001; Ramirez, Luo, Schofer and Meyer, 2006) including empirical studies, tends to treat quality of education in an input-output framework. With rare exceptions (eg. Chudgar, 2011; DRS & RESU-TSG, 2009; Chaudhuri and Roy, 2009), most analyses consider provision of infrastructure and academic facilities as independent variables with quantum of learning outcomes (as the sole measure of quality) as the dependent variable. There are some references to classroom processes such as those in the GMR 2005, but while these recognise that classroom and school based processes are of great significance they seem to be beyond the realm of concrete improvement measures. Such an analysis has also failed to capture the inherent linkages between children's school participation behaviour and school quality. Very little exploration is available to

understand how quality of schools and the processes therein impinge on the levels and nature of participation and completion of basic education by children. In other words, the backward linkage between school quality and exclusion from schooling has remained largely unexamined. Further, even where the external environment of schooling has been examined through household surveys, the tendency has been to point fingers at poverty and socio-cultural factors as obstructions for full participation of children in schooling. In fact, even high levels of inequity observed in quality of educational provision are explained away by economic and socio-cultural factors characterising societies. We argue that using the poverty of families and socio-cultural barriers to explain exclusion from education is counterproductive and is an acceptance of helplessness considering the conditions in which developing countries are operating their school systems. Yet, not much empirical exploration has been done to understand how the school, and the processes therein, as well as the outcomes it produces (which can all be transformed) could be shaping the behaviour of the parents in sending or withholding children from schooling? The contention of this paper is that if children remain excluded from schools, it is not helpful to use poverty and socio-cultural barriers as the main determinants for school participation. Keeping this in view, the paper explores the broad hypothesis that the quality of schools is a central factor influencing children's patterns and level of participation in schooling, impacting the perceptions of parents about education and thereby the decision-making process in families on school participation.

2. The Indian Context

The education system in India has steadily grown during the last six decades moving the national literacy figures from a mere 16% in 1951 (GOI, Census of India, 1951) to around 65% in 2001 (GOI, Census of India, 2001). Recently, the census commissioner of India has declared provisional data from the 2011 census. According to census of India, 2011, the literacy rate has reached 75% (GOI, Census of India, 2011). The country has witnessed, an unprecedented expansion in recent years in educational infrastructure across the country at all levels, drawing millions of children into the folds of organised learning. Official figures indicate near universal enrolment of all children in the compulsory education age group of 6-14. Though the number of schools has grown many times to a figure of more than one million, the quality of education provided in these schools remains a matter of concern. It is disheartening to see that many children, even after attending primary education of five years, lack basic learning skills and remain excluded from mainstream development. The low quality of education in India has been criticised by many educationists and researchers (Bajpai and Goyal, 2004).

Provision of quality education for all at the elementary level has been a longstanding agenda in India. It has always been of central concern of different commissions committees and policy documents even before independence. Since independence, achieving UEE has become a constitutional commitment and expansion of quality education has also become an important strategy for achieving UEE. While describing equity, quantity and quality as the elusive triangle in Indian education, Naik has considered the quality as ‘most central to education’ and ‘its very life and soul’ (Naik, 1975:41). He contends that: “Any education without quality is no education at all: it will not be able to fulfil promises and will also do immense harm.” Provision of quality education was also recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66) and National Policy on Education, (NPE) (GoI, 1986). NPE lays stress on access to education with success indicating the urgency of attending to quality issues while expanding educational facilities all over India. Since then, many initiatives have been taken by central and state governments from time to time giving quality a high priority as mentioned in Education for All (EFA) mid-decade assessment (NUEPA, 2008). In addition, special attention is also being paid to so-called ‘backward’ districts, which are poor and have low education indicators.

Notwithstanding these policy recommendations and special efforts taken by government, many researchers (Mehrotra, 2006; Dreze and Sen, 1995, 2002) have found that in reality, the situation is far from satisfactory particularly in educationally backward states. The recent data indicate that while around 93% of children are enrolled in schools, only around 30% stay on to complete five years of schooling; and around 50% drop out without completing the compulsory education period of eight years (GoI, SES, 2010). One of the main reasons emerging from field surveys (PROBE, 1999; Pratham, 2006, 2007, 2008; Pratiche, 2010) is that children begin to lag behind academically from the early grades and then eventually drop out of school by the end of or during the primary stage. On the one hand, many children do not make adequate progress in the early grades, and on the other, the content and pace of the curriculum (as mandated by the state governments) in Grades III and IV accelerates rapidly, making ‘catching up’ difficult. It is not unusual to have large numbers of children who complete the primary school stage in Grade IV or V without being able to read or write fluently or do simple arithmetic. One of the key findings of an all India survey (Pratham, 2006) conducted in 28 states in India was that 47% of children in Grade V could not even read a Grade II text fluently. Specifically, in Grade I, 38.2% could not read alphabets and

53.7% could not identify numbers; in Grade II, 76.7% could not read Grade I text, and 75% could not do subtraction; and in Grade V, 47% children could not read Grade II text, and 54.6% could not do division. ASER Reports (Pratham, 2006, 2007, 2008) have indicated that half of all children in the country begin lagging behind in Grade I and continue to lag behind in the achievement of expected competencies in Grades III and V. It is not adequately recognised that many children, especially from economically disadvantaged families and communities, are first generation learners. The adults in the household would not have gone to school at all. There is not enough support, space, opportunity, time, interest or inputs at home for the child's learning to be supported and strengthened so that he/she can be 'successful' in the formal school system. Achievement surveys conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) also find similar results, highlighting the need for special focus on improving basic skills among children in the initial years of schooling (NCERT, 2007).

In fact, a number of studies (Banerji et al. 2004; Sharma, 2008; Nambissan, 2010) since the early 1990s report low achievement levels at the terminal grades of primary school. Examples include a large national study by the NCERT in 1994, which found that children scored an average of 47% in language and 41% in mathematics and state-wise studies with smaller samples in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh (Shukla et al, 1994; Govinda and Varghese, 1993; Bashir, 1994; Hasan, 1995; Aggarwal, 2000; Jakob, 1997). A baseline survey of III to V graders in five districts of Andhra Pradesh, a middle performing Indian state, found that only 12% of students could do *single digit* subtraction and that 46% could not, when shown a picture of six balls and three kites, answer how many kites were in the picture (Pritchett and Pande, 2006). A recent survey of learning in India found that of students in government schools in Grades VI-VIII, who have completed the lower primary cycle and hence met the MDG, 31% could not read a simple story, 29% could not do two digit subtraction—both of which should have been mastered by Grade II in the Indian curriculum (Das et al, 2007). As Pritchett and Pande (2006) point out, a situation where between 50% to 80% of children do not have adequate basic primary schooling competencies is indeed a cause for concern. Similar results were reported in another study conducted in Rajasthan for students at the end of the primary cycle. Students were asked to read simple sentences and write simple words and sentences. It was observed that 53% of the students were able to write and 48% were able to read correctly, while 15% were not able to write and 18% were not able to read at all. The remaining students were able to read and write but not satisfactorily (Cheriyann and Sharma, 2007). Thus, invariably, all studies show that more than 50% of students, despite attending the full primary cycle, do not acquire even basic reading and writing competencies. A core question raised in this paper is whether the poor quality of schooling has become the cause for continued midstream drop out of children from schooling and eventual illiteracy and incapacity to pursue a productive life in their adulthood.

One may argue that expanding the system by opening an adequate number of schools, and through the creation of basic infrastructure facilities naturally remained the top priority for planners and policy makers. This indirectly led to diminished attention to quality dimensions of schooling in the early decades of education development. Having achieved a reasonable level of access, the attention has begun to shift towards quality improvement. In fact increased attention towards quality improvement began almost 20 years ago with the launch of the Operation Blackboard scheme. The effort has been further intensified over the years through DPEP and more recently under the auspices of SSA. Yet, this somewhat narrow interpretation of improving access and quality as sequential actions needs closer examination. Access cannot be treated only as creation of schooling infrastructure and providing pan-

systemic inputs such as teacher training, textbooks etc. According to Lewin (2007) access to education is not meaningful unless it results in: 1. Secure enrolment and regular attendance; 2. Progression through grades at appropriate ages; 3. Meaningful learning which has utility; 4. Reasonable chances of transition to lower secondary grades, especially where these are within the basic education cycle. 5. More rather than less equitable opportunities to learn for children from poorer households, especially girls, with less variation in quality between schools (Lewin, 2007:21). Essentially the message of much of the work of CREATE is that access, to be meaningful, has to pay equal and simultaneous attention to the issue of what happens to children once they are enrolled in school as well as simply enrolling them there. We argue that poor quality of schools is pushing children out of the folds of formal learning or effecting a silent and unnoticed exclusion making them vulnerable, to drop out and having learnt little even if they have attended and completed eight years of schooling (see also Lewin, 2007; Sinha and Reddy, 2010). As mentioned earlier, it is the poor and disadvantaged communities who are most affected by the low quality of education jeopardising the equity effects of education. It is this area of interface between access, equity and quality, particularly the backward linkage of quality with participation, that the present paper attempts to explore through an empirical study of 88 schools in 36 villages, located in three contiguously located clusters – one cluster in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh and one cluster each in Rewa and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh. In the next section we provide a brief outline of the study area.

3. Background of the Study Area

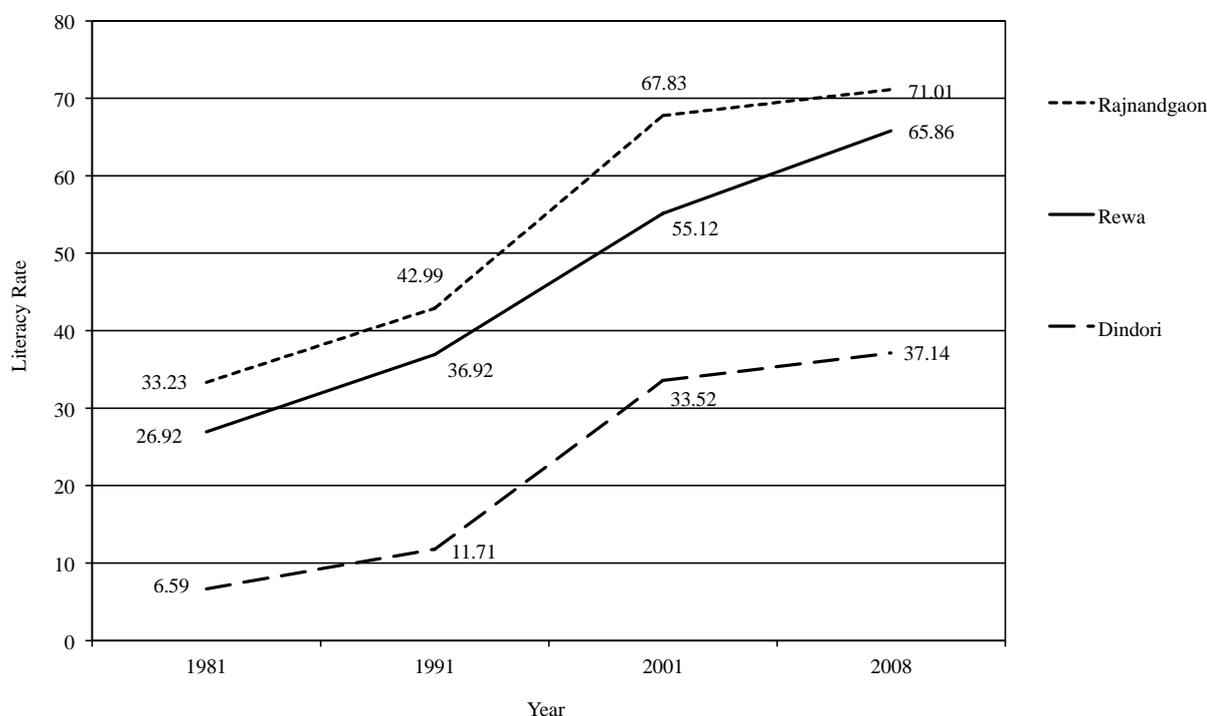
These clusters were part of another study conducted by NIEPA and UNESCO in 1990 (Govinda and Varghese, 1993). The three clusters – Rajnandgaon, Rewa and Dindori, in that order, present a development continuum in terms of general infrastructure as well as overall education development as reflected in literacy rates. While Rajnandgaon cluster is located alongside the main highway and has relatively better access to several other development facilities, Rewa cluster is an interior rural cluster and Dindori cluster consists of remote and difficult to access villages inhabited by a tribal population. In terms of literacy rates (Table 1), while Rajnandgaon cluster has an overall literacy rate of 71%, the corresponding figure for Rewa cluster is 66% and it is as low as 37% in Dindori. The literacy rate has shown upward trend in all three clusters. However, the overall gender gap is around 14% -16%, but the female literacy rate is much higher in Rewa and Rajnandgaon clusters as compared to Dindori where it is only 30%.

