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A Study on School Facilities in Rural Rajasthan, India: Badkochra, Lasani and Bhim Panchayats

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Abstract

Education in rural India is valued differently from that in an urban setting, with lower rates of completion as well as facilities available. The study looks at the provision of school facilities in terms of physical infrastructure and education facilities available for children in the selected government schools of Ajmer and Rajsamand Districts, rural Rajasthan. Along with an overview of facilities of Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary Schools in the respective panchayats, case studies of three Higher Secondary Schools in the villages of Badkochra, Lasani and Bhim are presented.

Keywords: School facilities, infrastructure, rural Rajasthan.

Introduction

Education is a vital aspect of the development process as well as its goal. Though the term encompasses all forms of education, for the purpose of the study we shall limit this definition to the formal education system. Under the education system, primary education gets the highest priority and is considered the base of formal education. The international community has recognized this, as is apparent in the declaration of Universalization of Primary Education as the second Millennium Development Goal for achievement by 2015. In spite of significant achievements in the education sector in India, there are many areas for concern. Important constraints in the education system are increasing privatization particularly after the globalization in 1990 and increase in inequality and exclusion of the vulnerable groups of population in education. Education in rural India is valued differently from that in an urban setting, with lower rates of completion as well as facilities available.

Overview of Education and School Facilities in India and Rajasthan: The need for improvement and reform in the education sector is apparent by looking at the literacy rates and development indicators of the country[1].

Table-1
Literacy rates in India and Rajasthan (1991-2011)

Literacy rate	1991	2001	2011
India	52.21	65.38	74
Rajasthan	38.55	60.4	67.1

Source: Census2011

Although the literacy rate of the country has sharply increased from 18.39% in 1950-51 to 65.38% in 2000 -2001, one-third of the population of 7 years and above are still illiterate. Issues such as those concerning high drop out rates, low level of achievement, low participation of children from disadvantaged sections of society, etc persist. In addition to this, there are also other areas of concern such as inadequate infrastructure in schools, unavailability of teachers in remote rural or tribal areas, high rate of teacher absenteeism, less number of teachers than requiredand inadequate allocation of resources on education[2].

Scenario in Rajasthan: Although the rise in literacy rate from 2001–11 was only 7% Rajasthan had the biggest percentage increase in literacy of all Indian states in the decade 1991–2001, from about 38% to about 61%. Aggressive state government action, in the form of the District Primary Education Programme, the Shiksha Karmi initiative and the Lok Jumbish programme, are credited with the rapid improvement. The primary school coverage in villages has drastically improved[3].

However the problems with systemic factors still persist. These include inadequate teaching staff (lack of female teachers in particular), irregular classes being held, teacher absenteeism, and overcrowded classrooms. Despite the advances in terms of access, it is apparent that many challenges persist that result in children having to leave primary school without learning basic skills of reading and writing[4].

Teacher absence is largely dependent on daily incentives to attend work. The reasoning is that teachers are less likely to be absent for schools which are inspected regularly, well equipped with better infrastructure, and are easily accessible. Further, absence rates are usually higher in low-income states. In order to promote better accountability and transparency, political leaders have started to give increasing importance to issues of motivation and commitment among teachers and local administrators[2].

RTE and School Facilities: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2009), which came into effect in India on 1 April 2010, made the right of all Indian children aged between six and 14 years to free and compulsory elementary education regardless of caste, class, gender, etc legally enforceable[5].

Table-2 gives an indication of the status of RTE compliance in rural India and Rajasthan[6].

Table-2
Percentage of schools complying with RTE norms

RTE Indicator (% of Schools complying with)	India	Rajasthan
Student-teacher ratio	45.3	56.1
Classroom-teacher ratio	73.8	69.4
Playground	62.4	57.4
Boundary Wall/Fencing	56.3	83.1
Provision of Drinking water	15.2	67.1
Kitchen Shed for cooking Mid day meals	87	85.3
Toilet available and usable	62.6	72.9

Source: ASER 2013

The RTE law makes it mandatory for governments to provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to 14 years in neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education. The mandated pupil-teacher ratio is 30:1 for Primary level and 35:1 for Upper Primary level.

