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NEP 2020 in Educational Institutions: Towards Empowerment of the Socio- Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

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ABSTRACT

The New Education Policy 2020 provides a foundational construct for the development of India. It provides a holistic interface for a transformed India, an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" continuously progressing and marching. Multidisciplinary and technology focused education, based on imparting life skills while being rooted in India ethos, forms the core of the policy. Towards this end, comprehensive reforms in the education system entailing pedagogical and curricular restructuring, formulation of a robust knowledge network and efficient resourcing and effective governance are entailed. Special emphasis has been laid out under the policy, for the historically unrepresented sections of the society (in education) namely Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). In this context, this paper undertakes a thematic study of NEP 2020 recommendations for SEDGs.

Keywords: SEDGs, NEP 2020.

I. INTRODUCTION

NEP 2020 posits education to be at the core of the development agenda for a new India. This is achieved through unleashing the full spectrum of human potential. It finds it imperative for scientific advancement, preservation of cultural ethos, delivering social justice and maintaining equality. India has a vast young population which requires to be tapped for India to find its rightful place amongst the top nations in the world. NEP 2020 provides a panacea for this through "Universal Access to Quality Education". Furthermore the world is undergoing rapid metamorphosis and witnessing technological advancements in the form of artificial intelligence. Data has emerged as the new resource to be mined and exploited. New challenge in the form of climate change and natural resource depletion loom over the horizon as well. These stupendous

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opportunities and challenges will require skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling the workforce. It will entail multidisciplinary learning and practical application skills. This requires developing learning on job skills and constant improvisation. NEP 2020 identifies it as ‘learning’ and ‘learning how to learn’. Development of such critical thinking skills requires not only pedagogical reforms such as ‘experiential learning’ but an ‘integrated learning’ ecosystem with a flexible curriculum along-with structural reforms in the education system.

II. NEP 2020 AND SDEGS

Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) is an umbrella term used for those sections of the society which faces a significantly higher degree of ‘vulnerability’ in their lives. Such vulnerability is often associated with ‘risk of poverty’, ‘social exclusion’, ‘discrimination’ and ‘violence’ etc.⁴ NEP 2020 identifies them as comprising a specific section of the population. Figure 1 focuses on the specific categories covered under SDEGs in NEP 2020.

⁴ Disadvantaged groups, eige.europa.eu, (Dec. 22, 2023, 11:15 AM), https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1174?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=Description,isolated%20elderly%20people%20and%20children.