Table 1: Male and Female Literacy Rates in the Three Clusters

| Districts | Total Population | | | Literacy Rate | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|--------|--------|---------------|----|--------|----|--------|----|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | % | Female | % | Total | % |
| Rewa | 5,604 | 5,078 | 10,682 | 4,096 | 73 | 2,939 | 58 | 7,035 | 65 |
| Dindori | 2,781 | 2,854 | 5,635 | 1,234 | 44 | 859 | 30 | 2,093 | 37 |
| Rajnandgaon | 7,499 | 7,468 | 14,967 | 5,897 | 79 | 4,731 | 63 | 10,628 | 71 |

Source: Household survey data, 2008

Figure 1: Trend in Literacy Rate



Source: Census, 1981, 1991, 2001 and Household Survey, 2008

There is considerable variation in social composition of population in these three clusters (Table 2). While the cluster from Rajnandgaon has high proportion of OBCs (as indicated by proportion of households owned by different castes), Dindori has the highest share of tribal population. Rewa has the highest proportion of households that belong to Scheduled Caste population and also of general category population as compared to other two clusters. Along with this distinct variation in population composition, these three areas vary in terms of economic status and occupational pattern. This will provide a basis for understanding the family background of children enrolled in school.

Table 2: Caste-wise Distribution of Households in Each District

| | Caste/Category | | | | | | | | Grand Total | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|--------|
| | Scheduled Caste | | Scheduled Tribe | | Other Backward Class (OBC) | | General | | Number | % |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | | |
| Rewa | 348 | 16.12 | 252 | 11.67 | 946 | 43.82 | 613 | 28.39 | 2,159 | 100.00 |
| Dindori | 93 | 7.16 | 1,119 | 86.14 | 79 | 6.08 | 8 | 0.62 | 1,299 | 100.00 |
| Rajnandgaon | 150 | 5.10 | 294 | 10.00 | 2,416 | 82.15 | 81 | 2.75 | 2,941 | 100.00 |
| Total | 591 | 9.24 | 1,665 | 26.02 | 3,441 | 53.77 | 702 | 10.97 | 6,399 | 100.00 |

Source: Household survey data, 2008

Information on the major source of income of households (Table 3) indicates that in a large number of households people are depending on agriculture in all the three clusters. While in Dindori, members from around 43% of households are found primarily engaged in farming, this proportion is much lower in Rewa (27.3%) and Rajnandgaon (26.2%) indirectly indicating the high level of dependence on agriculture for livelihoods. It should be remembered here that people in the tribal cluster though dependent on agricultural labour may not be landowners as most of the villages are declared as forest lands. Dindori has only 10% of households where members are engaged in non-farm labour, which could be because the chances for availability of non-farm activities are very low in this particular district.

Table 3: Caste Wise Occupation Structure of Respondents in Percentage

| Areas | Social Categories | Major source of Income of the household | | | | | Total |
|--------------------|----------------------|---|---------------------|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|
| | | Farming | Agricultural labour | Other labour | Salary paid | Others | |
| Rajnandgaon | Scheduled Caste | 20 | 26 | 32 | 17 | 6 | 687 |
| | Scheduled Tribe | 21 | 24 | 36 | 8 | 9 | 1,538 |
| | Other Backward Class | 31 | 30 | 22 | 7 | 10 | 12,760 |
| | General | 17 | 22 | 18 | 18 | 25 | 377 |
| | Total | 29 | 29 | 24 | 8 | 10 | 15,362 |
| Rewa | Scheduled Caste | 1 | 15 | 78 | 3 | 3 | 1,674 |
| | Scheduled Tribe | 0 | 52 | 46 | 0 | 2 | 1,076 |
| | Other Backward Class | 34 | 13 | 38 | 7 | 8 | 4,741 |
| | General | 47 | 5 | 8 | 22 | 17 | 3,200 |
| | Total | 29 | 15 | 36 | 10 | 10 | 10,691 |
| Dindori | Scheduled Caste | 3 | 91 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 387 |
| | Scheduled Tribe | 50 | 37 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 5,482 |
| | Other Backward Class | 42 | 20 | 17 | 15 | 5 | 424 |
| | General | 67 | 0 | 6 | 27 | 0 | 49 |

Source: Household survey Data, 2008

The household survey data also provides information about the distribution of households according to the monthly income of household. Table 4 indicates that majority of households fall into the category of low-income group but their share varies considerably from one cluster to another. While in Dindori more than half of the households are earning less than Rs. 1,000 (US\$ 22.5) per month, the proportion of such low-income households is only 3% in Rajnandgaon and 25% in Rewa. Half of the households in Rajnandgaon have monthly incomes of Rs. 1,000-2,000, in other areas one third of the households belong to this income group. While in Dindori, a small proportion of the households are from the higher income group (with monthly household incomes of Rs. 5,000 and more), in Rewa the percentage of such households is around 9% and in Rajnandgaon, it is around 7%. Thus, it is understandable that very few people in these three areas can be considered as rich and in a position to invest large amounts of money on education for their children. There is a substantial proportion of the population, particularly in Dindori district, which belongs to lowest income group (Table 4).

Table 4: Income Wise Distribution of Population

| Income Categories | Rajnandgaon | | Rewa | | Dindori | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
| | Number of Households | Percent | Number of Households | Percent | Number Of Households | Percent |
| Up to Rs. 1000 | 484 | 3.2 | 2,683 | 25.3 | 3,431 | 54.3 |
| Rs. 1000 to less than 2000 | 7,905 | 51.6 | 4,178 | 39.3 | 2,301 | 36.4 |
| Rs. 2000 to less than 3000 | 4,279 | 27.9 | 1,526 | 14.4 | 415 | 6.6 |
| Rs. 3000 to less than 4000 | 1,058 | 6.9 | 727 | 6.8 | 25 | 0.4 |
| Rs. 4000 to less than 5000 | 566 | 3.7 | 596 | 5.6 | 83 | 1.3 |
| Rs. 5000 to less than 7000 | 446 | 2.9 | 381 | 3.6 | 32 | 0.5 |
| Rs. 7000 to less than 9000 | 273 | 1.8 | 227 | 2.1 | 13 | 0.2 |
| Rs. 9000 and above | 283 | 1.8 | 277 | 2.6 | 14 | 0.2 |
| No Response | 22 | 0.1 | 26 | 0.2 | 8 | 0.1 |
| Total | 15,316 | 100.0 | 10,621 | 100.0 | 6,322 | 100.0 |

Source: Household survey data, 2008

4. Why are Children Out-of-School and Who are They?

Most of the children living in the study area belong to low-income groups and the households of manual labourers. In addition, in view of the low literacy rate in the study area, particularly in Dindori district, it can be assumed that a large proportion of the children are first generation learners. Despite having a low literacy rate, the majority of the child population in this district like other two districts are enrolled in school. This indicates that demand for elementary education has increased across the villages, even in those that are located in remote tribal areas. Table 5 provides an understanding of different categories of children according to their enrolment status and their engagement in work. It is interesting to see that a substantial proportion of drop out and never enrolled children are not engaged in any economic activities and household chores indicating household factors are not effecting their schooling participation. So, putting all the blame for out of school children on household conditions does not hold good. Further, it is entirely possible and quite logical that dropout children are engaged in productive activities after they leave school. It would be wrong to attribute work as the cause of their dropping out. So we need to examine the extent to which school factors impact on children's access and participation. This question will be dealt with later.

Table 5: Educational Status of Children and their Engagement in Different Activities

| Blocks and Districts | At present children are engaged in activities | Enrolled | Dropped out | Never Enrolled | Grand Total |
|----------------------------------|---|----------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Rewa, MP | Help in household work | 17 | 33 | 21 | 18 |
| | Engaged in farming or any other occupation | 2 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| | Employed | 0 | 34 | 6 | 2 |
| | Does not work | 81 | 27 | 72 | 79 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Dindori, MP | Help in household work | 42 | 69 | 66 | 47 |
| | Engaged in farming or any other occupation | 1 | 22 | 8 | 4 |
| | Employed | 0 | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| | Does not work | 57 | 3 | 23 | 47 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh | Help in household work | 21 | 43 | 31 | 22 |
| | Engaged in farming or any other occupation | 1 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| | Employed | 0 | 17 | 4 | 1 |
| | Does not work | 78 | 34 | 59 | 77 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Household survey data

Most of the out of school children are the offspring of labourers and they are engaged in domestic chores or work in family businesses. Some of these children also belong to farmers and are engaged in domestic chores (Table 6).

Table 6: Occupation Wise Distribution of Out of School Children and Their Engagement in Work

| Presently the child is engaged in | Occupation of Father | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|--------|-------|
| | Unemployed | Farming (Self) | Farm Labourer | Other Labourer | Others | Total |
| Rajnandgaon | | | | | | |
| Household activity/Sibling Care | | 1 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 30 |
| Help in domestic business | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 14 |
| Engaged in earning activity | 2 | | 11 | 11 | 3 | 27 |
| Rewa | | | | | | |
| Does not work | 1 | 25 | 14 | 26 | 5 | 71 |
| Household activity/Sibling Care | 1 | 41 | 55 | 16 | 4 | 117 |
| Help in domestic business | 1 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 22 |
| Engaged in earning activity | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | | 10 |
| Dindori | | | | | | |
| Does not work | 1 | 21 | 4 | 4 | | 30 |
| Household activity/Sibling Care | 1 | 40 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 99 |
| Help in domestic business | 1 | 7 | 11 | | 1 | 20 |
| Engaged in earning activity | | 2 | | 2 | | 4 |

Source: Household survey data, 2008

Out of 6,720 children, between 6-15 years old recorded in the household survey in 2008, 504 were found to be out-of-school accounting for 7.5% of the children. Out of these, 308 were those who had never enrolled in school and the rest (296) had dropped out from school (Table 7). It has been reported by parents that 19 children between 3-8 years old already had dropped out from school while 169 children of same age group remained never enrolled, for whom there is a possibility of getting enrolled later. Thus altogether 37% of total children are out of school. With no special programme for out-of-school children available in the villages, the chances for their inclusion in the education system were quite slim. In most cases, children's lack of interest in study has been mentioned as a reason for non-enrolment, which indirectly points to poor quality of education (Tilak, 2000). Though the next most important reason for non-enrolment was their engagement in household activities and sibling care, school related reasons like quality of education, distance of school, children's interest in studies and school fees do affect access and participation. In sum, of the never enrolled children, 34% said that this was because of household related reasons, particularly their family's economic condition and their engagement in household chores, while around 65% had never-enrolled because of school related reasons (Table 8). Poor quality of education emerged as a significant reason for 20% of never enrolled children in Rewa despite having schools equipped with better infrastructure facilities as compared to the schools located in Dindori cluster where 16% of children never attended school for this reason.

Table 7: Reasons for Not Admitting Children in School

| Reasons | Age Category | | | | | Total | % |
|--|---------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|---|
| | 6 to below 11 years | | 11 to below 15 years | | Total | | |
| | No | % | No | % | | | |
| Distance of School/Education Centre | 21 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 26 | 9 | |
| Quality of education in school is poor | 15 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 22 | 8 | |
| Child contributes in household income | 19 | 9 | 18 | 23 | 37 | 13 | |
| Child helps in household activity/sibling care | 41 | 20 | 19 | 24 | 60 | 21 | |
| Child is not interested in education | 60 | 30 | 21 | 27 | 81 | 29 | |
| Parents are unable to bear expense of education | 13 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 5 | |
| Parents do not give importance to school education | 25 | 12 | 4 | 5 | 29 | 10 | |
| Child's disability | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 3 | |
| Security of child | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | |
| Total | 203 | 100 | 78 | 100 | 281 | 100 | |

Source: HH Survey data, 2008

Table 8: Reasons for Never Enrolment of Children from Different Occupation Groups (Occupation of Father)

| Main reason of not admitting child in school | Occupation of Father | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Unemployed | Farming (Self) | Farm Labourer | Other Labourer | Others | Total |
| Distance of School/Education Centre | 1(25) | 9(11) | 13(13) | 2(3) | 1(5) | 26(9) |
| Quality of education in school is poor | | 1(1) | 20(20) | 1(1) | | 22(8) |
| Contribute in household income | 2(50) | 4(5) | 15(15) | 14(19) | 2(10) | 37(13) |
| Child helps in household activity/sibling care | 1(25) | 18(21) | 15(15) | 17(23) | 9(43) | 60(21) |
| Child is not interested in education | | 32(38) | 22(22) | 23(32) | 4(19) | 81(29) |
| Parents are unable to bear expense of education | | 3(4) | 2(2) | 8(11) | | 13(5) |
| Parents do not give importance to school education | | 12(14) | 7(7) | 5(7) | 5(24) | 29(10) |
| Child's disability | | 2(2) | 5(5) | 2(3) | | 9(3) |
| Security of child | | 3(4) | | 1(1) | | 4(1) |
| Total | 4(100) | 84(100) | 99(100) | 73(100) | 21(100) | 281(100) |

Source: HH data, 2008

Note: data of occupation of father is not available for eight never enrolled children (total 288)

The majority of children who were never enrolled were from the households of farm labourers and other labourers and the most prominent reason for their non-enrolment was a lack of interest of children in studies. Altogether around one third of the children were never enrolled for this reason (Table 9). In addition, another 20% of the never enrolled children, all

from farm labourer's households, blamed the quality of education for their absence. 9% of children faced the problem of inaccessibility of schools within walking distance. A similar situation prevailed in the case of dropout children (Table 10 and Table 11). One commonality is that most of these never enrolled and drop out children belonged to low-income groups and the cost of schooling affected only some of these poor children. Many of them worked and contributed to household income, thereby preventing them from completing even basic education.