Furthermore, the Act has certain provisions regarding basic facilities as well as quality of teaching, which will be dealt with in the Discussion section of this report.

Methodology

The study was conducted as part of a rural immersion programme of the CSSEIP Department, NLSIU Bangalore with the Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangthan (MKSS).
The study was conducted in November 2014 in three panchayats of Ajmer and Rajsamand districts, Rajasthan this was conducted along with facilitating the grievance redress process by the MKSS in Badkochra (Ajmer District) and Lasani (Rajsamand District) panchayats.

Within each panchayat, i. complaints and comments regarding the schools of various villages were recorded to provide an overview of the school facilities, and ii. a case study on a Higher Secondary School in each panchayat was carried out.

Observation of school facilities and interaction with students and/or teachers of 4 schools: The following schools were studied in this manner i. Govt. Higher Secondary School Badkochra, ii. Govt. Higher Secondary School Lasani, iii. Govt. Higher Secondary School Bhim, iv. Ramprasad Ach. Central Academy Secondary School, Barar (Bhim Block).

Unstructured interviews conducted with math and science teachers of the following schools: i. Govt. Girls Upper Primary School Lasani, ii. Govt. Upper Primary School Lasani.

Unstructured interviews with childrenand/or parents who filed grievance complaint on the state of the following schools: i. Govt. HigherSecondary School Badkochra, ii. Govt. Primary School Bheru Kheda (Badkochra Panchayat)

Secondary data on the above schools was obtained from DISE School Report Cards[6]for the Academic year 2013-14.

Results and Discussion

Findings and Observations: The status of school facilities cannot be analyzed in isolation to the area in which these schools are located and the economic situation. The schools covered in this study are located in Ajmer and Rajsamand Distrcts, Rajasthan.

The Blocks within these Districts differed in terms of socio-economic conditions as well as the School facilities available.

Table-3
Locations of the schools studied

District	Block	Panchayat
Ajmer	Jawaja	Badkochra
Rajsamand	Devgarh	Lasani
Rajsamand	Bhim	Bhim

The following section gives an overview of each Panchayat where the schools are located, the school facilities available, followed by a case study of a Higher Secondary school in each panchayat.

In India, the combination of classes for different levels of school education/school stages differs from State to State.

The following combinations of classes of the school system constitute pre-primary, primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary stages in Rajasthan:
Primary School Stage: Classes I-V
Upper Primary School Stage: Classes VI-VIII
Secondary School Stage: Classes IX-X
Higher Secondary Stage: Classes XI-XII.

While the broad indicators on the number of schools is apparently progressive, the situation is misleading in certain cases and there are a range of factors that are not captured by the DISE School Report Cards. The teacher to student ratio is one aspect that is highlighted in the DISE database and an examination of this shows the extent of this issue.