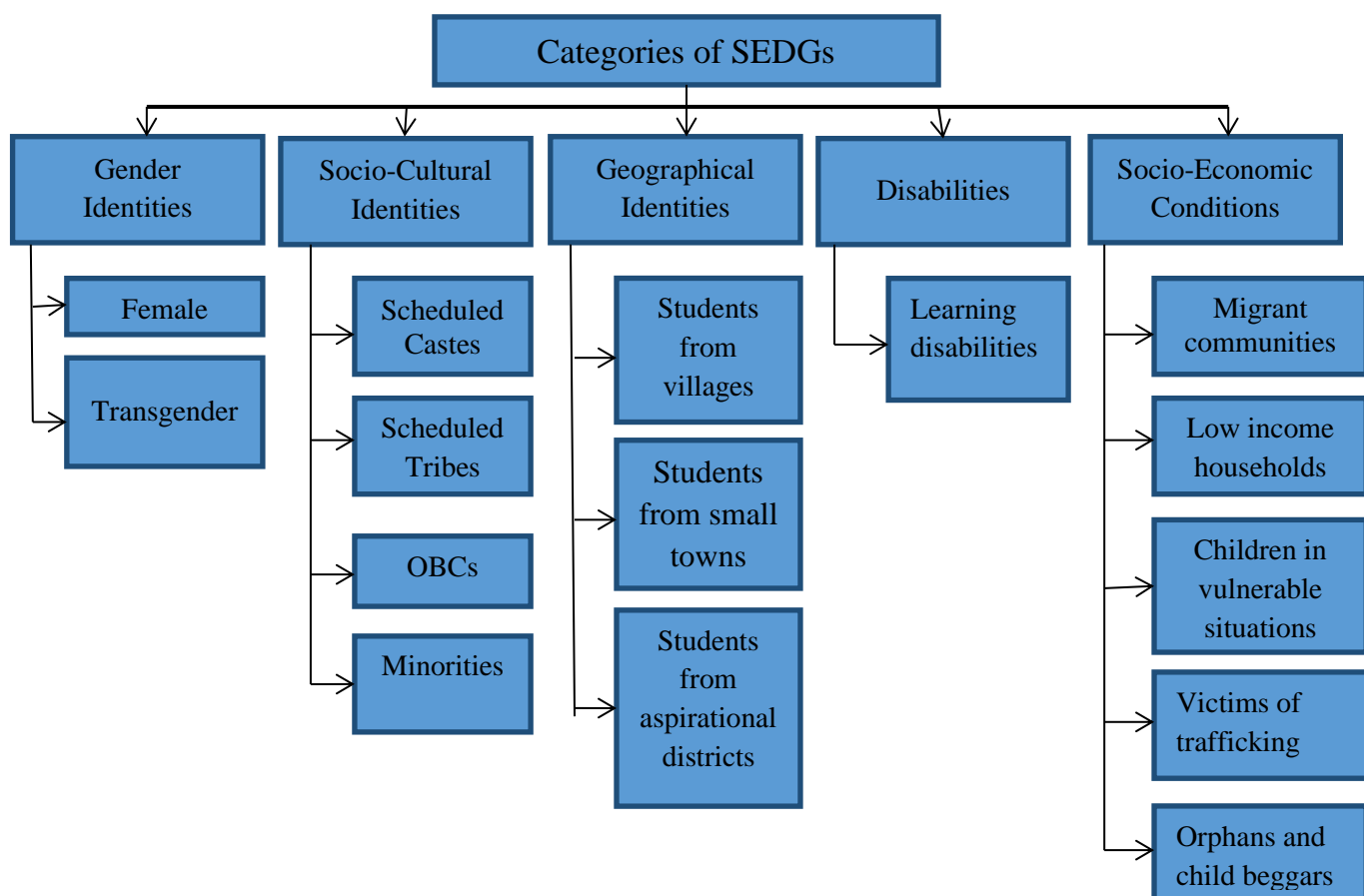


Figure 1: Categories of SEDGs under NEP 2020⁵

The policy classifies it on the bases of Gender identities, Socio-cultural Identity, Geographical Identity, Disability and Socio-economic conditions.⁶ Under the Sustainable Development Agenda which was adopted by India in 2015 it is imperative that such groups are specifically targeted for empowering them and promote not only equality but also equity.

Education is a very powerful tool to empower such sections of the society.⁷ It is proved to be primary medium for removal of inequalities.⁸ Globally also there has been a movement towards affirmative action though education.⁹ The structural reforms envisaged by NEP 2020 has “Inclusive Education” at its core aiming at the sections historically unrepresented and

⁵ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, (Sep. 10, 2023, 8:20 PM), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

⁶ Nand, Ramanand, National Education Policy-2020 and Marginals: A Primer, (2022)

⁷ Rajapakse, N, Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach and Education: Enhancing Social Justice, VOL. XIV-N°1(2016), <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.8913>

⁸ Nidhi S. Sabharwal, Extended Education at College in India: Advancing Equity Through the Extension of Public Academic Support Programmes for Students from the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups, *Budrich Journals*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (2020)

⁹ Clancy P, Goastellec G, Exploring access and equity in higher education: policy and performance in a comparative perspective, *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume61, Issue2, April 2007, Pages 136-154, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2007.00343.x>

uncovered by the education system, the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). The policy has the potential to empower and uplift these sections.¹⁰ Moreover the policy cannot be successfully implemented unless it focuses on the social and economic factors.¹¹ There is a need to move from an education system that marginalizes¹² to the one which focuses on inclusion.¹³ It is a sine qua non for putting India right in the center of the global economy.¹⁴ Table 1 maps the NEP 2020 principles with the focus and relevance to SEDGs empowerment.