Table 9: Reasons for Never Enrolment of Different Income Groups

| Main reason of not admitting child in school | Total Household Income | | | | | | | Total |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| | Up to Rs. 1000 | Rs. 1000 to less than 2000 | Rs. 2000 to less than 3000 | Rs. 3000 to less than 4000 | Rs. 4000 to less than 5000 | Rs. 5000 to less than 7000 | Rs. 7000 to less than 9000 | |
| Distance of School/Education Centre | 7 (5) | 17 (13) | 3 (19) | | | | | 27 (9) |
| Quality of education in school is poor | 22 (17) | | | | | | | 22 (8) |
| Contribute in household income | 19 (15) | 18 (13) | | 1 (50) | | | 1(100) | 39 (14) |
| Help in household activity/sibling care | 19 (15) | 36 (27) | 5 (31) | | 1 (100) | | | 61 (21) |
| Child not interested in education | 51 (39) | 29 (21) | 2 (13) | 1 (50) | | | | 83 (29) |
| Unable to bear expense of education | 4 (3) | 8 (6) | 1 (6) | | | | | 13 (5) |
| Parents do not give importance to school education | 5 (4) | 20 (15) | 3 (19) | | | 1 (50) | | 29 (10) |
| Child disability | 2 (2) | 6 (4) | 2 (13) | | | | | 10 (3) |
| Security of child | 2 (2) | 1 (1) | | | | 1 (50) | | 4 (1) |
| Total | 131 (100) | 135 (100) | 16 (100) | 2 (100) | 1 (100) | 2 (100) | 1 (100) | 288 |

Source: HH data, 2008

Table 10: Reasons for Drop Out from Different Occupation Groups

| Main reason of dropping out from school | Occupation of Father | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|----------|------------------|
| | Unemployed | Farming (Self) | Farm Labourer | Other Labourer | Others | Total |
| Distance of School/Education Centre | | 4 (6) | 4 (6) | 1 (1) | 0 | 10 (3) |
| Quality of education in school is poor | | 1 (1) | 1 (1) | | | 2 |
| Contribute in household income | 1 (33) | 19 (26) | 24 (34) | 29 (28) | 0 | 80 (27) |
| Help in household activity/sibling care | | 11 (15) | 11 (15) | 13 (12) | 0 | 41 (14) |
| Child not interested in education | 1 (33) | 32 (44) | 23 (33) | 49 (47) | 0 | 129 (44) |
| Unable to bear expense of education | 1 (33) | 2 (3) | 4 (6) | 6 (6) | | 13 (4) |
| Parents do not give importance to school education | | 1 (1) | 2 (3) | 2 (2) | 0 | 7 (2) |
| Child disability | | 2 (3) | 1 (1) | 4 (4) | 0 | 8 (3) |
| Does not have learning material | | | | 1 (1) | | 1 |
| Total | 3 (100) | 72 (100) | 70 (100) | 105 (100) | 0 | 291 (100) |

Source: HH data, 2008

Source: for four children data on father's occupation is not available

Table 11: Reasons for Dropping Out of Children from Different Income Groups

| Main reason of dropping out from school | Total Household Income | | | | | | | Total |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | Up to Rs. 1000 | Rs. 1000 to less than 2000 | Rs. 2000 to less than 3000 | Rs. 3000 to less than 4000 | Rs. 4000 to less than 5000 | Rs. 5000 to less than 7000 | Rs. 9000 and above | |
| Distance of School/Education Centre | 4 (6) | 4 (2) | 1 (3) | | 1 (20) | | | 10 (3) |
| Quality of education in school is poor | 1 (2) | 1 | | | | | | 2 |
| Contribute in household income | 23 (35) | 45 (26) | 11 (28) | 1 (20) | | | | 80 (27) |
| Help in household activity/sibling care | 9 (14) | 28 (16) | 6 (15) | | | | | 43 (15) |
| Child not interested in education | 19 (29) | 83 (47) | 20 (50) | 3 (60) | 3 (60) | 2 (100) | 1 (100) | 131 (44) |
| Unable to bear expense of education | 5 (8) | 8 (5) | | | | | | 13 (4) |
| Parents do not give importance to school education | 2 (3) | 5 (3) | | | | | | 7 (2) |
| Child disability | 3 (5) | 2 (1) | 1 (3) | 1 (20) | 1 (20) | | | 8 (3) |
| Does not have learning material | | | 1 (3) | | | | | 1 |
| Total | 66 (100) | 176 (100) | 40 (100) | 5 (100) | 5 (100) | 2 (100) | 1 (100) | 295 (100) |

Source: HH data, 2008

Variations were also found in reasons for drop out according to the location of their residence in the three different clusters (Table 12). Children who have been affected the most by distance to school and also being engaged in wage labour were from Dindori. Dindori is mostly inhabited by tribal groups engaged in agricultural labour. Yet, even in Dindori more children remain out of school because of school related reasons i.e. low accessibility and poor quality, which fails to attract and retain children's interest. Although almost all villages in Dindori cluster have been provided with government run primary schools, upper primary schools are available only in a few villages, making the transition from primary to upper primary impossible for many children, especially girls, in this cluster with difficult terrain and forested tracks. This suggests that mere provisioning for school is not enough to prevent drop out as the poor quality of education and lack of opportunities for progression create a lack of interest in education and cause exclusion. Around 51% of children in Rajnandgaon left school because of their lack of interest in study. The proportion of children with a lack of interest in studies is also high in other clusters. This indicates the fact that major problems lie within schools as they fail to hold the interest of children. This is indeed significant, since schools and the processes are amenable to change and adaptation, and therefore offer a way to improve participation and reduce exclusion of children from schooling.

Table 12: Reasons for Drop Out in Different Clusters

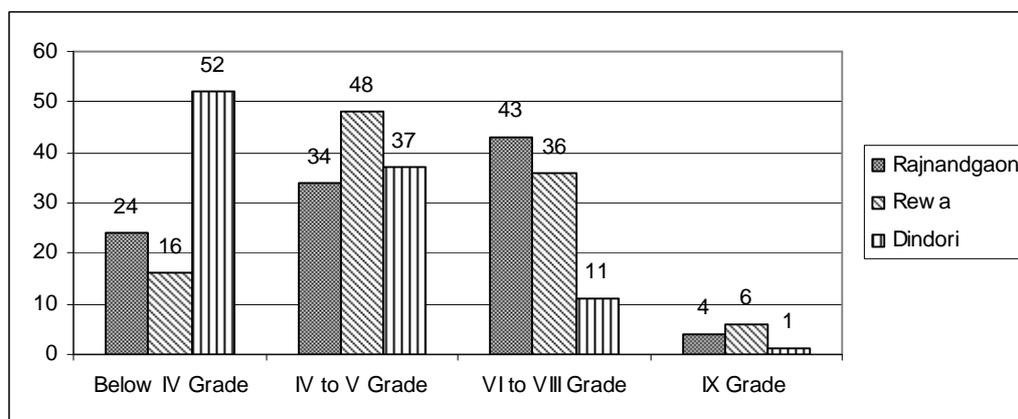
| Reasons | Rajnandgaon | % | Rewa | % | Dindori | % | Total | % |
|--|-------------|----|-----------|----|------------|----|------------|-----|
| Distance of School/ Education Centre | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 3 |
| Quality of education in school is poor | 0 | | 0 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Contribute in household income | 27 | 25 | 18 | 22 | 35 | 34 | 80 | 27 |
| Help in household activity/ sibling care | 13 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 19 | 18 | 43 | 15 |
| Child not interested in education | 57 | 51 | 39 | 48 | 35 | 34 | 131 | 44 |
| Unable to bear expense of education | 4 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 13 | 4 |
| Parents does not give importance to school education | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| Child disability | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 3 |
| Child doesn't have learning material | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total (N=100) | 109 | | 82 | | 104 | | 295 | |

4.1 Does Distance to School Lead to Exclusion?

Despite substantial investment on infrastructure facilities, many villages are devoid of adequate schooling facilities particularly at the upper primary stage (after Grade V), so, non-availability of school within accessible distance is a significant reason for children giving up on education without completing the full elementary cycle. The majority of drop out children left school after completion of Grade V, though the number of children leaving school even before completion of five years is also quite high as the lack of available opportunities for progression has a demotivating effect, resulting in dropout at earlier grades. Variation is noteworthy among clusters. While in Rajnandgaon only two villages do not have middle

schools, three villages in Rewa and eight villages in Dindori do not have any schooling facility beyond primary stage.

Figure 2: Last Grade Children Attended Before Dropping Out (in Percentage)



Source: Household Survey Data, 2008.

One could also observe considerable variation in the grade when children had to leave schools. While almost half of the total drop out children in Dindori left their schools without completing Grade IV, in Rewa, the highest levels of drop out took place between Grades IV-VI. Although the majority of children in Rajnandgaon continued their education until Grade VIII, a large number of children left school without completing Grade VIII, which was probably due to the end of cycle examination. The largest number of school leavers in Grade IX were found in Rewa. This could be because in Rewa and Rajnandgaon, initial access is not a problem as almost all villages have schooling facilities at least until primary level but it becomes more difficult as the grade increases. In Dindori, children face exclusion even much earlier at the primary level (Table 13).

Table 13: Cluster-wise Distribution of Schools by Type and Management

| Cluster | Upgraded Education Guarantee Scheme School | Government Primary School | Government Middle/Primary and Middle School | High School | Higher Secondary School | Private School (Preprimary/ Primary to different levels) | Total |
|--------------|--|---------------------------|---|-------------|-------------------------|--|-------|
| Rajnandgaon | – | 13 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 30 |
| Rewa | 15 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 35 |
| Dindori | 4 | 14 | 4 | 1 | – | – | 23 |
| Total | 19 | 34 | 19 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 89 |

Source: School Profile Data, 2008

It is generally assumed that availability of schools is not a problem with the enormous expansion witnessed in recent years. The field survey revealed that while expansion in facilities can be seen in all the three clusters, it is quite uneven across regions and does not fully guarantee adequate access even to eight years of elementary schooling. Analysis of the empirical reality across the three clusters clearly shows that school expansion programmes have not helped bridge equity gaps. Rather the expansion processes both in the government and private sectors favour the more developed localities thereby accentuating existing disparities. While more private schools are currently available in Rewa and Rajnandgaon, children in Dindori are solely dependent on government schools. Due to existing state policy,

a large number of small schools have sprung up under the EGS category, even in those villages where formal primary and even upper primary schools exist. This has caused more inequity in provision of schooling even within the government sector (for more detailed discussion see, Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

Having analysed the situation of children who leave school due to school related factors; it is pertinent to explore what happens to children who remain on the school register. In particular, it is worthwhile to examine the kinds of schools children are attending. What are their experiences in these schools? Are they getting adequate physical and academic facilities and do these factors impact their regular participation in the school? Are they able to learn well and how do teachers and their perceptions impact their learning levels which could in turn impact their continuation in school? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in the subsequent sections of the paper.

5. Exploring Quality of Schooling in Relation to Exclusion

The quality of schools has been assessed with respect to four sets of factors: (a) Physical Infrastructure; (b) Teaching Learning Materials; (c) Availability of Teachers and their Training Status (and their Absenteeism); and (d) Learner Performance – in terms of achievement test results and teacher expectations. The primary purpose of this section is to examine the nature of facilities provided in the schools and their possible relationship to children facing risk of exclusion. This has been examined particularly with respect to regular participation of children in teaching-learning processes and levels of learning achievement.

5.1. Physical Infrastructure

Beginning with the Operation Blackboard Project in the late 1980s, the Government of India has been investing substantial resources in strengthening the physical infrastructure of the schools. This has been further strengthened under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched ten years ago. The question to be examined is whether this has resulted in basic school infrastructure available for all children and if the level of infrastructure influences participation level of children in schooling. While this sub-section gives an analysis of the state of infrastructure in schools in the study areas, the issue of its relationship with school participation will be dealt with in a the section on absenteeism.

