Policy Brief

This Policy Brief summarizes the results of Yugantar's recent field work on Muslim youth in Old City of Hyderabad and their educational situation. We also set out a number of recommendations, based on both our experiences in the field and the already available guidelines provided by various government agencies.

Introduction

"Education is more than a luxury; it is a responsibility that society owes to itself."
Robin Cook

The importance of education, both for the individual and society, can hardly be overstated. Besides being a goal in itself, education is indispensable for a person's sense of worth and self-esteem, and is a central resource by which a person may enter the formal economy and reap the windfalls of India's impressive economic growth. Education is also connected to a host of positive social attributes. It has been shown that educated mothers increase the likelihood of educated children, especially daughters, and educated families are shown to be connected to smaller families. As the PROBE report writes "*education facilitates a whole range of activities that people tend to value: reading newspapers, finding one's way in a new city, taking a bank loan, avoiding extortion or harassment, and participating in local politics, among many other examples.*" (p.4, 2008) In short: a flourishing democracy demands an educated and politically conscious population.

Since 2010 and the 86th Amendment, the right to education is a fundamental right enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The Article 21A reads "*The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.*" The right to education was further strengthened by the passing of the RTE act. Despite education being a fundamental right and despite the impressive growth rates of recent years and overall developments in basic social indicators, educational levels in the country remain unsatisfactory. The failings of the Indian educational system have been well documented, particularly when it comes to primary education, and the situation of Muslims is especially dire. At around 140 million, Muslims in India constitute the largest religious minority by a wide margin. As the Sachar committee report, from

2006, decisively showed, the Muslim community is lagging behind in all the levels of educational performance. While the literacy rates have improved over the years, it has improved at considerably slower rates for Muslims than for other groups in the country, even STs and SCs. As stated in the Sachar Committee Report *"Government schools that do exist in Muslim neighbourhoods are merely centres of low quality education for the poor and marginalized. The poor quality of teaching, learning, absentee teachers, in turn, necessitate high cost inputs like private tuitions, particularly in the case of first generation learners from the Muslim community. This has a negative impact on retention and school completion. Thus, poverty again has a causal link with access to education among Muslims."* (p.16. 2006)

Although there are large regional variations among Muslims in India, the situation of Muslims in Hyderabad is in many ways representative of the broader malaise that haunts the community. Muslims in Hyderabad are overwhelmingly situated in and around the 'Old City': the walled historical heart of Hyderabad, now a sprawling urban slum of around 2 million people. The concentration of Muslims in a few localities has made it easier for the marginalization of the community and accentuated a lack of access to proper infrastructure and government facilities. This ghettoization of the community is being reinforced by a sense of insecurity and vulnerability in the face of an indifferent government controlled by politicians with few roots in Hyderabadi culture, and this has further deepened the community's sense of alienation.

Andhra Pradesh while being one of the top states in the country in terms of overall economic growth, ranks only 31st for literacy rates (Census, 2011). Only four states in India rank lower. This is in itself a clear indication that development does not guarantee literacy, and only a concerted governmental effort can help improve the educational deficits of the state.

Key Findings on Education

We in Yugantar have for the last three years worked on a project on Muslim youth issues in Hyderabad, conducting our own extensive field surveys and Focus Groups Discussions with youths from the Old City, during the course of which we have met numerous local leaders and politicians. These are our Key Findings on the educational situation of Muslims in Hyderabad:

- **There is a strong desire in the community for education**. It is clear that contrary to still prevalent myths poor parents have a strong desire to educate their children. This finding is very much in line with the findings of the Sachar Committee Report and the PROBE report.

- **Perception of Unemployability**. Both young men and women reported that there is discrimination in employment against youth from the Old City in the formal economy and government institutions, and that was one of the reasons for preferring to be self employed and seeking jobs in the Gulf. And even as there was an understanding of the importance of education, there was also a real perception that educated members of the community are unable to get jobs commensurate with their schooling. This is a worrying trend, for if Muslims continue to perceive themselves as lacking employment opportunities even after attaining education, there is a risk of disinvestment of parents in education and further alienation of the community from mainstream society

- **The number of youths that have attended government schools are a small minority**. The lack of access and the poor quality of government schools was cited as the main reason for a preference for private schools, even when these schools required much higher fees.