Table 1: Relevance of NEP 2020 principles to SEDGs¹⁵

Number	NEP Principle	How relevant to SEDGs
1	Holistic development of students by a. Capability enhancement of student b. Teacher and parent sensitization	Removes the historical bias towards SEDGs by focusing on individual. Additionally skill development in non-academic spheres is crucially important for these sections.
2	Foundational literacy and numeracy skills by Grade 3	Focuses on at least attaining the minimum foundational literacy leading to highest return towards empowerment and capacity building.
3	Learning flexibility and professional adaptability	Moves away from one size fits approach and focuses on needs based education.

¹⁰ Kishore Kumar, Ajai Prakash, Krishanveer Singh, How National Education Policy 2020 can be a lodestar to transform future generation in India, Journal of Public Affairs, Volume21, Issue3, August 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2500>

¹¹ Mohd Anas Wajid, Mohd Yasir, Aasim Zafar, NEP-2020's Implementation Execution: A Study Conducted Using Neutrosophic PESTEL Analysis, International Journal of Neutrosophic Science, Volume 20 , Issue 2, PP: 86-106 , 2023

¹² Mrutyunjaya Mishra and Pettala Ramakrishna, Education of Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups : From Marginalisation to Inclusion (2023)

¹³ Mrutyunjaya Mishra and Pettala Ramakrishna, Education of Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups : From Marginalisation to Inclusion (2023)

¹⁴ Arup Varma et al, India's new education policy: a case of indigenous ingenuity contributing to the global knowledge economy?, Journal of Knowledge Management (2021), 10.1108/JKM-11-2020-0840

¹⁵ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, (Sep. 10, 2023, 8:20 PM), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

4	Multidisciplinary approach and removal of hierarchies in area of learning	Multidisciplinary learning imparts necessary life skills to the SEDGs.
5	Multidisciplinary and holistic education system	Promotes holistic learning and vocational training for SEDGs.
6	Conceptual and application based learning	Focusing on addressing the economic imperative of SEDGs who are economically marginalized.
7	Innovation fostering through development of critical and logical thinking skills	Promotes spirit of entrepreneurship leading to self-employment for SEDGs
8	Development of scientific temper along with ethics and human values	Promotes an equitable society and reduces the historical schisms created and maintained.
9	Multilingual teaching and learning	Promotes diversity and reduces the stress on single language based education system.
10	Focus on life skills	Promotes clinical practical education based system for SEDGs
12	Focus on technology for learning and educational management.	Reduces linguistic challenges and increases accessibility both across temporal and spatial dimensions.
13	Focus on local and acceptance for diversity	Promotes inclusivity and mainstreaming of the SEDGs
14	Equitable and inclusive education system	Reduces the possibility of gradual displacement of SEDGs in the education system

21	Right of every child to Education.	Promotes equality and reduces the historical disparity and prejudices in the society face by SEDGs
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The vision of the policy focuses on providing an equitable education system leading to the transform change in the society. It further dispositions support to human right and sustainable development. Part I of the policy talks about reforming the school education system with a “Pedagogical and Curricular Restructuring” from 10+2 to 5+3+3+4. It divides the academic structure into

- a. Foundational stage of 3 years pre-school and 2 years school (Age 3 to 8)
- b. Preparatory stage of class 3 to Class 5 (Age 8 to 11)
- c. Middle stage of class 6 to class 8 (Age 11 to 14)
- d. Secondary stage of class 9 to 12 (Age 14 to 18)

