



National Education Policy 2020

Analysis

“I measure the progress of a community with the degree of progress women have achieved.”

~ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

A national education policy indicates its inclusiveness by its acknowledgement of the various groups that need to be served. The principles that are laid out in the policy towards education for sustainable development serve as an indicator for achieving the targets set under the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2017). A national education policy’s espousal of gender equality is most wanting, with all its intersections.

As a research centre that focuses on preventing gender-based violence by addressing gender bias through video gaming intervention in schools we appreciate the initiative of the Government in addressing the issue of gender equality and gender sensitization, particularly by opening the platform to disruptive technologies to address the ills afflicting our current society (Para 4.46 of the NEP).

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 used the slogan “Leave no one behind” (UNSDG, 2019). India’s New [National Education policy](#) aims to address the targets set under SDG 4. A simple reading shows that it aims to consolidate all policy pertaining to

education and related infrastructure and support under one umbrella. On the one hand it is fair since it is up to the states to take the policy forward for implementation, but on the other hand it leaves us wanting certain non-negotiable standards that need to be maintained concerning education for girls.

The policy talks about facilitating infrastructure and ensuring quality in teaching so that girls and students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups do not lose interest (para 3.4) in getting an education. But they do not address the main issues that lead up to a girl student from dropping out.

According to the National Statistical Office data (NSO, 2020) on education, lacking interest in studies accounts for 14.8% of the reason for girl dropouts, and 19.9% for never enrolling, it does not address the systemic reason why a girl may lose interest in education. The policy talks about an overhaul of the curriculum, but does not touch upon the issue of gender bias that gaslights a girl student and makes her self-esteem so low that she is made to feel she does not deserve an education. Stakeholders in the ecosystem of a girl student get her married (13.2% dropout, 0.5% never enrolled), engage her in domestic activities (30.2% dropout, 11.7% never enrolled), cite financial constraints (17.7% dropout, 13.6% never enrolled), or make her feel that she has studied enough (6.4% dropout) or say that it is not part of their culture (4.8% never enrolled)

and this gets furthered by making schools inaccessible to girl students (school too far away causing 2.7% dropout, 1.4% never enrolled). The policy makers relied on the NSO data to make appropriate changes to the policy but have not addressed the pressing issues that lead to dropouts or no enrollments. Below we are analysing the positives and negatives this revised policy has in relation to the expectations of stakeholders and students themselves. See Annexures I and II for further details.

Positives

Acknowledgement of education being a leveler. Notions of equity and inclusion.

The Policy talks about education being a leveler and the pillars of equity and inclusion being the anchor of the national education policy. The Policy emphasised the need for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) to be given special attention in its implementation, especially girls from these communities (para 6.2).

The encouragement of counsellors and well-trained social workers in taking forward the right to education.

The Policy talks about appointing counsellors and well-trained social workers to assist students in attaining their education with inclusive support (para 3.3). Additionally, these social workers/counsellors are to ensure that all children are enrolled in school and continue to attend school. This would help the community to adapt to the need for education for all.

Gender sensitization and stereotypes and biases to be removed from curriculum

One more positive with regards to the curriculum overhaul would be to remove the gender stereotypes (para 6.20). Various states had already started taking steps in this direction to show more gender inclusive examples (Poorvaja, 2018; PTI, 2019).

This would ensure the students inculcate gender inclusiveness in their schooling and in their value system. The policy also talks about including gender sensitisation in the teacher education programme (para 6.14), as well as providing the same to counsellors, college faculty and students in higher education (para 14.4.2 (k)).

Here gender sensitisation is more from the gender inclusivity perspective.

Merit based scholarships for B. Ed.

This policy also suggested a four-year B.Ed. programme with merit-based scholarships (para 5.2) for locals so that students have teachers from the community. This would also create job opportunities locally, especially for women. The policy also discusses a housing facility or allowance for the teachers (para 5.2).

Gender inclusion fund

The Government is to include a gender inclusion fund (para 6.8) to invest in infrastructure and capacity building to boost enrollment/attendance of girls as well and transgender students. These would include sanitation measures, toilets, cycles, cash transfers, etc.

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These schools were included in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan especially for girls from SEDGs (MHRD, n.d.). Under this policy these schools will be expanded to ensure quality education for girls (para 6.9).

Reporting mechanisms

The government acknowledged that girls do face violence in schools, for which reason parents feel it unsafe to send them to schools. Hence, they reiterated the need for schools to be a safe space for students to have a holistic learning without fear. The policy encourages reporting mechanisms to be put into place for any such act of violence meted out to the students (para 8.11).

Conveyance

Many states created local policies based on the needs of the local students, where the schools were far. They created walking groups for safety, arranged for cycles, etc. These are to be encouraged especially for girl students so that they would attain quality education (para 3.3).

Negatives

Gender Bias?

Through our research we have tried to establish that gender bias perpetuates gender-based violence intergenerationally. A passing mention of gender sensitization and removal of gender stereotypes will alone not solve the problem of gender bias. The policy has emphasised on the need for an overhaul of the education system

but does not specifically address its implementation plan for ensuring girls do not dropout due to reasons of marriage, domestic work, etc.

Separate attention to gender

There is specific emphasis on girls from the SEDGs, but again there are bare necessities that are unaddressed in the policy. The NSO report on education is indication enough of areas that need to be addressed, to ensure a girl does not drop out of school. Special attention is warranted towards ensuring the stakeholders in a girl student's life buy-in to her completing her studies and contributing to the economy.

Sanitary napkins, infrastructure

While there is a fleeting mention of infrastructural change to reduce dropouts amongst girls, the policy has absolutely no mention of sanitary napkins. 23% girls dropout of school when they reach puberty (Dasra, 2015). Many organisations are working towards educating girls on menstruation and hygiene, and providing sanitary napkin dispensers, but this needs to be taken on by the government on a nationwide level. The government is also working towards providing Sanitary napkins at the rate of Re. 1 (Butani, 2020), and where better to start than school.

Sex education

Just like menstruation, sex education is conspicuous in its absence in the Policy. Gender sensitisation alone will not stop gender-based violence. Sex education is essential for students to understand body autonomy and

consent. Studies (Reis, Ramiro, Gaspar de Matos, & Diniz, 2011) have shown that sex education reduces risky sexual behaviours amongst adolescents. They are more likely to use birth control methods to reduce unwanted pregnancies. This would further reduce dropouts. There is no statistical data to suggest that girls dropout due to unwanted pregnancies, but there is data that marriage is one of the reasons for school dropouts (NSO, 2020).

STEM/Labour force

Finally, one of the aims of education is also to be able to contribute to the economy by being a part of the labour force. The periodic labour force survey (PLFS) data (NSO, 2019) of 2017-18 notes women's participation in the labour force at 23.3%. According to the NSO data on Education (NSO, 2020) 9.8% of females compared to 13.9% males complete higher secondary and 8.3% females compared to 12.8% males complete graduation or above in India. Further in India 43% women complete STEM courses (Sindwani, 2020) but only 13.9% women are employed researchers in STEM fields (UNESCO, 2019). The Policy talks about upskilling to meet industry needs (para 23.10), yet it stops short of the last mile requirements to encourage women to be an equal contributor to the workforce. According to a working paper under the aegis of the World Bank an Indian female earns 31% more when she achieves tertiary education (Montenegro & Patrinos, 2014). Thus, women getting a higher education needs to be encouraged.

Conclusion

The policy all in all meets basic expectations as regards gender inclusiveness. It satiates the need of the times, as well as the SDG requirements. Yet it is not enough from the gender perspective.

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