The first impression one gets in the field is that schools have the necessary physical facilities. In fact, school buildings can be found in almost all villages. But good quality education requires several other facilities in the school. SSA has been investing substantially to equip all schools with such facilities. 16 such items were identified, which are available to different extents in the schools of the three clusters. An attempt has been made to empirically determine the level of facilities by arranging them in four hierarchical groups providing a basis for classifying schools according to the level of infrastructure facilities available. Four items were found to be available in almost all schools: school building, blackboard, chair for the teacher and drinking water facility in the school. Any school with at least three of the four facilities are considered to have basic facilities or at 'Level 1' in terms of infrastructure. The overall framework developed is as follows:

Level 0: School does not have even three of the four items in Level 1

Level 1: Schools has at least three of the following items - School Building, Blackboard, Chair for the teacher and Drinking water facility in the school

Level 2: School has at least three of the following in addition to Level 1 items - Separate classrooms, Toilet, Pupil desk and Playground

Level 3: Library, Staff Room, Kitchen, electricity

Level 4: Computer, Gate, Store Room, Ramp

There is indeed considerable improvement taking place with respect to infrastructure provisions in most of the states under DPEP and SSA but this is concentrated in bigger habitations and those close to main roads. Smaller primary schools with one room and one teacher, mostly recruited on contract basis are found in smaller habitations. Many of these schools are running under the EGS scheme and are now facing the threat of abolition if they

do not meet the requirements of the RTE Act, 2009. The Act does not approve the schools run under EGS and AIE schemes. The integrated schools with primary, middle and high school stages are found in bigger villages and agglomerations like Arjuni in Rajnandgaon, Amilki in Rewa and even Chanda in Dindori clusters. These schools generally do not suffer acute problems of teacher shortages and absenteeism ensuring regular functioning of schools. The data compiled through the level classification of schools as per infrastructure facilities shows extremely poor conditions of schools in the tribal cluster of Dindori with one out of four schools not meeting even the basic level requirements. Two schools in this cluster do not even have buildings. Even in Rewa cluster very few are in level 3. It is only in Rajnandgaon cluster, which is served by good roads, that a particularly well-equipped school had most of the items listed.

However, the mismatch in terms of electricity and computers is a serious problem, in Rajnandgaon cluster, while ten schools have computers, only nine have electricity; seven of the ten schools that have computers do not have electricity. This clearly points out the need to establish a set of priorities in equipping schools with infrastructure and also the need to give urgent attention to meeting the most basic facilities in tribal areas. Also, the supply of provisions has to be contextualised. Basic needs have to be fulfilled before moving further and supplying computers which were found to be unutilised (Table 14).

Table 14: Level Wise Distribution of Schools with Respect to Infrastructure

| Clusters | level 0 | level 1 | level 2 | level 3 | level 4 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Rajnandgaon | 0 | 15 | 10 | 4 | 1 |
| Rewa | 0 | 21 | 11 | 3 | 0 |
| Dindori | 1 | 21 | 1 | | |
| Total | 1 | 57 | 22 | 7 | 1 |

Source: School Profile and Roster Data, 2008

5.2. Teaching-Learning Material, Teachers and their Training Status

Just like the focus on creation of physical infrastructure, supply of teaching-learning material (TLM) has been the focus of all major programmes of school education in the country. It was in mid-80s that a major programme for supplying science kits to all schools was initiated. Operation Blackboard provided for a comprehensive kit containing a variety of teaching-learning materials. The effort continued under DPEP and SSA. In fact, special grants are being provided every year to each school by SSA for preparing/acquiring teaching-learning materials. In addition, each teacher has been getting an annual grant at least for the last ten years in most of the schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for preparing teaching-learning material. With such long term efforts, substantial investment coupled with sustained effort in training of teachers for preparing and using various kinds of material, one would expect most schools to be well equipped in terms of TLM. The field reality presents an altogether different picture of the situation in most of the schools (Table 15). It is shocking to find that 10% of schools in Rewa cluster and 17% in Dindori did not even have blackboards. Again, as in case of physical infrastructure, there is a hierarchy – schools located remotely and serving the more marginalised are generally worse equipped. In fact, the ten items listed in Table 15 are essentially those which form part of the SSA framework of norms for supply of TLM to schools. Further, mere availability of material will not suffice. One has to examine if the material/equipment are in a usable condition and whether teachers have been using them effectively.

Table 15: Availability of Teaching-Learning Material

| | Blackboard | Chalk | Duster | Map | Globe | Chart | Science Kit | Maths Kit | Book shelf | Sports equipment |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Rajnandgaon N=30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 23 | 23 | 29 | 16 | 18 | 16 | 15 |
| Percentage | 100 | 100 | 100 | 77 | 77 | 97 | 53 | 60 | 53 | 50 |
| Rewa N=35 | 32 | 35 | 35 | 19 | 10 | 29 | 9 | 14 | 11 | 16 |
| Percentage | 91 | 100 | 100 | 54 | 29 | 83 | 26 | 40 | 31 | 46 |
| Dindori N=24 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 10 | 5 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| Percentage | 83 | 83 | 83 | 42 | 21 | 46 | 13 | 8 | 25 | 21 |

Source: School Profile and Roster Data, 2008

5.3 Is there Adequate Provision of Teachers?

The teacher is the central figure in organising and managing any school. Timely recruitment of teachers and their rational deployment in schools is the core function that every school system has to manage in a systematic manner. The average figures on teacher provision at the macro level invariably appear to be satisfactory. This is the case with respect to the three clusters under consideration (Table 16). However, beneath this satisfactory picture is a serious distortion in matching teacher supply with number of students in the school. This again is evident from the data. No one can fault the overall Pupil Teacher Ratio in any of the clusters. But a careful look at the variations even within small numbers of schools in each cluster indicates the degree of the problem of teacher deployment.

Table 16: Enrolment, Teachers and Classrooms

| | No. of students | No. of teachers | Average PTR | TPR Range | No. of classrooms | Students/ Classroom Average | Students/ Classroom Range | Schools without Female Teacher |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Rajnand Gaon | 4,734 | 134 | 35 | 1:13 to 1:132 | 129 | 37 | 1:12 to 1:82 | 1 out of 30 |
| Rewa | 3,157 | 101 | 31 | 1:3 to 1:87 | 112 | 28 | 1:6 to 1:65 | 16 out of 35 |
| Dindori | 1,737 | 51 | 34 | 1:12 to 1:75 | 53 | 33 | 1:16 to 1:96 | 18 out of 24 |

Source: School Baseline Data, 2008

The mismatch between the number of teachers and classrooms to teach in is similarly problematic. No careful planning seems to precede the creation of infrastructure; there are several schools where the number of teachers is more than the number of available classrooms. Equally problematic is the situation where classrooms remain unutilised due to inadequate provision of teachers. Similarly, a range of situations with respect to the ratio of number of students to number of classrooms show that some schools are overcrowded, while several others have very few students to utilise the classroom facilities.

A primary school is supposed to impart instruction from Grades I-V. However, teacher allocation is done mainly on the basis of enrolment. The common norm adopted is to have one teacher for every 40 students. However, considering the difficult conditions in which many schools function, it was adopted as national policy to appoint at least two teachers in every school along with at least two classrooms. Implementation of such a policy began in early 1990s. Also, at least one female teacher was to be appointed in every school. This policy of ensuring at least 50% of new recruits to teaching profession are females has continued even under SSA. Surprisingly, neither of these policies seems to be in practice in the clusters under consideration.

As can be seen from Table 17, a large proportion of schools continue to be single teacher schools. In fact, only a small number have at least five teachers to teach five classes. The more under developed the cluster is, the more single teacher and two teacher schools are to be found. 16 out of 35 schools in Rewa and 18 out of 23 schools in Dindori have no female teachers in position.

Table 17: Schools According to Number of Teachers

| | Number of teachers | | | | | | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|----|----|---|---|----|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | >5 | |
| Dindori | 8 | 10 | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 23 |
| Rewa | 10 | 12 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 35 |
| Rajnandgaon | - | 9 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 30 |
| Total | 19 | 31 | 12 | 7 | 5 | 15 | 89 |

Source: School Baseline Data, 2008

A massive expansion of teacher training facilities has taken place in recent years. The Government of India spends substantial sums of money every year to strengthen pre-service training of elementary school teachers (Bandyopadhyay, Umabati and Zeitlyn, 2011). Yet surprisingly, very large proportions of teachers are untrained. Even in Rajnandgaon cluster around 25% of teachers are untrained; the number is a staggering 67% in Dindori cluster (Table 18). Many teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction about school infrastructure, school environment and the attitudes of parents and community members. They have expressed dissatisfaction with the way training programmes are planned, as they do not adequately take into consideration their training needs. A large proportion of them have indicated that students' absenteeism and their lack of interest in studies are reasons for the poor conditions of schooling (Bandyopadhyay, Umabati and Zeitlyn, 2011).

However, teachers never considered that the school conditions and their own way of dealing with children in the classroom and outside could be influencing children's interest in schooling and learning. This indifferent attitude and lack of understanding by teachers is also found in other countries. CREATE research in Ghana found strikingly similar issues and attitudes (Alhassan and Adzahlie-Mensah, 2010).

Many teachers opine that parents should pay more attention to their children's education. It is not illogical to say that this negative attitude towards students and their regularity on the one hand and parents and their non-cooperation, as well as disinterested on the other would negatively impact children's participation in schooling. This issue will be elaborated upon in a later section.

Table 18: Distribution of Trained and Untrained Teachers

| | Trained | Untrained | Total |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|-------|
| Rajnandgaon | 101 (76) | 32 (24) | 133 |
| Rewa | 75 (75) | 25 (25) | 100 |
| Dindori | 17 (33) | 34 (67) | 51 |

Source: School Profiles and Teacher Questionnaires

Finally, while teachers invariably place the blame of poor learning on irregular attendance of learners, not much is said about absenteeism among teachers. CREATE research revealed that teacher absenteeism is a serious issue. While around one out of six teachers were absent on the day of the visit in Rajnandgaon and Rewa clusters, it was one out of four in Dindori cluster. Many teachers said that they did not feel comfortable in school because of the lack of essential facilities like drinking water, toilets and electricity. They also expressed difficulties in performing their teaching tasks due lack of facilities like classrooms, blackboards and other teaching learning materials. Such problems are worse in schools run under the EGS/AIE scheme as mentioned in the following box.

Box 1: Teachers' Opinion about School Infrastructure

Teachers from UEGS Jakiratola in Rewa reported that their teaching is affected by the inadequacy of academic infrastructure. They said:

- Text books are not available to students.
- Lack of parental support for their children's education.
- Teachers are involved in non-academic work adversely affecting teaching learning process. Due to teachers' involvement in mid day meal activities, teaching gets affected drastically. So there should be separate staff for mid day meal activities. Teachers should be exempt from being deployed in other non-teaching programmes e.g. pulse-polio programme, census survey etc.
- Training for teaching of English should be given to all teachers, so that they can effectively teach this subject.
- Due to insufficient classrooms teachers face problem in conducting classes.

Source: Teachers' profile, 2008

While teachers complain about parents, it is also necessary to examine if teachers are involved in teaching when they attend school. Quite often during the fieldwork, teachers were found to be involved in various activities other than teaching. In fact, during the fieldwork, parents expressed considerable dissatisfaction about teachers' irregular attendance. This was validated by the field data (Table 19).

Box 2: Parents' Opinion about Irregular Teacher Attendance

During the fieldwork in Rewa district, parents and community members were unhappy about irregularities and late arrival of teachers in the Dhovkhari Government Primary and Middle School that enrol a large number of children. Even after coming to school, teachers spend time playing *carom*¹ instead of teaching in class. Another example is from Dhobkhari UEGS 299, where our investigator had to visit repeatedly to interview the teacher, as he was absent for a long time. 'He is always irregular' was the comment of parents whose children were enrolled in this school. Similar problem of teachers' absenteeism has been reported in case of Raura GPS and Pipara GPMS.

Table 19: Teacher Absenteeism (Day of the Visit)

| | Total | Present | | Absent | |
|--------------------|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| Rajnandgaon | 136 | 113 | 83.09% | 23 | 16.91% |
| Rewa | 101 | 85 | 84.16% | 16 | 15.84% |
| Dindori | 52 | 40 | 76.92% | 12 | 23.08% |

Source: School Profile, 2008

5.4 Is Access to Schools Equitable?

If the goal is to provide equitable access to quality schooling, it is important to examine who goes to which type of school and with what kinds of facilities. The numbers of private

¹ A popular South Asian board game

schools are increasing and some believe that this will meet the increasing demand for quality education. The growth of private schools responds to the demand of rich parents for better quality education (Kingdon, 2007; Tooley et al. 2005). Table 20 gives the distribution of children according to the type of schools in which they are enrolled. The first point that is clearly discernible is that private schools are not likely to be established in very poor and remote localities such as Dindori as opportunities to make profits from educating very poor people in difficult to access areas are limited. The government has to make more intensive efforts to strengthen school infrastructure in these places. We will see evidence to show that this is not really happening.

Table 20: Enrolment in Different Types of Schools

| Management type | Rajnandgaon | | Rewa | | Dindori | |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Private | 568 | 13 | 331 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| Government | 3,757 | 87 | 1,750 | 57 | 1,523 | 90 |
| EGS | 0 | 0 | 969 | 32 | 171 | 11 |
| Total | 4,325 | 100 | 3,050 | 100 | 1,694 | 100 |

Source: School roster data, 2008

A second factor to note is that enrolment in private schools has a clear gender bias. Parents prefer to spend additional resources on boys than girls (see Table 21). The third point is that a large proportion of children enrolled in government schools are studying in very small EGS centres. It may further be observed that 23% of the schools are very small with less than 50 children enrolled and another 31% have less than 100 children (see Table 22). Such small schools, though they may provide access to more children fail to provide adequate physical and academic facilities to make the teaching learning process effective. Who goes to such schools – their gender and social background, and what impact they have on actual learning outcomes are critical issues determining their attendance and learning patterns.