This academic structure includes in it ambit 3 to 6 age group under “Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)”. This system specially focuses on the SEDGs giving them accessibility enabling their participation and provision of early childhood development facilities and care. Para 1.2 of NEP 2020 focuses on foundation building and enhancement of social capacities with respect to SEDGs. The policy envisages attainment of cognitive development and foundation literacy along with “socio-emotional-ethical development” through development of “National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE)”. Para 1.4 of NEP2020 provide for priority targeting of socio-economically disadvantaged districts. This is sought to be delivered by a network of integrated education institutions involving Anganwadi either on standalone or co-located with the primary school system. This would involve training and re-training of the current academic resources comprising of teachers and workers and usage of digital tools such as DTH channel and smart phones and mentoring by cluster resource centres. Para 1.8 of NEP 2020 visualizes introduction of ECCE in alternative schooling system in tribal-dominated areas. Such foundational literacy will lead to an outcome where the requisite capacities are developed in SEDGs. Attaining such foundational literacy has been made the utmost priority under the policy and would be taken up in the mission mode under National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy. SEDGs

are historically marginalized and are found to fall behind within the education system due to under nourishment and general lack of health. The policy attempts to address these lacunae through provisioning of healthy meals and community involvement. In addition to mid-day meals it suggests providing of breakfast for optimal learning environment.

Retaining children especially those under SEDGs fold is a challenge. As per NEP 2020, there is a significant drop in enrolment ratio as we move to higher grades. Figure 2 shows the factors responsible for drop in GER as per NEP 2020.

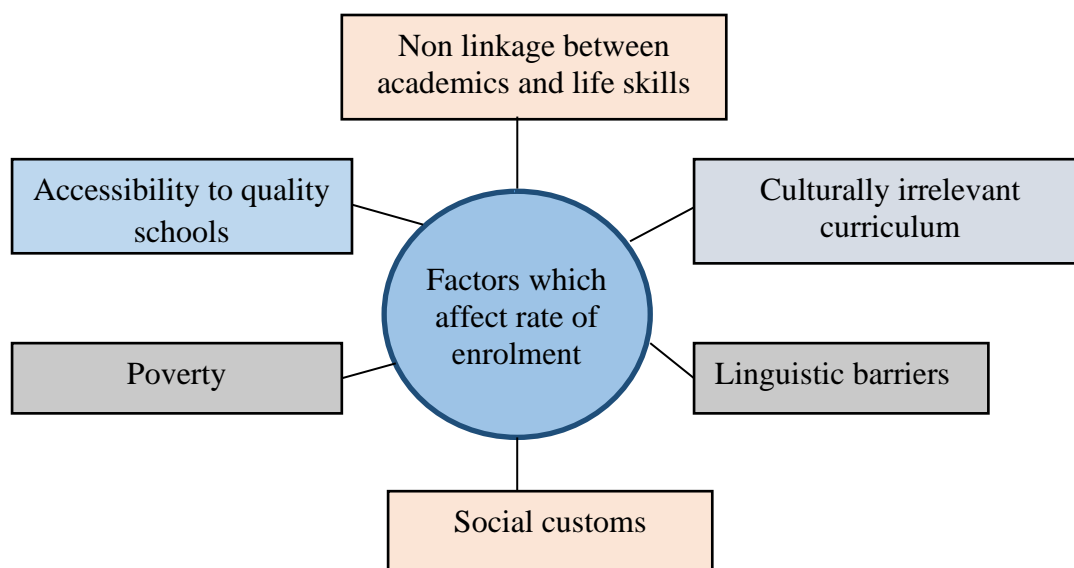


Figure 2: Factors responsible for drop in GER as per NEP 2020.

Table 2 provides the relevant grade and the Gross Enrolment ratio. It clearly shows a decline in GER at higher grades.

Table 2: GER as per Grade¹⁶

Grade	Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER)
6 to 8	90.9%
9 to 10	79.3%
11 to 12	56.5%

¹⁶ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, (Sep. 10, 2023, 8:20 PM), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Figure 3 shows the difference in degree of decline in dropouts for SEDGs and certain categories within SEDGs. It shows a higher drop for SEDGs.¹⁷

