

Secondary Education: Challenges and Options

Part 1: Constraints on achievement of RMSA targets

The target date for universal access to grade 9 is 2017 and for universal completion of grade 10 is 2020, yet these targets are not on course to be met. This policy brief summarises elements of a study that projects future expansion of secondary education and the constraints on this growth. It is the first of three briefings that use this study to identify how the goals of RMSA can be achieved, and is an interim document based on modelling and not on substantial secondary analysis, empirical work and household surveys.

Rates of attrition in elementary school are the key constraint on enrolment in grade 9; due to this attrition, it is unlikely that the RMSA targets will be achieved on schedule in all states. In addition, demographic changes will lead to declining numbers of potential students over the next decade. These factors present a risk of over-supply of secondary school places. To address this, more realistic projection are needed for the fastest sustainable rate of growth in secondary participation.

Most states in India are currently not on course to achieve the Government's targets for participation in secondary education. Despite significant improvements in the last decade, the secondary gross enrolment rate is still only 72% for boys and 70% for girls. RMSA-TCA has developed a model to examine whether the participation targets can be achieved, the constraints on growth, and how growth can be accelerated. Three case study states (Assam, Bihar and Odisha) were analysed using this model. While the results were different for each state, several overall conclusions can be drawn:

Attrition in elementary school means 2017 grade 9 target will not be met

The large numbers of students who do not complete elementary school is the key constraint on achieving the secondary participation targets. More than 50% of children who start grade 1 do not reach secondary grades. Therefore, even if the transition rate from grade 8 increases to 100%, the RMSA target will not be achieved by 2020. Figure 1 shows national survival rates for each grade, which includes students who are repeating years. Survival rates in some states are significantly lower than the national average. A rapid expansion in secondary school provision to facilitate 100% enrolment could result in over-supply of places.

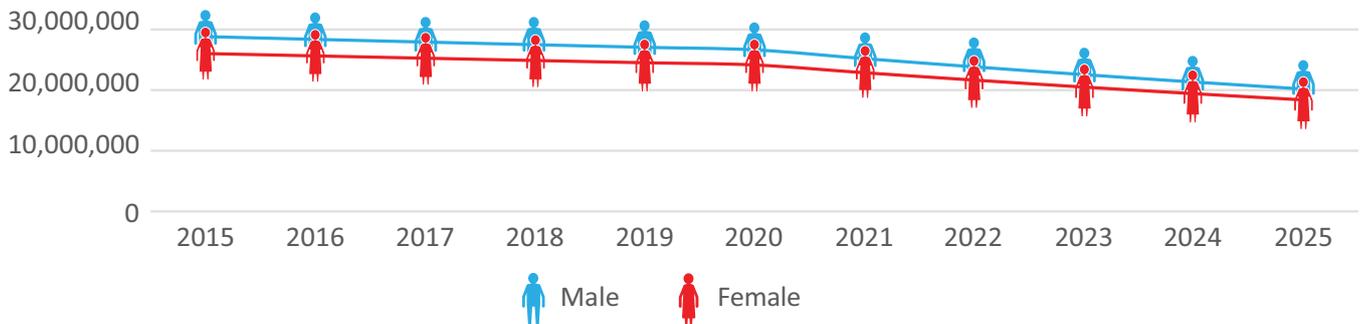
Figure 1: Survival rates, national average



Demographic changes need to be anticipated

The number and location of potential students in India is changing rapidly. Due to declining fertility rates, the number of 14-year-olds is falling and will continue to do so at an increasing rate (see Figure 2). In addition, urban migration is affecting where secondary-age children live. Where rates of migration are 7% a year, the numbers of children seeking school places will double every 10 years. Decisions about school location based on current population may become outdated and result in over-supply in some areas and shortages of places in others.

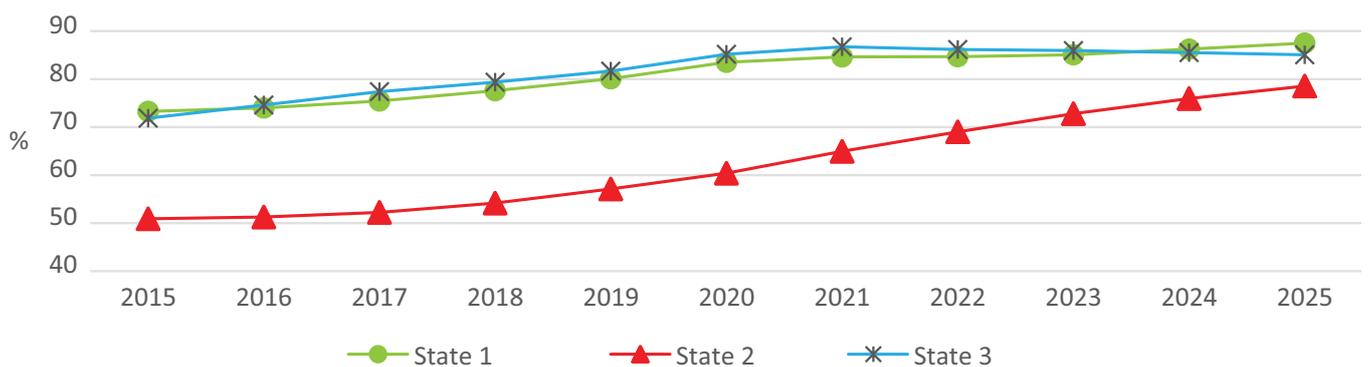
Figure 2: Projected population of children aged 14-15, all India



Measures should be taken to ensure expansion of secondary provision is based on realistic projections of demand:

- Secondary expansion needs to take into account the numbers of students who reach and graduate from grade 8, to avoid over-supply of places. Enrolment projections can identify the ceilings to growth from the flow of grade 8 students; examples of these for the three case study states are shown in Figure 3. These should be applied at state and district level. The results should be reflected in targets for progress towards 100% enrolment at secondary level which recognise starting points and challenging, but not impossible, rates of growth. Efforts also need to be sustained to increase the flow of students to grade 8 and improve readiness for secondary school. The success of RMSA depends on maintaining momentum to complete SSA and ensure all children graduate from grade 8.

Figure 3: Gap between projected Gross Enrolment Rate and 100% enrolment, case study states



- Policy and decisions on resource allocations for RMSA should also recognise and plan for the demographic changes that will influence the number and location of secondary-age children. To avoid over-supply, planners need to anticipate a period of expansion that will be followed by a period of falling rolls in many areas. School location will have to make provision for rapid growth in enrolments in some areas and shrinkage in others due to patterns of migration.