Table 21: Gender and Type of School

| Cluster | Management | Boys | % | Girls | % | Total |
|-------------|------------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| Rajnandgaon | Private | 318 | 14 | 250 | 12 | 568 |
| | Government | 1,873 | 86 | 1,884 | 88 | 3,757 |
| | | 2,191 | 100 | 2,134 | 100 | 4,325 |
| Rewa | Private | 230 | 15 | 101 | 6 | 331 |
| | Government | 814 | 53 | 936 | 61 | 1,750 |
| | EGS | 482 | 32 | 487 | 36 | 969 |
| | | 1,526 | 100 | 1,524 | 100 | 3,050 |
| Dindori | Private | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Government | 804 | 90 | 719 | 90 | 1,523 |
| | EGS | 90 | 10 | 81 | 10 | 171 |

Source: School Roster data

Table 22: Schools According to Enrolment*

| Cluster | Up to 50 | 51-100 | 101-200 | 201-400 | Total |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Rajnandgaon | 1 (3) | 6 (20) | 18 (60) | 5 (17) | 30 |
| Rewa | 13 (37) | 10 (29) | 9 (26) | 3 (8) | 35 |
| Dindori | 8 (33) | 12 (50) | 4 (17) | - | 24 |
| Total | 22 (25) | 28 (31) | 31 (35) | 8 (9) | 89 |

*percentage in parenthesis

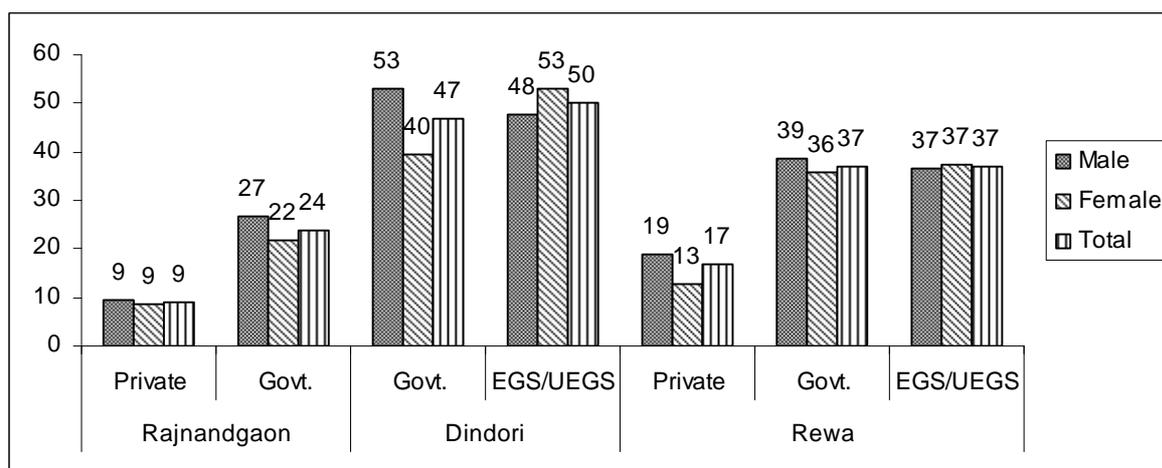
Source: School Roster data

6. Children at Risk of Exclusion: Exploring Absenteeism among Students

The central characteristic of school education is the sustained and active participation of children in teaching learning processes organised according to a predetermined curriculum. Learning outcomes are to be viewed largely as the product of such organised learning experiences. To what extent is this taking place in the sample schools? This has been examined in terms of children’s attendance patterns. As part of the investigation, every child’s recorded number of presence in the school register for the previous month was collected. Secondly, the actual presence of the child on the day of the visit was also recorded to find out the participation behaviour of children in the class and the school. Third, for each child, the concerned teacher was asked to indicate how regular the attendance of the child has been; specifically, how many days did the child attend the school on average in a month.

Figure 3 highlights the very high levels of overall absenteeism among students in all the localities. The rates are particular staggering in Rewa and Dindori. What is most intriguing is the unduly high proportion of children absent in EGS schools, which are supposed to be established and managed by local communities. With such high levels of student absenteeism, the official claim of very small proportion of ‘out-of-school’ children needs re-examination.

Figure 3: Percentage of Students Absent on the Day of the Visit to Schools



Source: Roster Data, 2008

Data has revealed that all the three clusters are facing tremendous challenges ensuring meaningful participation due to the presence of a high percentage of absentees; some children are absent for more than 15 days per month. The data collected on attendance on the day of the visit does not, of course, match with the information recorded in the official register (See Figure 3). Yet, even according to the school register, absenteeism is quite high in government schools. For instance, around 20% of children attended school for 15 days or less per month in Dindori and the corresponding figure is as high as 25% in Rewa. Surprisingly, even private schools in Rewa seem to face this problem to a high degree. Interestingly, teachers do not seem to perceive the problem to the same extent (See Table 23).

Table 23: Number of Children who Remained Absent in the Month Preceding the Field Visit – Teacher’s Response

| Clusters | | 0-3 days | 4-6 days | 7-15 days | >15 days |
|-------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Rajnandgaon | Boy | 1,255 | 585 | 383 | 89 |
| | Percentage | 54.28 | 25.30 | 16.57 | 3.85 |
| | Girl | 1,402 | 480 | 279 | 69 |
| | Percentage | 62.84 | 21.52 | 12.51 | 3.09 |
| Rewa | Boy | 726 | 342 | 360 | 99 |
| | Percentage | 47.54 | 22.40 | 23.58 | 6.48 |
| | Girl | 785 | 310 | 359 | 69 |
| | Percentage | 51.51 | 20.34 | 23.56 | 4.53 |
| Dindori | Boy | 443 | 180 | 176 | 95 |
| | Percentage | 49.55 | 20.13 | 19.69 | 10.63 |
| | Girl | 491 | 122 | 125 | 62 |
| | Percentage | 61.38 | 15.25 | 15.63 | 7.75 |

Source: School Roster, 2008

The analysis of data highlights the very high levels of overall absenteeism among students in all the localities (Figure 4). The rates of attendance are particularly low in Rewa and Dindori with many children missing a week or more of schooling each month. It is interesting to note that in all three clusters rates of absenteeism for 0-3 days per month are higher among girls, but higher proportions of boys were missing 4 or more days per month than girls.

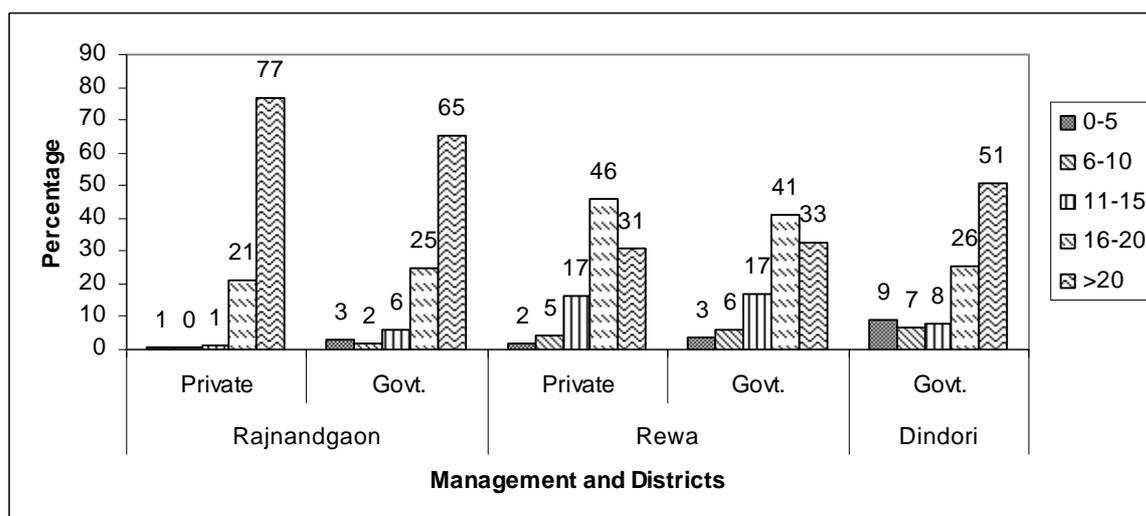
Table 24: Reasons for Absenteeism

| | Rajnandgaon | | Rewa | | Dindori | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Child went to relative' house | 331 | 10.5 | 379 | 15.9 | 108 | 9.1 |
| Child was not well | 550 | 17.5 | 570 | 23.9 | 305 | 25.7 |
| Fears in going to school | 23 | 0.7 | 33 | 1.4 | 21 | 1.8 |
| Engaged in domestic work | 373 | 11.9 | 154 | 6.4 | 72 | 6.1 |
| Others | 35 | 1.1 | 8 | 0.3 | 48 | 4 |
| Total Children | 3,147 | 100 | 2,388 | 100 | 1,186 | 100 |

Source: HH Survey, 2008

Data collected in 2009 and 2010 further confirm that many children are unable to attend their school regularly. In view of high rates of absenteeism, it seems worthwhile to examine the reasons for absenteeism (Table 24). Are these children absent because of school related reasons or is it because their home environment does not encourage them to attend school regularly? The reasons for absenteeism have been explored based on interviews with parents during the household survey. In Rajnandgaon, around 17% of students were absent because of illness, and this figure was about 25% in Rewa and Dindori.

Figure 4: Average Attendance in the Previous Month as Shown from Register



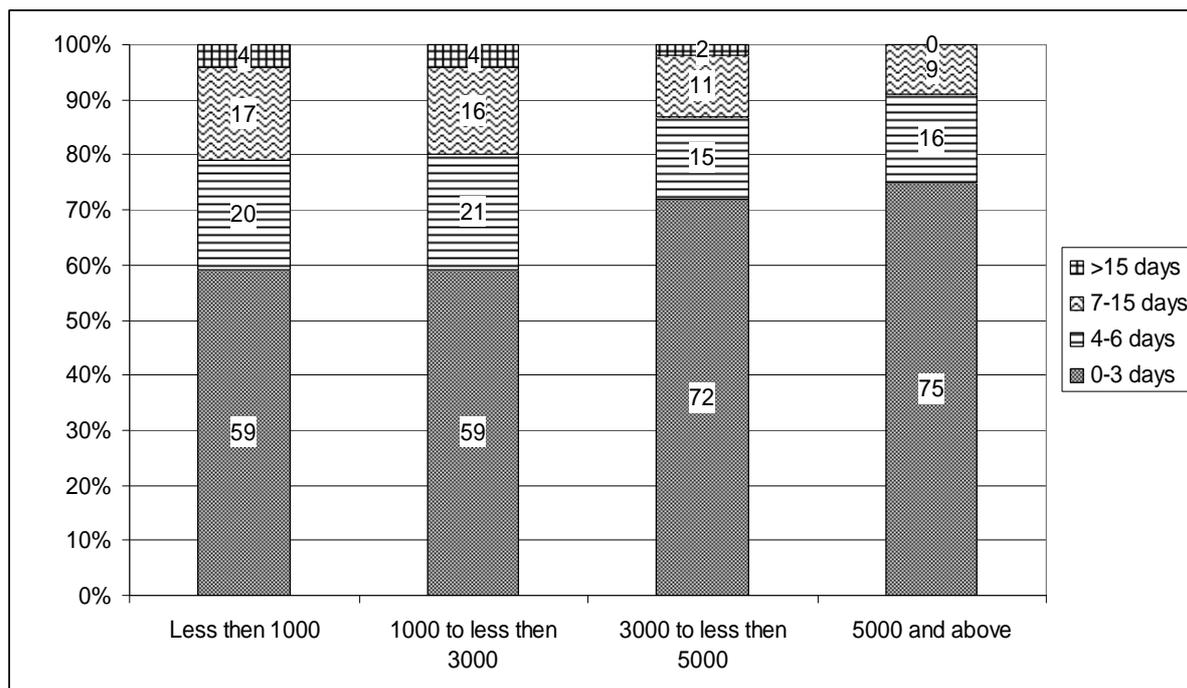
Source: School Roster, 2008

The household data also indicates that parents’ levels of education are associated with attendance. Children whose parents are illiterate are more likely to be absent from school. For example 26% of the students in Rajnandgaon, 24% in Rewa and 10% in Dindori whose fathers are illiterate were absent from school. This is much higher than those whose fathers are literate or have higher levels of education. The proportion of absentee children whose father has secondary or higher education is much lower. The rates are 9%, 18% and 0% in Rajnandgaon, Rewa and Dindori in 2008. Similar trends can be observed in 2009 and 2010. While strong links were found between level of absenteeism and household income as well as educational levels of parents, a significant association was also found between absenteeism and the level of physical infrastructure facilities (Bandyopadhyay, Das and Zeitlyn (2010).

6.1 Household Income and Absenteeism

There was a significant association between income and attendance of children in schools across the clusters. It is those children from lower income groups who remain absent from school for longer periods of time. The Figure 5 shows that 75% of children from the highest income group were absent for a maximum of three days in the previous month of data collection. Not a single child in the highest household income group (above Rs. 5,000) was absent for more than 15 days, although a few of them were absent for 7-15 days. In the lowest income group (less than Rs 1,000) meanwhile, 59% of children were absent for less than 3 days per month and 21% missed more than seven days in a month.