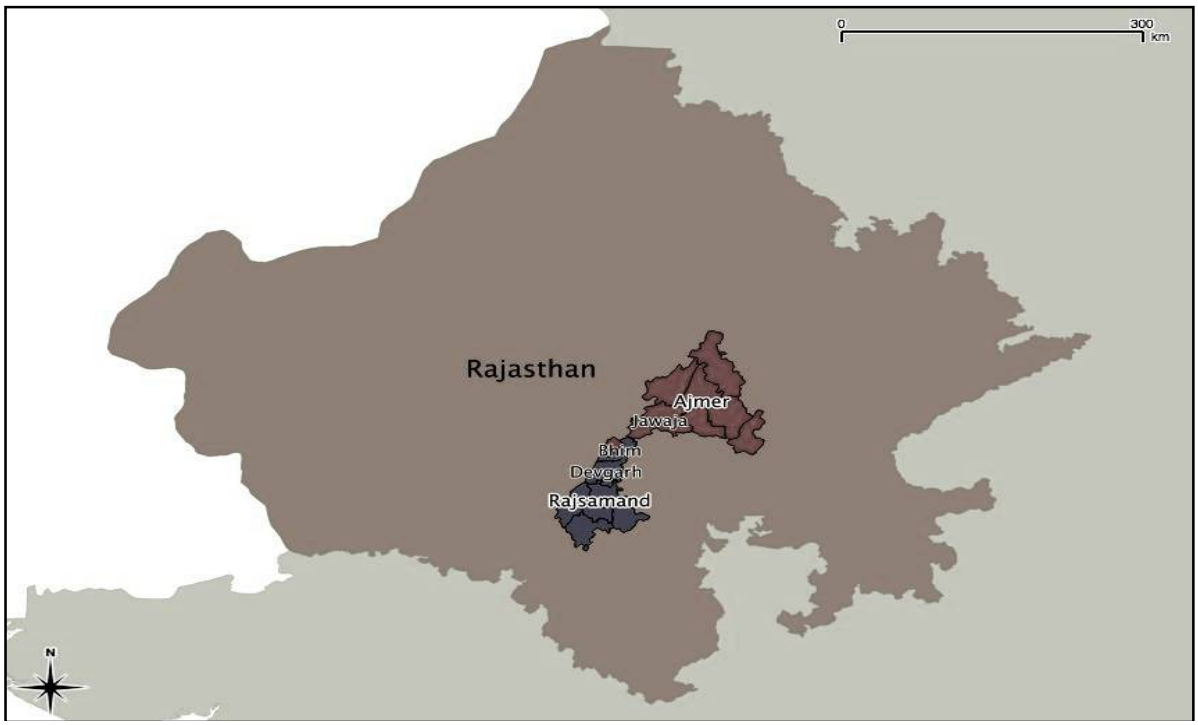

Figure-1
Map of Districts and Blocks where the studied schools are located

School facilities in Badkochra: Badkochra Panchayat is located in Jawaja Block of Ajmer District, Rajasthan. The region is characterised by a hilly terrain as the Aravalli ranges pass through it. The panchayat has an approximate population of 6000.

Table-4
Classification of Schools in Badkochra Panchayat

	Primary	**Primary with Upper Primary**	**U Primary with Sec/H. Sec**	**Total**
Govt. Schools	6	1	1	8
Private Schools	1	-	-	1
No. of Schools	7	1	1	9

Source: DISE School Report Cards (2013-14)

While Table 4 shows a total of 9 schools for the academic year 2013, the Primary school in the village of BheruKheda had closed several months prior to when the study was conducted. Villagers and parents in this village complained about this situation and about the children having to travel to Badkochra village for attending school. On examining the indicators of BheruKheda school in the DISE database, it can be seen that the school is listed as functional till 2013-14, with facilities such as drinking water and boundary walls were present, along with a total enrolment of 53 and 3 teachers (satisfying student teacher ratio as per RTE regulations)[7]. However, the parents who filed the grievance complaint regarding the school closure maintained that there was irregularity of classes being conducted and teachers being absent.

In Paluna village, which is approximately a 4 km uphill trek from Badkochra village, a villager (woman) stated that the timings of day schools are not convenient for older girls due to their work commitments. Instead night schools are preferred. Paluna village only has a primary school and students of higher classes have to go to Badkochra.

On October 31st 2014, a Jan Sunwai or Public Hearing was conducted in Badkochra Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra. Several students from the Govt. Senior Secondary School Badkochra attended this and filed a complaint about their school. The following case study on the Govt. Sr. Secondary School Badkochra is based on observation of the Jan Sunwai proceedings, the school premises, the written complaint as well as interview with the students.

Govt. Higher Secondary School, Badkochra: This Higher Secondary School is located in Badkochra village, near the Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra or IT centre. This covers classes 1 through 12, divided into 7 classes. The number of students enrolled at the time of the Jan Sunwai was 150 students and 3

teachers, which does not follow the RTE standards concerning student-teacher ratio as well as classroom-teacher ratio.

