

# National Campaign on Education: Claiming Education for Every Child

Social Change  
45(2) 337–340

© CSD 2015

SAGE Publications

sagepub.in/home.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0049085715574308

<http://sch.sagepub.com>



Sneha Palit<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, implemented in India since April 2010, guarantees free elementary education to all children in the country within the ages of 6–14, primarily making it the responsibility of the state to provide good quality education, in an equitable manner. In addition to legally making education a state responsibility, the RTE Act, 2009 also attaches joint responsibilities to every stakeholder within the education process, making them accountable to the system as a whole (and to each other). Since its enactment, the Act has been successful in rekindling aspirations of millions of Indians, giving them the hope as well as the opportunity to educate their children despite its limitations.

Once the Act was enacted, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education gave two sets of deadlines to the central and state government for ensuring complete implementation of the RTE Act. The first deadline was 31 March 2013, by when all the infrastructural and other norms and standards (as outlined within the RTE Act, 2009) had to be implemented in all schools across the country. The second (and final) deadline comes to an end on 31 March 2015, by which time it is expected that all the teachers within the system will be regularised and provided appropriate training.

**Challenges:** However, it has been almost 5 years since the implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 and the performance of the Act remains dismal. In 2013, according to the Right to Education Forum's Stocktaking Report on the Status of Implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, less than 10 per cent of the 1.4 million schools across the country were compliant with all the norms and standards of the RTE Act. As per government data, 6 million children continue to remain out of school while regular attendance of enrolled children remains a big challenge. Alternative sources of data indicate that the number of out-of-school children is

---

<sup>1</sup>Policy and Research Co-ordinator, Right to Education Forum, New Delhi.

---

**Corresponding author:**

Sneha Palit, Policy and Research Co-ordinator, Right to Education Forum, 53, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi 110003.

E-mail: [sneha.palit1@gmail.com](mailto:sneha.palit1@gmail.com)

much larger in reality, especially when we take into account child labour data. (It is estimated that there are approximately 20 million child labourers in India.)

Debilitating infrastructure, massive shortage of teachers, poor teaching–learning atmosphere and poor level of learning have emerged as some of the common characteristics of most of the government-run schools. Although only a few months remain for the final deadline (with regards to recruitment, regularisation and training of teachers), it is estimated that the country presently faces a shortage of 1.2 million trained and qualified teachers. As per the Right to Education Forum’s Stocktaking Report 2013–14, 5 lakh teacher posts remain vacant and 6.6 lakh in-service teachers are yet to be trained. Moreover, around 37 per cent primary schools have a pupil to teacher ratio adverse to the national norm. In fact, the number of untrained teachers has actually increased over the last few years. However, instead of recruiting regular teachers, the government continues to hire teachers on a contractual basis, in gross violation of the RTE Act, 2009. The situation of teacher training and teacher training institutes is equally poor.

Although the RTE Act, 2009 gave a constitutional right to education to all children; it was a special achievement, especially for the marginalised sections of the society. It gave people who had been traditionally deprived of basic education a chance to realise their dreams and aspire for better opportunities for their children. However, the apathy of the state towards public education is extremely unfortunate and continues to persist. Moreover, present times are witnessing new challenges where government schools are being shut down in thousands in states such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Telengana among others. The last one year has witnessed the closure of approximately 1 lakh schools across India, as part of the rationalisation process. The reason that has been provided by the government is that the schools that have been closed had low enrolment rates, which made them economically unviable to the state. These measures were also expected to ‘free’ the teachers who were posted therein, who could then be transferred to other schools that failed to adhere to the required pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR) norms as per the RTE Act.

Unsurprisingly, the immediate consequence of this process has been the dropout of girls and other disadvantaged groups from the education process, due to reasons including social barriers, distance to schools, safety and security issues, among others. In essence, the measures have created accessibility problems and pushed out those children of the education system who needed it the most. It is extremely unfortunate that instead of focusing on strengthening the public system of education, the government is busy closing down schools. Instead of accepting its Constitutional obligations and reviving the system, it appears that the government is ready to give up on its responsibility. It is important here to revisit the reason for having a ‘right to education’ in the first place. Rights-based policies are generally the first step towards ensuring equality and closing equity gaps. However, actions like the present are merely increasing existing gaps.