Figure 5: Absenteeism by Income Group



Source: Merged data set of School Roster and Household data for Figure 5, 6, 7

6.2 Infrastructure Quality and Absenteeism

While it is visible from above charts that poorer children are absent from schools more frequently and for longer than wealthier children, one can see considerable association of poor condition of schools with attendance of children which has been established using chi square test. Using the data on attendance and the levels of schools calculated based on infrastructure facilities as mentioned earlier; an attempt has been made to find out relationship between these two variables (Table 25).

In Table 25, cross-tabulation has been done between the attendance of the students and the infrastructure level of schools. The infrastructure level was assigned as outlined in section 5.1. Actual data for each child from zero attendance to above twenty days attendances have been recorded for previous month of data collection in the school roster data. Using this data a chi square test has been conducted to show significant difference in the respective attendance of the students between the various levels of the schools. For this purpose, the expected differences or values are calculated from the above data by applying the formula: $(\text{Row Total} * \text{Column Total} / \text{Grand Total})$. The chi square value is 258.6, which is highly significant at the p value of 0.01. So it can be concluded that the sample supports the hypothesis that the attendance of children increases with infrastructure facilities in school. In other words, children tend to remain absent more in the schools with less infrastructure facilities. Greater differences between expected and actual data produce a larger Chi-square value. The larger the Chi-square value, the greater the probability of having a significant difference between the observation (attendance of students) and the groups (levels of schools) that are being studied. If the Chi-square value is greater than or equal to the critical value then there is a significant difference between the groups we are studying. If the Chi-square value is less than the critical value then one can conclude that there is no significant difference. So the levels are our groups that are being studied and the chi square attempts to show that there is significant difference among attendance of the students and the levels of the schools.

Table 25: Number of Days Attended in Previous Month of Data Collection by School Level (2008)

| | Attendance in Days and percentage | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| School Level | 0 | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | >20 | Total N=100 |
| Level 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 28 | 0 | 34 |
| Percentage | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 82 | 0 | |
| Level 1 | 118 | 120 | 207 | 525 | 1613 | 2069 | 4652 |
| Percentage | 3 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 35 | 44 | |
| Level 2 | 25 | 56 | 96 | 199 | 607 | 1451 | 2434 |
| Percentage | 1 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 25 | 60 | |
| Level 3 | 18 | 16 | 45 | 120 | 305 | 487 | 991 |
| Percentage | 2 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 31 | 49 | |
| Level 4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 17 | 155 | 149 | 331 |
| Percentage | 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 47 | 45 | |
| Total | 165 | 193 | 353 | 867 | 2708 | 4156 | 8442 |
| Percentage | 2 | 2 | 4 | 10 | 32 | 49 | |

Source: School Roster and School Profile

7. Assessing the Nature and Extent of Repetition

An important feature of good schooling is the smooth progression of children from one grade to another. It is assumed that the children learn the relevant competencies as per the curriculum and move on to the next grade. However, considering the wide variations one finds among children in terms of the pace of learning and acquiring the expected learning outcomes, emphasis in the early grades is placed on continuous evaluation and promotion of learners to the next grade irrespective of the levels of mastery achieved by the children. This policy of automatic promotion is expected to ensure that children do not repeat same grade and lose their motivation to learn. It is also based on the premise that repetition tends to lead to eventual school dropout. Do teachers and school authorities follow this policy and implement it in the right spirit? Field data show that the no-detention policies are not being implemented (Table 26 & 27).

Table 26: Extent of Repeaters Found in the Three Clusters (Roster Data)

| | Boys | | Girls | | Total | |
|--------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | Total | Repeaters | Total | Repeaters | Total | Repeaters |
| Rajnandgaon | 2,311 | 294 | 2,231 | 213 | 4,542 | 507 |
| | | 12.7% | | 9.5 % | | 11.2% |
| Rewa | 1527 | 266 | 1524 | 273 | 3,051 | 539 |
| | | 17.4% | | 17.9% | | 17.7% |
| Dindori | 894 | 205 | 797 | 157 | 1,691 | 362 |
| | | 22.9% | | 19.7% | | 21.4% |

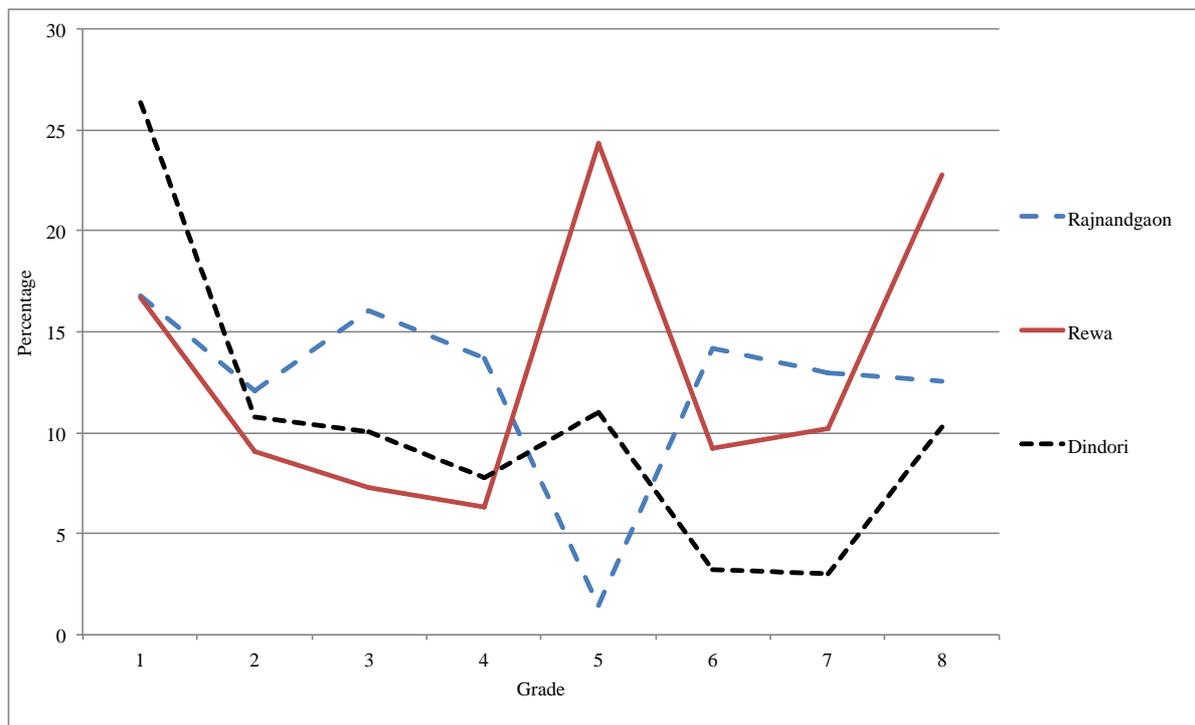
Source: School Roster, 2008

Table 27: Trends of Repetition in the Three Clusters (Percentages from School Profile Records)

| | | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|--------------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Rajnandgaon | Boys | 17.93 | 15.65 | 14.25 | 12.92 | 9.66 |
| | Girls | 15.69 | 14.17 | 12.45 | 12.95 | 8.36 |
| | Total | 16.86 | 14.94 | 13.37 | 12.93 | 8.92 |
| Rewa | Boys | 17.66 | 16.78 | 24.97 | 33.91 | 17.77 |
| | Girls | 14.79 | 15.64 | 25 | 32.83 | 18.9 |
| | Total | 16.23 | 16.23 | 24.87 | 33.37 | 18.34 |
| Dindori | Boys | 20.96 | 16.45 | 21.42 | 19.79 | 24.97 |
| | Girls | 25.19 | 16.2 | 21.52 | 18.79 | 21.26 |
| | Total | 22.73 | 16.35 | 21.47 | 19.32 | 23.76 |

The high rates of repetition in the early grades are indeed surprising considering that both the clusters (Rajnandgaon and Rewa) follow an automatic promotion policy. However, teachers and head teachers pointed out that they detain children based on examination performance. Some also mentioned that poor attendance of the children is the reason for their failure to progress to the higher grades. Invariably, the blame is placed on the poor capability of the children or the disinterest of their parents. The records also show that, over the years the situation is gradually improving in Rajnandgaon schools but not so in the other two clusters. Figure 6 shows that repetition is a problem from the early grades of primary schools in all three clusters although there is a considerable variation in trend. Rates of repetition peak in Grade V in Rewa, but are at their lowest rate in Grade V in Rajnandgaon (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

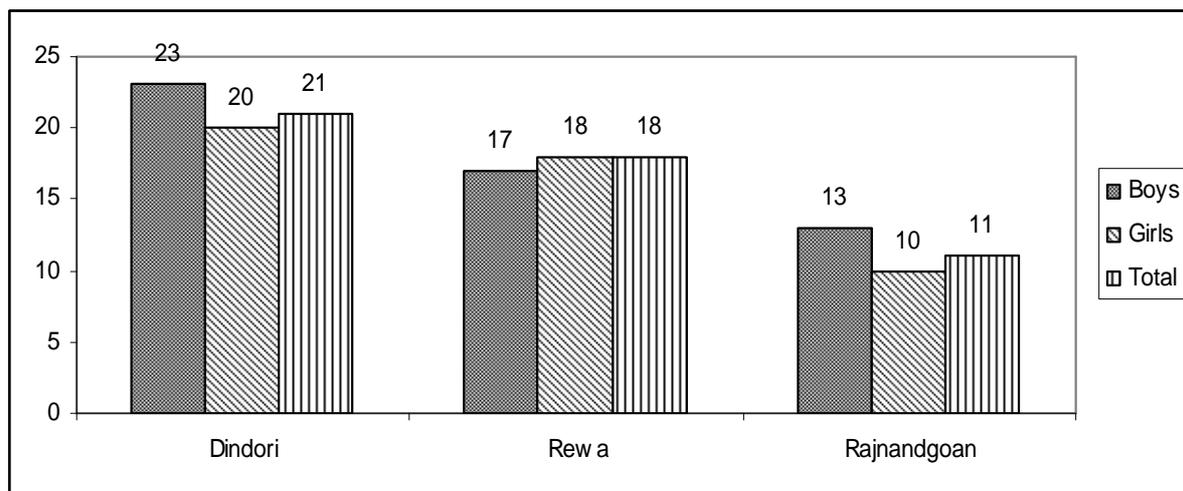
Figure 6: Grade Wise Repetition in the Three Clusters



Source: Roster Data, 2008

The data from 2008 shows the proportion of children who have repeated a grade at least once since they joined the school. The data of 2009 and 2010 shows the repetition of children in the academic year of 2008-09 and 2009-10 respectively. Around one fifth of the children in Rewa and Dindori clusters were found to have repeated their class at least once since they entered school. However, in Rajnandgaon the figure was considerably lower. Surprisingly, repeating children are mostly attending government run formal or EGS schools while repeaters were rarely found in private schools.

Figure 7: Rates of Repetition in the Three Clusters



Source: School Roster Data, 2008

In view of these high levels of repetition as shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7, it is important to examine whether the repetition is linked with the policies adopted by the state governments to determine if the examination practices adopted at the primary classes have any impact on the levels of repetition. Traditionally, Madhya Pradesh conducts an external test at the end of Grade III and failures are asked to repeat. In Chhattisgarh where Rajnandgaon cluster is located this examination has been abandoned in favour of a Grade V assessment. High levels of repetition should be a serious cause of concern since they lead to over age enrolment and increased risks of drop out. So also does late entry into Grade I. In Grade I between 30 and 40% of children are seven years old or more. By Grade V in Rewa and Dindori more than 60% are one or more years over age and by Grade VIII over 70%. In Rewa over 25% of those in Grade VIII of primary school are 16 years or older and in Dindori over 33%. Older children are more likely to drop out, especially if they are girls.

It is important that more in depth investigations are done to determine the cause of varying trends across clusters. Since these are those children who have been attending the school despite not progressing further, it is important to examine if the school conditions are congenial for the children to learn. Basically, the issue is one of ineffective teaching learning process in the schools. Data from the field also show a positive relationship between repetition and school infrastructure as shown in Table 28.

Table 28: Level-Wise Distribution of Repeaters

| Level of school | Repeaters | Total students | % |
|-----------------|-----------|----------------|----|
| 0 | 0 | 34 | 0 |
| 1 | 806 | 4,776 | 17 |
| 2 | 288 | 2,220 | 13 |
| 3 | 188 | 801 | 23 |
| 4 | 27 | 327 | 8 |
| Total | 1,309 | 8,158 | 16 |

Source: School Roster and School Profile data, 2008

It is also understandable that with the problem of high repetition, the most schools are vulnerable to the problem of dropout. As the data indicates, the incidence of drop out increased in 2009 when 446 children dropped out, while in 2010, 602 children from the 88 schools dropped out. It should be observed that a large number of children dropped out even in Rajnandgaon in 2009 as well as 2010, though the cluster is equipped with better schooling facilities as compared to Dindori and Rewa. In addition, for access to school to be meaningful, students should be able to progress through the stages of education – primary, upper primary and secondary. Data reveal that though enrolment is high in the primary stage, the transition of these enrolled students to upper primary is not encouraging. 11% in Rajnandgaon, 29% in Rewa and 38% in Dindori did not transit from primary to upper primary (Grade V to Grade VI) in these clusters in 2008.

