

SOCIO-LEGAL BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS: POLICY GAPS AND REMEDIES

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Higher education and the ability to learn become two key drivers of social and economic growth. However, in rural India, the low presence of inequity in access and opportunity remains a threat to these opportunities. Despite the constitutional protection and legislative initiatives, including the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, and several national programs and initiatives aimed at developing skills and education, the rural population, especially women and disadvantaged groups, are limited by the poverty level, gender inequality, social marginalization, and weak institutional assistance that is an insurmountable obstacle to the process of acquiring an education and skills. This article examines socio-legal barriers that restrict access to education and skills development in rural areas based upon inequality; weak enforcement of laws, gaps in policy implementation, and systemic failures of existing programs; and the disconnect between law and legal implementation. Finally, if true empowerment and transformation is to occur within these communities, there must be a multi-faceted approach to overcoming barriers, which prioritizes legal enforcement, community participation, gender-sensitive planning and institutional accountability which results in an active and inclusive education and skills development context.

Introduction

National development is based on education and skill development, which allows people to become valuable members of society and economy. Even though the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 stipulates that children between 6 and 14 years of age are compelled to get free and mandatory education, the disparity in the structure, teacher quality, and access is acute in the rural areas. Moreover, it has been found that programs of skill development like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) have failed to reach their potentials because of low outreach, low awareness, and gender biases. Not only do they increase the capabilities of individual people, but also help to strengthen the community, social mobility, and economic productivity¹. The Right of a child

to free and compulsory Education Act of 2009 (RTE Act) was adopted to offer universal elementary education as it was acknowledged to be a fundamental right to children as affirmed in article 21-A of the constitution². On the same note, policy measures like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) attempt to foster life-long learning and employability through skills, in rural areas³. However, policy-practice disjunction is wide because of deep social inequalities, economic and financial difficulties, and poor institutional structures. These problems are a symptom of underlying socio-legal fixations whereby the laws are in principle and are not being implemented or are not responsive to local realities⁴. The paper has attempted to critically evaluate the socio-legal barriers that prevent a rural population to access the right to education and skills acquisition and thus outline the necessity of powerful policy implementation, legal literacy, and active community participation.

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Barriers to Education in Rural Areas

The educational obstacles facing rural communities are multidimensional as they are influenced by social and legislative restrictions. a) Gender Discrimination: Rural girls are frequently forced to marry early, although there is the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the practice still interferes with the education system, particularly among girls. b) Poverty and Economic Dependence: Many children are forced to do wage labor, despite the enactment of child labor laws against such practices, the implementation of the law is very weak and poverty has continued to send children out of school. c) Caste and Social Exclusion: The discriminated communities, in particular, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, experience social exclusion in schools. d) lack of Infrastructure and Quality Education: The spirit of RTE Act is negated by the inadequate school buildings, insufficient trained teachers and poor sanitation facilities especially by the girls [5]. e) Legal Awareness Deficit: The rural families do not know their rights to education as guaranteed by the RTE Act and other welfare schemes and therefore take advantage of these benefits minimally. In the following figure 1. It has been highlighted.

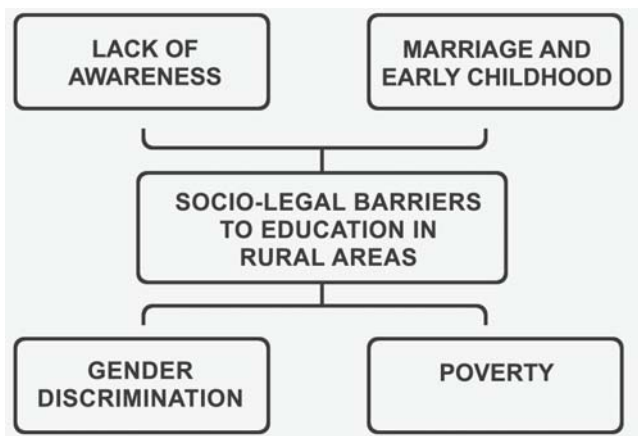


Fig. 1. Barriers of education in rural areas

Barriers To Skill Development In Rural Areas

- There is a lack of institutional access⁶.
- Gender discrimination in ability training⁷.
- Skill/ Market Demand Mismatch
- Ineffective Legal System in Rural Employment
- Inadequacy of Awareness and Career Guidance.

Reforms and Recommendations

To overcome the socio-legal barriers in education and skill development in rural areas, a multi-dimensional and inclusive strategy is essential, as discussed below:

- Enforce Law: Make sure that the RTE Act and child protection laws are actually enforced by monitoring and punitive practices in case of violations.
- Introduce Gender-Sensitive Educational Programming: The researcher would suggest the establishment of interventions in the community where the educational quality of girls and the delay of their marital choices should be the primary priorities.
- Integration of Law Literacy with Education: The researcher would here suggest promoting the creation of educational rights, access to scholarship programs, and skills development programs⁸.
- Decentralized Skill Development: The researcher here would recommend opening more rural skill centres, depending on local industries as agriculture and the craft industry⁹.
- Public-Private Relationships: The author of this article believes that NGOs, entities in the private sector, and government should be encouraged to work together to expand training opportunities to girls¹⁰.

Conclusion

Education and skill building are not policy aspirations but a fundamental human right which is needed to promote dignity, equality and empowerments of individual. Although some positive laws and welfare programs have brought particular improvements, there are still some socio legal challenges that exclude millions of rural Indian citizens against receiving the education and skills they need. Beyond the policy formulation, there is the urgency to make the statutory stipulation a reality of the ground, which is to bring the legal perspectives to live alongside the facts on the ground. Such a shift requires increasing the strength of institutional processes, working to implement gender-responsive policies diligently, and inculcating legal consciousness between the concerned populations in a systematic way. In case we manage to create an ecosystem where education and skills serve as engines of empowerment, a fair and equitable educational system will provide the basis of sustainable and equitable national development path that will lead us to self-reliant rural India. □

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