Table-5
RTE Indicators of GHS School Badkochra

RTE Indicator	Status at time of study
Student-teacher ratio	50:1
Presence of Playground	Yes
Presence of Boundary Wall/Fencing	Yes
Provision of Drinking water	No
Kitchen Shed for cooking Mid day meals	Yes
Toilet available and usable	No

The students filed a complaint on the following grounds: i. Toilet being shut/not usable, ii. Lack of provision of drinking water, iii. Shortage of teachers, iv. Lack of maintenance of the school by authorities.

School facilities in Lasani: Lasanipanchayat is located in Devgarh Block of Rajasamand District. While Lasani village is the main village in this panchayat, 10 smaller villages/hamlets are included in this panchayat. These include GujjarokaBadiya, etc. whose name denotes the community that lived there historically. Situated in the plains of Rajsamand District, Lasani is relatively prosperous region which a larger average landholding size. The Panchayat contains 4 revenue villages.

Table-6
Classification of Schools in Lasani Panchayat

	Primary	Primary with Upper Primary	Sec/ H. Secondary	Total
Govt. Schools	5	4	1	10
Private Schools	2	-	-	2
Madrasa	1	-	-	1
No. of Schools	8	4	1	13

Source: DISE School Report Cards (2013-14)

The cluster of villages in Lasani have a total number of schools which is more than that of Badkochra, especially in the case of upper primary schools. However, various issues with the school facilities were recorded during the padyatra through the panchayat.

Several students of the Govt. Primary school in Lasani Dhani village commented on lack of water. In Talabka Badiya, the Primary school with more than 30 students had only one teacher. Toilet and hand pump were provided here but not accessible to the students.

In Lasani village, an unstructured interview was conducted with two Math and Science teachers of upper primary schools in Lasani. Based on their responses, the following details about the schools were noted. Both the schools had electricity, mid day meal and drinking water provision (comments and insights from these teachers have been presented in discussion section of the report).

Govt. Higher Secondary School, Lasani: The Govt. Higher Secondary School is situated adjacent to two Upper Primary schools in Lasani village.

Table-7
RTE Indicators of GHS School Lasani

RTE Indicator	Status at time of study
Student-teacher ratio	25:1
Presence of Playground	Yes
Presence of Boundary Wall/Fencing	Yes
Provision of Drinking water	Yes
Kitchen Shed for cooking Mid day meals	Yes
Toilet available and usable	Yes

The total number of students enrolled in Classes IX to XII for the academic year 2014-15: 274. The number of teachers for these classes was reported as 11 (with 5 vacancies including that of the principal's post). Shortage of teachers is most acute in 11th and 12th with no teachers for the subjects of Hindi, Sanskrit, and Mathematics.

School facilities in Bhim: Bhimpanchayat is one of the largest in the state. Located in Bhim Block, Rajsamand District, this differs from the previous panchayats most notably by the fact that it includes a semi-urban portion through predominantly rural. The panchayat centre is in the census town of Bhim, which has a population of 11,568 as per Census India 2011 report[1]. Literacy rate is 78.06 %, which is higher than state average of 66.11 %.

Regarding education, Bhim has been in the media reports due to a protest from students of the Govt. Girls Higher Secondary School, supported by the MKSS in October 2014. About 700 girls from Std. IX to XII study there, but the number of teaching staff is just three with no teacher for basic subjects like Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Hindi and Sanskrit. This is despite adequate teaching staff for the Boys Higher secondary School[8]. Table 8 gives an overview of the schools in Bhim.

Table-8
Classification of Schools in BhimPanchayat

	Primary	Primary with Upper Primary	Primary, U Pri. and Sec.	Primary, U Pri, Sec./H. Sec	Sr. Sec	Total
Govt. Schools	6	3	-	-	2	11
Private Schools	2	4	4	3	-	13
Madrasa	-	1	-	-	-	1
No. of Schools	8	8	4	3	2	25

Source: DISE School Report Cards (2013-14)

Govt. Higher Secondary School, Bhim: The co-educational Government Higher Secondary School in Bhim is one of the larger schools with a moderate student-teacher ratio unlike that of the Girls Higher Secondary School as previously mentioned in the above section.