8. Are All Children Learning?

Poor learning in the early stages of education is one of the main stumbling blocks for progress of children through the grades and transit to upper primary and thereafter to secondary stages of schooling. No attempt was made in the survey to evaluate the learning levels of children in all grades. Instead it was considered that the measures of learning outcomes among Grade IV and Grade V children work as useful indicators of the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes taking place in the school. This is also significant since Grade V is the final grade of the lower primary cycle determining if children qualify to enter the upper primary cycle. Further, a large majority of the 88 schools in the three selected clusters have only lower primary sections.

The achievement tests² used in the survey were specially constructed to correspond to competencies expected in Grade IV children. The figures in Table 29 give an overall picture of average performance levels in the schools of the three clusters. The situation is not encouraging as indicated by the mean scores, particularly in Hindi. Two observations are relevant to be noted from the figures in Table 29. First, mean performance in mathematics is slightly higher than in Hindi in all the clusters, even though the differences are not statistically significant except in the case of Rajnandgaon. Yet, such poor performance in the first language is a cause for concern as it would seriously affect reading and learning capabilities of the children as they move up in the school ladder. A second observation is that invariably, Grade V students have done considerably better in both the tests. This indicates that children are indeed progressing by acquiring additional competencies as they continue to attend school even if the pace of learning may not match the grade in which they are placed. Rather, this calls for re-examining the pace at which curricular inputs are provided and also on the pedagogic strategies adopted. A disaggregated analysis of the raw scores would also help specifically identify which are the competencies that seem to be mastered and which are those which demand more focused additional inputs by the teachers.

Table 29: Mean Performance on Achievement Tests in 2008

| | Number of Schools | N | Mathematics | | Hindi | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. |
| Grade IV | | | | | | |
| Rajnandgaon | 15 | 482 | 32.31 | 21.97 | 27.98 | 22.48 |
| Rewa | 32 | 385 | 29.48 | 21.19 | 28.19 | 19.83 |
| Dindori | 17 | 285 | 10.58 | 12.24 | 9.51 | 9.75 |
| Grade V | | | | | | |
| Rajnandgaon | 15 | 400 | 37.7 | 25.81 | 32.02 | 20.06 |
| Rewa | 32 | 412 | 40.66 | 25.18 | 37.96 | 22.94 |
| Dindori | 17 | 173 | 17.53 | 12.81 | 16.78 | 12.68 |

Source: calculated based on competency test, 2008

In addition, the analysis of test results can indicate whether there has been any improvement in the learning level of children in these three clusters. Table 30 indicates that although there

2 The Tests in Mathematics as well as Hindi were constructed in such a way that it would be possible to delineate the specific competencies expected to be mastered Grade II, Grade III and Grade IV children. A detailed analysis would therefore help which are competencies corresponding to the three Grades are mastered by each child. (Such analysis of the scores is yet to be carried out) A pool of Test items were prepared and validated by groups of practicing teachers teaching in primary classes. The final tests were constructed after trying out the pool of items and reexamination of performance by the group of teachers.

has been no improvement in Dindori district, children in Rajnandgaon have shown some improvement in both subjects. The performance of children in Rewa shows a declining trend which is definitely a matter of concern.

Table 30: Cluster Wise Mean Scores of Learners in Hindi and Mathematics (in 2008, 2009, 2010)

| Name of the school | Maths | | | | | | Hindi | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|
| | Mean | | | S.D. | | | Mean | | | S.D. | | |
| Grade IV | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
| Rajnandgaon | 43.13 | 40.37 | 55.22 | 21.17 | 18.5 | 11.22 | 34.63 | 40.54 | 20.00 | 18 | 21 | 11 |
| Rewa | 42.65 | 26.75 | 25.01 | 24.74 | 21.04 | 13.00 | 38.32 | 21.97 | 15.00 | 21 | 17 | 10 |
| Dindori | 26.12 | 28.3 | 14.33 | 26.28 | 18.51 | 10.58 | 22.65 | 21.19 | 6.54 | 18 | 13 | 10 |
| Grade V | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rajnandgaon | 54.47 | 58.03 | 35.82 | 23.608 | 20.267 | 12.41 | 47.42 | 51.1 | 26.53 | 18 | 20 | 9 |
| Rewa | 52.96 | 48.41 | 29.79 | 24.167 | 19.662 | 15.84 | 45.95 | 41.63 | 19.81 | 21 | 20 | 13 |
| Dindori | 35.01 | 30.24 | 20.5 | 28.206 | 16.32 | 9.78 | 29.72 | 26.26 | 14.98 | 19.264 | 15 | 12 |

Source: competency test results, 2008, 2009, 2010

Table 31 presents a classification of schools based on mean performance in Grade V mathematics. This has been presented essentially to illustrate that interschool variations make a critical difference. The relative position of the three clusters does not differ significantly. However, it transforms the uniformly poor picture that the overall mean presents to one where several schools seem to be performing well. For instance, results from Dindori cluster, which indicate total failure in both the tests at both grades, show that children studying in about 30% of schools are doing reasonably well. Similarly, children in 17% schools in Rewa, a relatively backward rural cluster, are learning quite well. A more detailed analysis of school wise performance and in particular the profiles of well performing schools should show the way to go ahead revealing examples of good practice for improving school quality (Table 32).

Table 31: Classification of Schools Based on Mean Performance in Grade V Maths

| | Rajnandgaon | Rewa | Dindori |
|---------|-------------|--------|---------|
| Poor | 15.39% | 30% | 70.59% |
| Average | 76.92% | 53.33% | 29.41% |
| Good | 7.69% | 16.67% | 0 |

Poor: ≤30; Average: 31 to 60; Good: >60

Table 32: Distribution of Learners According to their Marks in Competency Test

| Locality | HINDI | | | | | | | | MATHEMATICS | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|------|---------|-------|---------|------|---------|-------------|---------|------|---------|-------|---------|------|---------|
| | Boys | | | | Girls | | | | Boys | | | | Girls | | | |
| | Poor | Average | Good | V. Good | Poor | Average | Good | V. Good | Poor | Average | Good | V. Good | Poor | Average | Good | V. Good |
| Grade IV | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rewa (B=190, G=199) | 39 | 45 | 13 | 3 | 57 | 32 | 12 | 0 | 45 | 29 | 18 | 7 | 63 | 25 | 8 | 3 |
| Rajnandgaon (B=235, G=247) | 57 | 34 | 9 | 0 | 59 | 32 | 7 | 1 | 54 | 29 | 12 | 5 | 61 | 26 | 10 | 2 |
| Dindori (B=100, G=89) | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 79 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 84 | 8 | 4 | 3 |
| Grade V | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rewa (B=219, G=209) | 34 | 41 | 20 | 5 | 36 | 44 | 17 | 3 | 29 | 32 | 23 | 16 | 45 | 31 | 16 | 8 |
| Rajnandgaon (B=214, G=186) | 33 | 45 | 21 | 0 | 36 | 45 | 17 | 2 | 33 | 35 | 17 | 15 | 34 | 29 | 27 | 10 |
| Dindori (B=82, G=90) | 72 | 18 | 10 | 0 | 64 | 30 | 4 | 0 | 76 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 73 | 11 | 9 | 7 |

Note: Poor= Below 30%

Average= 30-60%, Good= 60-80%, Very good= Above 80%

Source Analysis of Competency Test administered in 2008

The analysis of competency scores according to the level of schools indicates the interrelationship of school infrastructure and performance of students studying in these schools to some extent. It can be noted that the majority of students who have appeared for the tests are studying in 44 level 1 schools but they performed worse than the students studying in 13 level 2 schools which are equipped with better infrastructure as compared to level 1 schools. Many of these schools are small in size. Although the data show that the students of Grade V have shown better performance than Grade IV in all schools irrespective of their levels but the students from level 2 schools have shown best performance. It may be because the teachers pay more attention to Grade V students as it is the highest grade of primary schools and children in Grade V have external examinations in most schools. It is surprising to see that children studying in five level 3 schools which have better infrastructure than the level 2 schools, have shown poorer performance than the students studying in level 2 schools. It is quite low in the case of Grade IV students. This indicates that the mere availability of infrastructure may not ensure better learning of children, rather its proper use by teachers and many other factors like teachers' presence and involvement in teaching, effective teaching learning process and children's regular participation in school also can be determining factors. The Table 33 highlights the distribution of competency test marks among the schools of different levels in terms of its condition and physical facilities available in it.

Table 33: Mean Score Obtained by the Students in Different Levels of Schools

| Grades and Subjects | Level 1 Schools (No= 44) | | | Level 2 Schools (No= 13) | | | Level 3 Schools (No=5) | | | Total Schools (No=62) | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----|----------------|--------------------------|-----|----------------|------------------------|-----|----------------|-----------------------|-----|----------------|
| | mean marks | S.D | no of Students | mean marks | S.D | no of Students | mean marks | S.D | no of Students | mean marks | S.D | no of Students |
| Grade IV | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hindi competency | 31 | 17 | 581 | 39 | 19 | 156 | 25 | 23 | 61 | 32 | 18 | 798 |
| Math competency | 34 | 22 | 476 | 46 | 23 | 165 | 24 | 16 | 52 | 36 | 22 | 693 |
| Grade V | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hindi competency | 40 | 18 | 577 | 49 | 14 | 152 | 46 | 14 | 82 | 43 | 17 | 811 |
| Math competency | 45 | 23 | 548 | 58 | 20 | 157 | 54 | 12 | 83 | 48 | 22 | 788 |

Source: Analysis of Competency Test administered in 2008

8.1 Learning Levels and Teacher Perception:

How do the teachers perceive the academic performance levels of their students? This information was gathered with respect to every student studying from Grades I to VIII in all the schools of the three clusters. It is interesting to note that the pattern of perceptions across the three clusters fairly resembles the picture drawn by the mean scores. Lower proportions of children are rated as better performing in Dindori as compared to the other two clusters. Yet, of children across different levels within the cluster does not correspond to the empirically derived picture. In fact, disaggregation of Grade IV and Grade V children according to their test scores and teacher expectations showed that the two are at considerable variance. There is a considerable difference in teacher's rating of the performance of the same group of children whose data have been collected in 2008, 2009 and 2010. While in Rajnandgaon, there has been improvement in students' performance as the rating of teachers has shown that a higher proportion of children are better performers (very good and good) whereas in Rewa and Dindori there has been decline in proportion of children as better performer as rated by teachers. However, comparing the teachers' rating of performance of students and actual scores on the competency test (Table 34), one can explore whether teachers are aware about children's actual competency or not.