On the other hand, the determination and growing interest of the private sector to commodify and commercialise education is worrisome. The harmful effects of privatisation (especially for essential services like health care and education) are known to exclude, especially the marginalised sections of the society. There

is ample evidence that indicates how privatisation of higher education, technical education and teacher training institutes has already resulted in the poor and deteriorating quality in these sectors. For example, results from central Teacher Eligibility Test (TETs) held in 2014 show that merely 1.78 per cent (13,428) of the 7.50 lakh candidates, who appeared for the exam, actually passed the exam.

Over the last few years, along with an increase in the number of private schools, the percentage of children enrolled in schools run by private providers has also increased. While the proportion of children in the private schools varies across states, it is surprising to note that the proportion is relatively high even in some of the underdeveloped states.

**National Campaign: A Brief Note:** The RTE Forum, a collective of civil society organisations, educationists, teachers and representatives of teachers unions/associations and rights-based activists, has been consistently working since the last 5 years to ensure complete implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. Taking note of the overall gloomy picture of the public system of education, there is an urgent need to transform and revive the public system of education. The Forum, working in 19 states in India, envisions good quality education for every child in India, provided in an equitable manner, through a strong public system of education. To draw the attention of the government towards the deteriorating status of elementary education and implementation of the RTE Act, the RTE Forum has launched a 150-day National Campaign—‘Claiming Education’—for every child, from 1 November 2014 to 31 March 2015. The 150 days symbolise the last 150 days till the second deadline for the implementation of the RTE Act—focusing on quality by making every teacher trained and regular.

The Campaign has been launched in 19 states primarily with two objectives: (i) to *remind* the state of its constitutional obligation towards the citizens of India—to provide free, compulsory education of good quality to every child between the ages of 6–14 and (ii) to pressure the state to fulfil those obligations in a timely manner, in congruence with the time span mandated by the Parliament of India. Moreover, in order to make education a people’s agenda, the Forum intends to use this Campaign as a platform to bring together people from all walks of life in order to create a strong collective voice claiming the rights conferred by the RTE Act, 2009. Additionally, the Forum believes that this is the time to demand for an expansion of the scope of the Act, to cover children below the age of six and above the age of 14.

Consequently multiple activities have been planned by the Forum at community, district, state and national levels, as a part of this Campaign. One of the primary initiatives that have been undertaken as a part of the campaign is the submission of the Charter of Demands to the prime minister of India. Broadly, the following points highlight the demands of the Forum:

1. Complete implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. Ensure all schools comply with all the norms of RTE Act.
2. Bring all children back into school by 2015 by rolling out nationwide child mapping and tracking systems and special training for all children out of school.

3. Take urgent action to ensure that all teacher vacancies are filled by qualified, trained and regular teachers as laid down in the RTE Act, 2009. Renovate and strengthen on urgent basis adequately staffed and fully funded academic support structures for teachers across the country, particularly teacher education institutions.
4. Empower parents to exercise control over the schools through School Management Committee (SMCs) and ensure that SMCs are responsible for bottom-up planning.
5. Convene an urgent meeting of the National Development Council (NDC) to plan for the Act's implementation and take up its monitoring in each consecutive NDC meeting until the task of RTE implementation is fulfilled.
6. Allocate all the resources needed for the implementation of RTE Act. This calls for substantially enhancing the current budgetary levels and announcing a time-bound roadmap for achieving the target of 6 per cent of GDP for education.
7. Put in place regulatory framework for private schools including ensuring their compliance with minimum norms.
8. Take steps needed to end discrimination and to ensure total inclusion of children with disability, Dalit, tribal and Muslim learners in classrooms.
9. Put in place policies and resources to ensure instruction in the mother tongue for all children.
10. Extend the Right to Education to children under six and up to the age of 18 years.
11. Strengthen the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights by making them functionally independent, adequately staffed and financed entities and put in place an uninterrupted chain of redressal of complaints from the grassroots to national level.

Another important component of the Campaign would be the collection of grievances from different states. The RTE Forum plans to collect 10 lakh grievances from different parts of the country to highlight the violations of the RTE Act, 2009. Grievances would be collected on multiple issues including infrastructural norm violations, PTR violations, discriminatory practices within the classroom among others. Some of the other activities include: a mass signature campaign, kite-flying events, press conference at national and state level, state level stocktaking of the status of implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 and, finally, the National Stocktaking Convention in March, 2015. To complement all these activities, a social media campaign has also been launched to raise awareness among the masses and reach out to as many people as possible.