Table-9
RTE Indicators of GHS School Bhim

RTE Indicator	Status at time of study
Student-teacher ratio	25:1
Presence of Playground	Yes
Presence of Boundary Wall/Fencing	Yes
Provision of Drinking water	Yes
Kitchen Shed for cooking Mid day meals	Yes
Toilet available and usable	Yes

There were no teachers for the following subjects: Physics, Mathematics, Drawing, Accounts and Business Administration. The fact that there were no teachers for Physics and Math is a cause for concern since 96 students are presently studying in the Science stream (PCM-Physics, Chemistry, Math and PCB-Physics, Chemistry, Biology) which us the second largest group after the Arts stream. While adequate number of teachers for core subjects in the Arts stream was present, the Commerce stream also had a shortage like the science stream since Accounts and Business Administration are core subjects in that stream.

Discussion: Based on the observations from the field, interactions with school authorities and students, as well as secondary sources of information, the problems relating to school facilities can be analyzed in the following categories:

Physical Infrastructure and Resources: The RTE Act lays down standards for physical infrastructure and resources such that the school building should be an 'all weather'structure, and should include an office cum store for the head teacher, separate toilets for boys and for girls, a kitchen for cooking the free mid day meal that children are provided, have access to safe drinking water, a library, a playground, and barrier free access[9].

Regarding Physical Infrastructure, a contrast can be seen between the Govt. Higher Secondary (GHS) school in Badkochra and those in Lasani and Bhim. The school in Badkochra had a lack of several basic facilities. While the above provisions have been met in the studied Govt. Higher Secondary schools of Lasani and Bhim, a qualitative assessment of the school buildings reveal certain issues. For instance, the GHS School Lasani had adequate number of classrooms as well as a newly constructed building with two classrooms. However, it was observed that the classrooms were poorly lit with small windows. With lack of electricity, the primary source of light came from the open doors. When these doors were closed by accident, most of the writings on the board were not visible. In fact, in the GHS School Bhim, classes were conducted in the hallway outside the classroom to ensure light and ventilation.

When asked about their views on provision of basic facilities, the Math and Science teachers of Govt Upper Primary School and Govt Girls Upper Primary School in Lasani stated that there are various issues, but they expect very less and make do with whatever is provided (It should be noted that these Upper Primary Schools in Lasani have relatively better facilities compared to other schools in the panchayat according to the DISE School Report cards).

Teaching Staff: Part V of the RTE Act states the terms under which the quality of elementary education is to be ensured, which include a comfortable teacher-student ratio, curriculum reform and improvement in evaluation methods. But the success of these measures largely depends on teachers, and that is where the system is facing problems[10].

GHS School Badkochra is once again the exception among the three schools when it comes to student-teacher ratio while the GHS schools in Lasani and Bhim follows RTE norms. Despite this, the shortage of teachers is a striking feature in all schools studied. Being higher secondary schools, this problem is even

more apparent when the students are divided into Arts, Science, Commerce and Agriculture streams after 10th class. In GHS Bhim, there was a lack of teachers in two core subjects in Science as well as the Commerce stream.

The perspective of students was sought in an unstructured interview and interaction with students of Class 12 in Govt. Higher Secondary School Lasani. The only problem they mentioned was lack of teachers in several subjects. It was only after asking specific questions regarding computers that we found out that the computers though present were not operational at the time. In fact, the shortage of teachers seems to be the first problem mentioned by students as well as teachers when asked about the state of school facilities in the panchayats visited.

Conclusion

The study highlights the lacunae in the infrastructure and facilities in three panchayats within two districts of Rajasthan, as representative of the realities of education in rural India.

Important determinants such as availability of teachers, societal motivation are as much a factor in rural communities as in urban areas.

It is evident that though the infrastructure physical facilities required are basic, such as toilets, drinking water, etc, the lack of these facilities both in real terms and in meeting expectations of students and teachers, could be a contributory factor in the high student drop out rate in schooling in rural areas. The mid-day meal programme appears to be functional in most of the schools visited.

It would appear reasonable therefore to suggest that investment in infrastructure should be a part of policy initiatives with lofty ideals such as universal primary education in rural India. This would ensure both achievement of goals and sustenance of educational initiatives.

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