- **Steep Educational Decline after Primary Education.** The education levels of respondents shows that while the number of students who have attended primary school was relatively high, the levels of education decline substantially after primary school education: dipping by about half for secondary school education, and then dipping by another half for intermediate and college level education.

- **Few Vocational or Technical Training opportunities.** Training or vocational education is not sufficient and it does not provide the youth with jobs or better job opportunities. But a large number of youth do undergo such training which is not beneficial to them. This fact was reported by both male and female respondents.

- **The major reason for dropping out of education is their inability to pay for their education**. Many want to continue their studies but cannot afford to do so. This is particularly true for Higher Education. Among the women, lack of family support was also

cited along with lack of affordability for higher education. Distances to travel to educational institutions (especially for higher education) were also cited as an inhibiting factor by the female respondents. A large number of male youth worked while studying, but despite this they were unable to continue. Young women did not say they worked while studying. High failure rates for both young men and women can be attributed to the low quality of teaching.

- **Few have studied in Urdu-medium schools and almost all prefer to study in the English medium**. This follows the findings of the Sachar report, which shows a low rate of Urdu medium schools in AP compared to states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka. However, while most studies recommend an increase in Urdu-medium schools, our research suggests that the interest for education in Urdu is low and most want quality English education, even at a primary level.

- **Only a very small minority went to Madrasas**. The myth that Muslim youth get Madrasa education stands exposed with this survey. Arabic education is available in masjids and private schools nowadays, so Madrasa education is low. There is also a feeling that Madrasa education is inadequate. It is mostly poorer migrants who attend Madrasas especially on the outskirts of the city. This is very much in line with the findings of the Sachar Committee which says that only about 4% of Muslim children get Madarsa Education

- **The absence of public spaces.** There is a lack of public spaces where the young and old can spend time or take part in recreational activities. Most of the respondents answered that they spent their time in "irani hotels", "video shops", shopping malls, at friends' homes or at street corners. A large majority of the respondents from all the survey areas reported that successive governments had been neglecting the old city as opposed to other parts of Hyderabad.

- **Special issues on young women**: Among the youth we surveyed we found that in general female members of a family tended to be more educated than the men, but only up to high school level. Many young boys from poor families are being sent to work, yet it appears that there are fewer instances of child labour for girls among Muslims in Old City. Women have more potential for continuing with their studies, at least up till intermediate levels. There was also a higher computer literacy rate among women than men. One of the main reasons for the

dip in higher educational attainment for women was the lack of convenient transport facilities, since many Higher Education colleges are outside old city. There is a reluctance in families to send women to schools and collages outside of their neighborhoods, particularly since many parts of the city experience regular communal tensions, often at times of various festivals.

What Measures Have Been Undertaken?

Since the release of the Sachar Committee Report there has been considerable focus on the plight of the Muslims and the attempts of the Central and State governments to improve their status. Besides the Sachar Committee's own recommendations, the Prime Minister has also unfolded a comprehensive 15-point programme for the welfare and empowerment of minorities. Following the recommendation of the Sachar Committee Report the Andhra Pradesh government has additionally strengthened the Andhra Pradesh State Minorities Finance Corporation Ltd. (APMFC), whose main task has been providing fee reimbursement and scholarships to minorities. The APMFC primarily focuses on three schemes: Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme and Merit-cum-means Based Scholarship Scheme. While these measures have proved to be important steps in helping poor minorities to access education, they have noticeable weaknesses. Scholarships, while important, are only a part of many steps that are necessary to improve the educational possibilities of Muslims in Hyderabad. Moreover, new rules with regard to income certificates and fee-reimbursement as well as reported irregularities have increased the difficulty of parents in gaining access to scholarships for their children. The Central Government has also introduced a Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MSDP), for Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs), designed to address the 'development deficits' of these districts and bring them on par with the national average. However of the 90 districts selected, none are in AP, despite Hyderabad's Old City being a high minority concentrated area.

Although the AP government was initially very vigorous in its implementation of the recommendations of the Sachar Report and the 15 point plan, these efforts now seem to have run out of steam and the educational situation of Muslims in Hyderabad remains poor. Andhra Pradesh which was once held up as a role model in terms of minority development now runs the risk of falling significantly behind other states.

