



INDIA

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COLOMBIA*

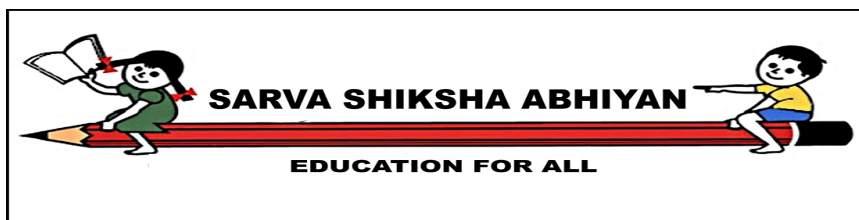
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Common questions

- Decentralisation was proposed as a solution in many systems of education in the 1990s. In some contexts, it yielded some results. In others, it became a challenge that needed to be dealt with. Solutions are yet to be found.
- School autonomy has generated debate for several decades. It is still a matter of discussion in countries like the US and the U.K. It is also an issue in India and Colombia: are schools prepared to be autonomous? Is the government ready to let go?
- Who has a say? Stakeholders matter, but how much? Unions, the private sector and civil society organisations are among the relevant actors that (try to) influence public policy in education. Are they effective? Are their inputs well taken?

Context

- In 1954, the Central Government took over the control and administration of primary and middle schools in India.
- In 1976, via the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution of India, education was made part of the Concurrent List which allowed both State Governments and Central Government to legislate on the matter.
- Subsequently, programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched which envisages a partnership between Central, State and local governments to achieve learning desired outcomes.
- Several schemes have been implemented across the country by Central and State Governments to improve the primary and secondary education systems. However, the literacy rate in many poor states have not improved as expected. While Kerala has around to 94% literacy rate, there are many states with literacy rate in the low 60's.



(Images taken from the official website of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government Of India)

Issues

- States like Bihar have traditionally performed badly in health and education, have not benefited hugely from having additional decision makers. Bihar has the worst literacy rate among all the states in India with an exceptionally low female literacy rate of around 55%.
- Studies indicate that most schools in rural areas of Bihar are ill-equipped without quality roofs, walls or floors, with usable desks, tables and chairs, and with a school library; only 20% of schools have separate girls/female toilets and over 10% of schools in Bihar still does not have clean drinking water facility.
- The pupil-teacher ratio is very high in Bihar, whereas there are very few female teachers in rural areas.



(Image taken from The Economics Times)

Areas of Research

- Who should a school be answerable to and who should responsible for the upkeep/maintenance of the school infrastructure?
- While decentralization works on paper, in poverty ridden states, what impact does involvement of local government have on schools?
- Bihar has been a low performing state with regards to the state run services provided to the people. However, while the health outcomes have improved in the recent years due the various policies introduced by the State Government, why has Bihar not witnessed similar improvement been witnessed in education?
- What other policies have worked for other states which can be applied to improve school performance?

Context

- Colombia reformed the education system in 1991** when a new constitution was approved. Decentralisation was a key aspect of this reform. The national government was given the role of formulating general goals and guidelines, while local governments (departments and certain municipalities) were granted the responsibility to manage the system within their jurisdiction.
- In 1994, the Legislature approved the General Education Act** that, among other important decisions, gave autonomy to schools in regards to their curricula (that had to be defined according to general standards established by the national government). This reform sought to empower schools, headmasters and teachers.
- For decades, the government has faced **complex and tense relationships with the teachers union**. FECODE has been able to block some reforms but, during the last 15 years, has faced internal divisions that have hindered its capacity to influence policy. Most key informants consider they pose to be limited.

Issues

- Real decentralisation was never achieved. **Local governments were not prepared to become the central players in the system**. Most of their resources (in most of these administrations) still come from national transfers. Very little fiscal effort is done at that level. Hence, the national government is "calling the shots", albeit with little power. The exceptions are big cities like Bogota or Medellin.
- School autonomy has not met the intended results. **Headmasters and teachers were not necessarily prepared or trained to lead this sort of process**. Most schools, particularly in rural areas, faced institutional weakness and did not have access to relevant material. In consequence, they have not been able to produce quality curricula (which affects mainly vulnerable populations). The discussion of a national (unified) curriculum is back in the table with many actors in favour of such reform.
- The union is a big, but weak, institution**. It has been ideologically consistent. But a legal reform, in 2002, introduced teachers' assessment as a criterion to gain promotion and higher salary for those recruited after its approval. This divided the union in two clearly defined sets of interests. Although the traditional teachers are still a majority, the newly enrolled educators have reached almost 40% of the entire population. This change has reduced the capacity of the union to pressure the government.

Reforms Being Discussed

- Some, including the Ministry and certain academics, are promoting a reform towards: national ("unified") curriculum, improved "state presence" in the classroom and centralised textbook provision.
- At the same time, some are calling for real decentralisation and school autonomy, building further state capacity at the municipal and institutional (school) level.
- Recent changes to teachers' assessment have been agreed upon between the Ministry and the union (yet to be implemented). The Ministry and CSO's are calling for further changes (recruitment, salary, training, among other aspects).

Areas of Research

Colombia has produced very little (policy-relevant) research in education. Some universities have begun efforts, but it is still scarce. Some proposed research questions are:

- Which incentives work and which do not when designing a decentralised system?
- What have been the effects of school autonomy after 22 years?
- Why is civil society not sufficiently engaged with education policy?
- Did the 2002 reform on teachers' assessment produce any impact on test results and other variables?

* These inputs are extracted from an ongoing diagnostic exercise done for Colombia using RISE methodology.