Table 34: Performance Level of Children as Rated by Teachers

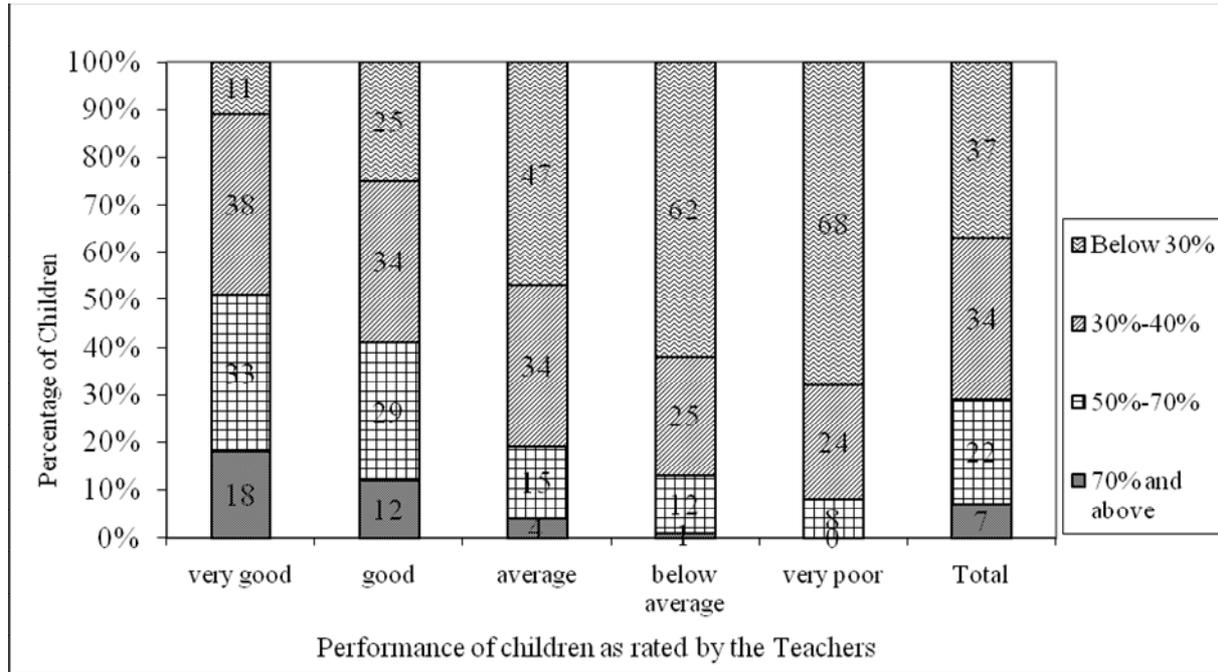
| | | Performance of the child 2008 | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| | | very good | good | Average | below average | very poor | Total N=100 |
| Rajnandhaon | Number | 542 | 1,538 | 1,847 | 529 | 85 | 4,541 |
| | % | 12 | 34 | 41 | 12 | 2 | |
| Rewa | Number | 401 | 1,050 | 1,128 | 335 | 137 | 3,051 |
| | % | 13 | 34 | 37 | 11 | 4 | |
| Dindori | Number | 44 | 312 | 696 | 472 | 167 | 1,691 |
| | % | 3 | 18 | 41 | 28 | 10 | |
| | | Performance of the child 2009 | | | | | |
| | | very good | Good | Average | below average | very poor | Total N=100 |
| Rajnandgaon | Number | 396 | 1,148 | 1,886 | 459 | 149 | 4,038 |
| | % | 10 | 28 | 47 | 11 | 4 | |
| Rewa | Number | 262 | 713 | 1,127 | 390 | 63 | 2,555 |
| | % | 10 | 28 | 44 | 15 | 2 | |
| Dindori | Number | 22 | 452 | 569 | 264 | 89 | 1,396 |
| | % | 2 | 32 | 41 | 19 | 6 | |
| | | Performance of the child 2010 | | | | | |
| | | very good | good | Average | below average | very poor | Total N=100 |
| Rajnandgaon | Number | 471 | 1,339 | 1,524 | 218 | 41 | 3,593 |
| | % | 13 | 37 | 42 | 6 | 1 | |
| Rewa | Number | 210 | 582 | 1,127 | 207 | 70 | 2,196 |
| | % | 10 | 27 | 51 | 9 | 3 | |
| Dindori | Number | 6 | 218 | 723 | 257 | 45 | 1,249 |
| | % | 0.4 | 17 | 57 | 21 | 4 | |

Source: School Roster 2008, 2009 and 2010

Figures 8 and 9 indicate that although many of the children whom teachers have rated as average and poor performers have shown poor performance (obtaining marks below 30% and 30-40%) in Hindi and mathematics competency test, a few children who were rated by teachers as good and very good performers have also performed miserably in the competency test. However, the majority of better performers as rated by teachers have shown better performance in the competency test. One has to note that a very high proportion of children rated by teachers as good and very good performers have shown average performance securing 40%-60% marks in Hindi as well as mathematics. Similarly, some children who were rated as poor performers by teachers have shown reasonably good performance in the

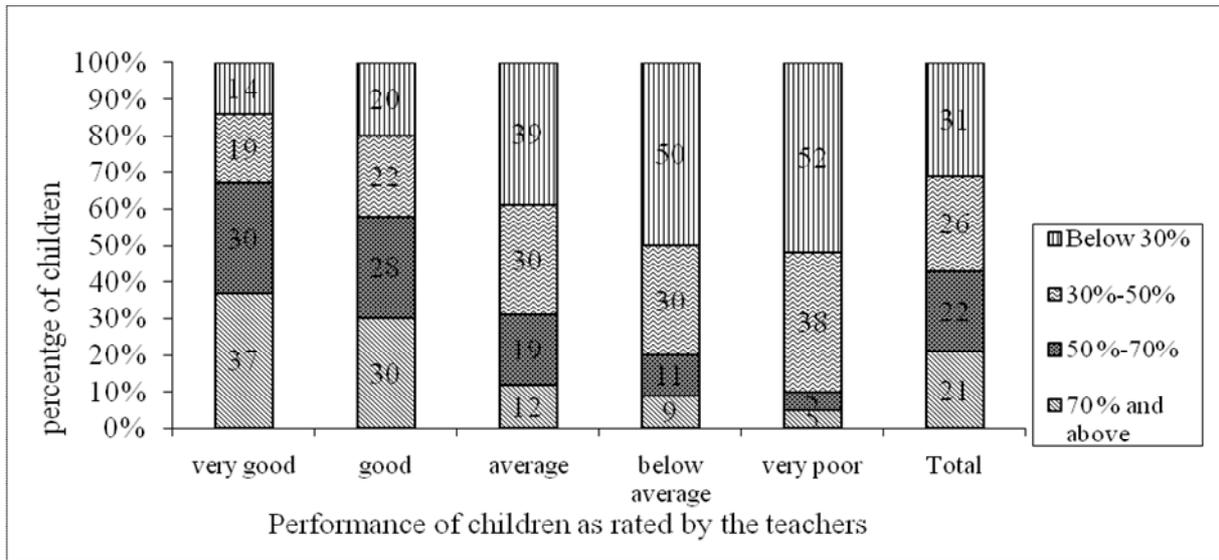
competency test. Teachers' perception regarding these children is very significant as it is highly likely to impact on their attitude towards the children and even assessment of their learning. This, in turn, will have a decisive impact on their promotion to higher grades and the kind of attention these children are likely to receive in the classroom; in effect, it would have a discouraging effect on participation and learning performance of the children, pushing them to the category of at risk of leaving the school permanently.

Figure 8: The performance of Children in Hindi Competency Test and their Performance as Rated by Teachers in 2008



Source: School Roster data and competency test results, 2008

Figure 9: The Performance of Children in Mathematics Competency Test and Their Performance as Rated by Teachers in 2008



Source: School Roster Data and competency test results, 2008

9. Major Observations

The analysis presented here brings several important issues to the fore, which call for further research. It also points to the need for more focused attention on the school related factors in preparing education development action in order to reduce the risk of exclusion and achieve universal participation of children in school education.

- a. The household survey data reveals that a large proportion of children in this sample are below the poverty line and they are from households of agricultural or wage labourers. However despite this economic background, most of these children are enrolled in school in all these three areas and the majority of those never enrolled or have dropped out of school seem to have left the school due to school related reasons such as poor quality of education, children not interested in school, inaccessibility of the school and so on. In fact, a substantial number (though constituting only a small proportion) of the total drop out children were quoted as saying that 'fear of school' had contributed to their drop out, raising serious issues about the way children are treated in some of the schools.
- b. The study has examined clusters of schools located in three locations that form a hierarchy in terms of overall development characteristics. It is therefore not unexpected that in the natural process school systems would grow with perceptible variations in both access and quality, unless special efforts are made to change this course. This is indeed the challenge for the educational planners to find ways and means of making educational provisions more equitable. How have we fared in this regard? Field data show that on almost all indicators of access and quality, development planning has not been able to address the problem of disparity and inequity. For instance, schools in the tribal cluster of Dindori are way behind other areas in every aspect. One wonders why is it so uneven while the programme of special block level tribal sub-plans has been in operation for several decades. These efforts are supposed to have been further reinforced under the District Planning Framework of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. In fact, even with the minor location handicap of being away from the main road, Rewa suffers from lower levels of education development compared to Rajnandgaon cluster.
- c. Availability of schools and initial enrolment of children do not seem to be serious issues, though some villages of the tribal cluster still lack easily accessible schools. But the twin problems of absenteeism and repetition begin soon after the children get enrolled. Very high levels of absenteeism among students begin from Grade I and continue through out the school cycle. In fact, even the recorded attendance shows substantial absenteeism. Empirical observations show that the incidence of absenteeism is too high to be taken lightly. Several students who were absent on the day of the survey were marked present and are only nominally on the school register. The problem of repetition is even more intriguing. Even though the pattern and extent of repetition is different in the three clusters, this also begins from Grade I in all of them. This is so despite the official policy of automatic promotion in the early grades. That school quality does matter in retaining children in the school and for their regular participation is clearly shown by high level of positive association between school infrastructure conditions and attendance levels.
- d. Recent efforts to equip schools with basic infrastructure seem to be changing the physical conditions of the school. For instance, all the schools excepting one in Dindori cluster have a school building. But beyond buildings and blackboards, the situation is quite appalling as we move from schools of Rajnandgaon to schools of Rewa and Dindori.

Opening of ultra small schools (under EGS) with single teachers which may have given notional access to education to some children has aggravated the situation and demands careful reconsideration. In fact, even access seems to be superficial, as many children particularly from a few specific deprived caste groups have access to only early grades of elementary almost permanently depriving them of completing even compulsory elementary education cycle. Some of those children who can complete their primary education from these schools do not transit to upper primary grades as the schooling facility for upper primary education is not available in these schools.

- e. Presence of standard TLM supplied under SSA could be observed in almost all schools to varying extents. But the conditions of the material and their use remained quite unsatisfactory. Most schools have no facility for proper storage of these materials or the books supplied to the notionally functioning school library. This again is surprising, as DPEP and SSA have been spending, on an annual basis, substantial amounts on this account in every school; also every teacher is supposed to be getting an annual grant for preparing TLM suitable for use in the local context. In fact, equipment have been often supplied without consideration to the local context. This is clearly seen in the supply of computers to schools with no access to electricity.
- f. The most important resource in any school is the teacher who is professionally qualified to teach in the school. The data show that a very substantial proportion of teachers are untrained. It is also a prerequisite that the teacher attends the school regularly teaches according to the curriculum and provides continuous feedback to parents on the progress of the children. Again data collected through the survey showed teacher absenteeism as a serious problem. Considering that a majority of the schools particularly in Dindori and Rewa clusters are small schools with only one or two teachers, teacher absenteeism would effectively exclude any possibility of teaching in these schools on many days. This again is surprising as a cluster resource centres have been established to support and oversee academic work in every school on a continuous basis. Apart from this, uneven deployment of teachers is also a serious issue. The data collected in the study totally belies the general claim of adequacy of teacher supply made by the authorities based on average ratios.
- g. Negative perceptions of teachers based on the regularity and learning ability of the children comes out as a serious issue. In fact, the serious mismatch between the expectations of the teacher and the actual levels of learning demonstrated by the children is indeed a very serious issue with the potential to push the children permanently out of the school. Similar is the attitude of the teachers towards parents. Considering that many children are first time school goers in their family such negative perception of the teachers with respect to parents and their cooperation and support to children can be very damaging, leading to children leaving the school.
- h. Learning levels as observed in the study are very disappointing feeling across the clusters. The overall performance is poor even in Rajnandgaon cluster. However, disaggregated analysis show that interschool variations are wide, as even in the tribal cluster of Dindori a couple of schools (for instance, the school in Tarach) are performing relatively better. There is therefore a need to study in greater depth the profile of such schools to identify factors that can contribute to improvement within the local context. Also, the fact that Grade V children invariably did better than Grade IV children calls for examining the existing practices of learner evaluation and promotion to higher grades.

The analysis presented in the paper apart from describing the current state of quality of schools, attempts to understand the linkage between quality of schools and children's school participation behaviour. The analysis gives first glimpse of how schools and the quality of processes therein play a significant impact on the process of exclusion of children from schooling. Better understanding of the situation requires careful analysis of the interface between these two sets of indicators in greater detail. For instance, we have to examine how does and what levels of student absenteeism negatively impact their performance; is there a critical level of physical and academic facilities that determines optimal learning conditions; and so on. Also it is necessary to examine what strategies would help bridge persisting disparities and inequities between schools functioning in different development contexts.

To conclude, it should be noted that the development strategies in education have indeed begun to recognise the interaction between access and quality factors. The issue of improving quality is, no doubt, seriously engaging the minds of policy makers and planners of education in the country. But what is needed is a change in the perspective. For a long time, system level reforms implemented through pan-national projects have been the chosen means of meeting this concern for improving learning levels. It continues more or less the same way even under SSA. This approach has to give way to a clear recognition of the individual school as the primary unit for improvement action. Second, a shift in approach needed is design more contextualised and prioritised action strategies. Generic inputs to schools can help only to a limited extent; merely adding more of such inputs do not guarantee change and improvement. Improving schools which are in remote locations and serving tribal population calls for a different approach from what is adopted in the Rewa cluster or even more so from what is adopted in a cluster like Rajnandgaon which is well connected by roads and has better general infrastructure. This is essential to meet the goal of reaching education to the traditionally excluded groups and ensuring equitable development of education in the country.

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Report summary

In the era of globalisation, provision of quality education is increasingly gaining importance across the world. Like elsewhere, it has already been realised in India that equal attention is needed simultaneously on access, equity and quality to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education. It has also been experienced that although the majority of children in India today have access to school education, all of them are not receiving quality education for various reasons, leading to poor learning level, repetition and gradual exclusion from school education. Large achievement gaps are found among different groups of children attending schools located in different regions and managed by government and private providers. Using the primary data collected from 88 schools of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, this paper attempts to critically examine the extent to which the quality of school affects access and participation of children particularly in rural areas. It also investigates problems of inadequate infrastructure and academic facilities: how these are affecting the quality of education; who are the children most affected by poor quality schools and therefore facing problems of locational disadvantage; and the influence of gender and social background of children on their access to quality education.

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