

Increase of Literacy Rate in India Sluggish, Less Than 1 Percentage Point Per Year

New Delhi, 8th September: while India has achieved somewhat steady growth in education and literacy over the past few decades, the growth rate has remained sluggish and much less than expectation. As the literacy rate has gone up to just a little above 74% (Census 2011), it still leaves a quarter of the population without basic reading and writing skills.

A comparative analysis of the last two Census reports (2011 and 2001) shows that literacy rate has been increasing by almost at a snail's pace, even less than 1 percentage point per year. While in 2001 it was at 64.83%, literacy rate went up to 74.04% in 2011.

As the world gears up to celebrate the International Literacy Day, close to 900 million people across the globe are still illiterate, and India is home to around 287 million of them (UNESCO Report), which is nearly one-third of the global population of illiteracy.

In India, while the Right to Education (RTE) Act has ensured that education is every child's basic right, severe poverty and deprivation, population growth, war zones and natural catastrophes are depriving many children of a world of books and learning.

Puja Marwaha, CEO, CRY – Child Rights and You says, "Education is the single most effective agent of change in society. When a child is able to go to school, she sets off a cycle of positive change. But, thousands of children in India lack access to education and can't even write their own names. Moreover, underprivileged children between the ages of 14 to 18 years are hugely vulnerable to dropping out of schools, and subsequently get married off or sent to work, as they are not covered by the immunity of RTE Act. On the other hand, an educated child stays away from an early marriage and is more empowered to stand up against any kind of exploitation. As children grow, they are able to make better choices for themselves and influence the communities they live in. This transforms their present life and ensures a secure future for them."

While the goal of universal elementary education is a long way from being achieved and it affects the status of education for children, adult illiteracy also has negative impact on them. Statistics have shown that

Status of Education & Literacy in India: An Overview

Only around half of the children in the country finish school education and less than 1/3rd of the children finish school education age appropriately (DISE 2014-15)

Only 3% of the schools offer complete school education from Class 1 to Class 12 (DISE 2014-15)

There are 33 million working children between 0-18 years in the country and a staggering 73% of them have dropped out of school (Census 2011).

Around 42% of currently married women married women in India were married as children (Census 2011)

Every third child bride in the world is a girl in India (UNICEF). There are 3.5 million adolescent married girls in India who are non-literate.

India has more than 4.5 lakh girls under 15 years of age who are married, and have begun child bearing. Of these 40% are non-literate (Census 2011)

children of uneducated mothers are more vulnerable to the threats of under-nutrition. Illiterate adults are also less likely to send their children to school and children of illiterate parents are more likely to drop out midway in their education. Education is, in all probability, the most influential tool required to break the vicious intergenerational cycle of abuse, malnutrition, poverty and oppression. Literacy thus requires a lot of attention.

Despite the Right to Education (RTE) Act coming into force in 2010 and rate of enrollment has seen a considerable increase, access to education for every child still remains a concern in the country.

According to the definition drafted by UNESCO, literacy is an overall ability to “identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.”

Note to the Editor:

CRY - Child Rights and You is an Indian NGO that believes in every child's right to a childhood – to live, learn, grow and play. For 4 decades, CRY and its 850 initiatives have worked with parents and communities to ensure Lasting Change in the lives of more than 2,000,000 underprivileged children, across 23 states in India. For more information please visit us at www.cry.org. For media enquiries contact: **Abhik Bhattacharya, Media Advocacy, CRY, email id:** abhik.bhattacharya@crymail.org, **phone no:** **+91 9051668304**