Recommendations

Here we have compiled a list of key recommendations, taken from these reports as well as from our experiences on the ground:

- **Increase Quality of education in Governments schools in the Old City**. A determined effort is needed to overhaul decades of neglect of the government schools in the Old City. There is an acute lack of quality educational institutes offering affordable courses at a competitive level. As it stands parents are forced to send their children to private schools, of varying quality, or they are forced to opt out of education all together as the financial burdens are too great.

- **Increase the number of English Medium Schools**. When discussing the question of Muslim educational backwardness, particularly in North India, it is common to raise the issue of Urdu, and stress the importance of Urdu-Medium Schools. In AP, the majority of Muslims do not attend Urdu (or Hindi) medium schools, but prefer the English medium (with the choice of Urdu or Hindi as second language). Our research suggests that there is a preference for quality English education rather than more Urdu schools, as the common perception is that Urdu education leads only to unemployment, and is primarily intended for those seeking religious education. Our recommendation is that while Urdu might be important as an identity marker, the need for access to quality English language schools is keenly felt by the community and should be a priority in any government attempts to improve educational capacities. We must stress that English Medium, though in demand, is problematic from the very first year of school. We therefore, recommend that in the primary years of schooling there should be mother tongue teaching, with English as a Subject. At the upper primary stage, there could be a shift to English medium schools.

- **Facilitate greater access to schools for girls**. Access to schools need to be defined not only in term of physical distance but in terms of the *socio-cultural context*. For many females leaving the house is a contentious issues, let alone travelling alone to get to school. Any efforts to simplify access will greatly enhance the ability of girls to pursue education. One option is to

increase the number of female hostels. Another is having exclusive girls' schools. It is also imperative to increase the percentage of female teachers, which has proved to be an important way for improving literacy rates and enrolment among women, and provides essential role-models for girls. The problem of transport is particularly acute for accessing higher education institutes, as most quality colleges are located outside the Old City and bus connections from the Old City are often poor. Increasing the number of Government Colleges in general and Women's Colleges in particular in the Old City will also greatly help in increasing the possibilities for Muslim women.

- **More disaggregated data on the situation of the inhabitants of the Old City is necessary**. The inclusion of religion as a category in the 2001 census was important, and clearly showed the backward socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in India. However, the data available is aggregated and there is a lack of useful micro-level data and information for areas with a large Muslim population, and this lack hinders proper planning or development at the micro-level.

- **Simplification of the scholarship procedure**. This is particularly crucial as our research has shown that a large number of families are dependent on scholarship grants, and that the increased difficulties in accessing scholarships have hit the community hard. Here we have compiled a list of key recommendations, taken from these reports as well as from our experiences on the ground:

  o **The procedure for proof of income has to be drastically simplified**. As it stands parents face huge hassles in attaining the needed income certificates. An important simplification would be to allow ration cards or aadhar cards to be used as proof of income.

  o **Doing away with bank account requirements** is also a recommendation as many in the Old City face difficulties in opening bank accounts.

  o **Make the current three scholarships schemes into one.** This might be one workable solution which would enable a child, once identified, to receive scholarships up to whatever level of education he/she wishes to attain, rather than having the student go

through the process of submitting applications at every stage, without any guarantee of continuity of scholarship.

o There is also a need for **increased allocation of funds to the APSMFC** in order to expand its functions to include such functions as providing bank loans. Budgetary allocation for schemes meant for minorities at the central level was just above 5 % of total plan allocation in FY 2010-11. The Ministry of Minority Affairs's (MoMA) own outlay for FY 2010-11 was Rs. 2600 crores, a small sum, given its nodal ministry status. Per capita plan allocation for minorities in 2010-11 was a mere Rs. 797 (against Rs. 1521 for STs; Rs. 1228 for SCs). (see also separate brief on scholarship)

o **Increasing the Validity of Income Certificates**. Ration cards are not revised every year, yet income certificates needed for scholarships are. This imposes needless difficulties.

o **Revising the Income Ceiling**. Income ceiling for STs and SCs is 2 Lakh, yet for minorities it is 1 lakh. This discrepancy should be done away with.

o **Revising the Age Limit**. The APSMFC has introduced age restrictions of 20 years for intermediate students and 24 years for the undergraduates. As Muslim students in particular have higher failure rates and are prone to have to repeat a year or two and their average age is higher, this restriction needs to be revised or removed altogether in order to make more students eligible.

o **Revising the Need for School Recognition**. In order for a minority student to be eligible for scholarships they have to attend a recognized school. As many in the Old City, particularly from the poorer sections, attend unrecognized schools at primary levels, they are left out completely.

o **Removing the cut-off date provision.** Scholarship deadlines need to be redrawn so that they match with academic admission deadlines, which often are later. Alternatively, institutions should allow for later admission of scholarship students all year round.

o **Removing the Cap on Fee-Reimbursement**. From next year the APSMFC plans on introducing further restrictions on the Merit-Cum-Means scholarship scheme for

minorities. There will be a cap on funds released under the fee reimbursement scheme to engineering colleges at Rs 35,000. This needs to be reconsidered, as many colleges charge fees well over Rs 35,000.

- **Resource Centre and Helpline.** We have found that a major obstacle for parents and youths is the lack of necessary information on locally available opportunities. Moreover, the access to government services in the Old City is poor and riddled with hurdles. Besides financial constrains, parents and children from the Old City are at a disadvantage in that they lack "insider" knowledge of the educational systems, feel unwelcome in an unknown school environment, and face language barriers. In this situation of diminishing social capital there is a dire need for social reintegration, by which we mean the processes and capacity for building civic trust. Social reintegration can be addressed through the rebuilding of social and institutional networks and linkages, dialogue between community and state actors. It is in this context that we suggest the setting up of resource centers and help-lines to provide spaces for the youth to establish social support networks. These resource centres and help lines will act as focal points and bridges in helping the disadvantaged access basic services such as scholarships and government schemes, as well as knowledge hubs for information on all aspects pertaining to education and employment. They can also provide knowledge about useful skills training and guidance programmes. Given the crowed nature of most accommodations in the Old City these resource centres can also function as local community study centres, where youth can gather for a few hours of peaceful study.

Beyond acquiring specific skills, job seekers also need to know how to write a CV, find a job on the Internet, contact an employer, respond to common questions asked in interviews, and find 'Job-seeking courses' providing specialized and local knowledge of recruitment processes. Confidence building often plays a role in such courses, particularly where they are targeted at the poorly educated or at women. Our previous experience with a help line showed that it proved particularly valuable for women and girls who many times face hurdles in traveling out of their localities. A substantial section of the callers were mothers looking for information on education and scholarship for their children and women looking for working from home.

The following are some of the services which can be provided by the proposed Helpline and Resource Center:

1. Career Guidance: education, employment oriented skill training
2. Access to Government Schemes/Programmes
3. Placement Services
4. Facilitation for Certification
5. Institutional Linkages (education, employment, finance etc)
6. Faith Sensitive Counseling (women's issues, health issues, legal issues, identity, security)
7. Workshops / Counseling sessions on education / help filling forms
8. Study spaces.

These centres will help rebuild the social and institutional networks and linkages for the youth, and facilitate dialogue between the community and state actors, and provide durable access to the youth of the Old City to opportunities that exist in Hyderabad.

Yugantar set up help line successfully on a pilot basis for a period of 4 months (March 2012-June 2012). The helpline and resource centre that Yugantar developed has already been taken up as a model by the National Advisory Council to the Planning Commission, and is part of its 12th plan, "Towards Inclusive Development to Empower Minorities". The NAC has recommended to the government that 100 such centers should be set up in minority concentration towns.

- **Expansion of Public Spaces in the Old City.** The management of public spaces plays a decisive part, not only in the general well-being of a neighborhood, but in constructing the social climate in which young people and others can interrelate. Such spaces could very well regulate conflicts and tensions in any particular locality. A negative environment can make young people feel unwelcome, and frustrated at what they perceive to be unfair and unjust policies and policing practices. A positive approach, on the other hand, is one which respects the views and rights of young people, and that invites young people to be part of the solution. As there is a dearth of such public spaces in the old city, and a lack of playgrounds for children in general and school children in particular, a concerted effort should be made to increase these throughout the old city. The creation of such recreational public spaces will have an indirect but important positive effect on minority student performance in the Old City.