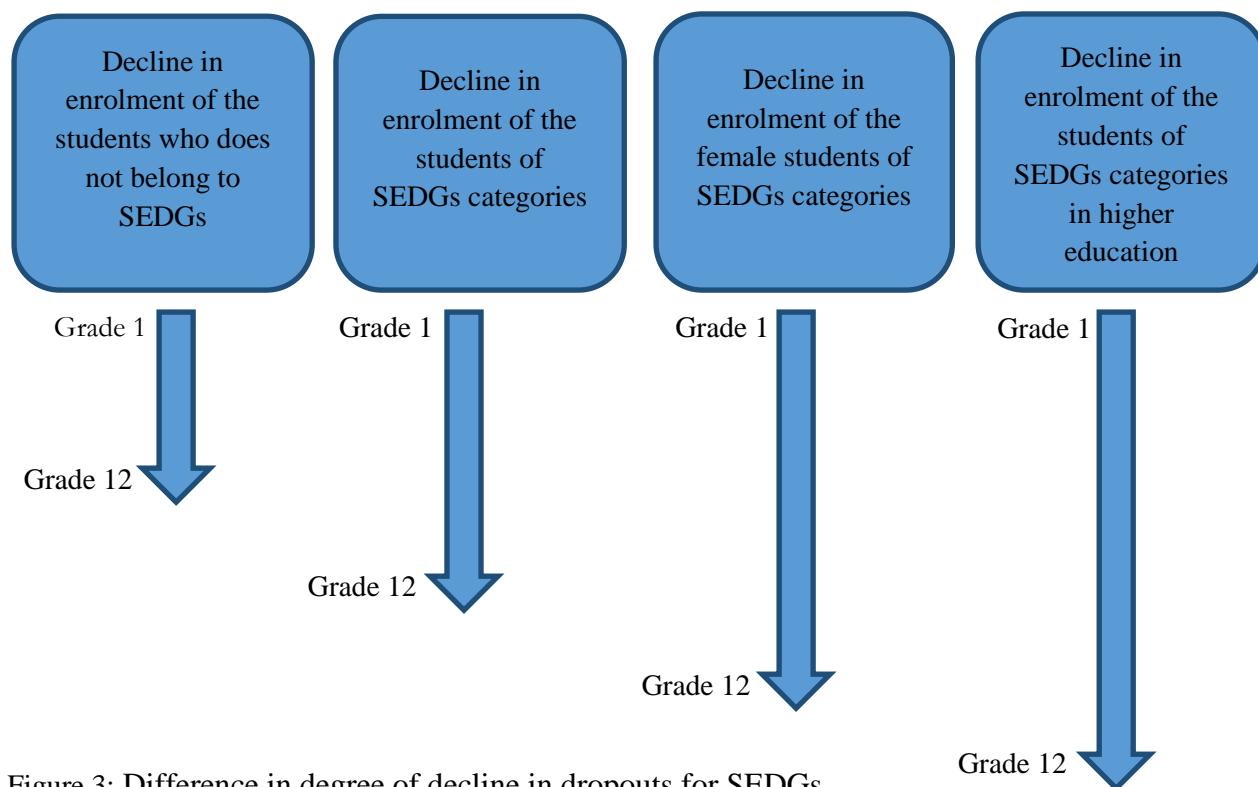


Figure 3: Difference in degree of decline in dropouts for SEDGs

Studies have been done using the concept of social capital for analysis of dropouts from school.¹⁸ Under NEP 2020 initiatives through provision of adequate infrastructure, restoration of government school credibility, up gradation of education infrastructure providing safe and easy conveyances will be very useful to address and arrest the alarming decline the GER for SEDGs. Additionally alternative education system will be providing for children of migrant labourers and other marginalized sections of the society. Participation will be enhanced through facilitation system for re-entering for those who have dropped out. This will require continuous community engagement and motivation of parents and students. Para 3.4 considers evolving a “System of Incentives” for ensuring retention students from SEDGs by ensuring quality. This will involve deployment of teachers and reforming the curriculum. Para 3.5 lays specially emphasis on SEDGs by broadening learning outcomes involving multi model education system such as “Open learning” and “Distance Learning”. These would offered to facilitate re-entry,

¹⁷ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, (Sep. 10, 2023, 8:20 PM), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

¹⁸ James S. Coleman, Social capital in the creation of human capital, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, (1988), pp. S95-S120

increase accessibility. Furthermore vocational education, adult literacy and other life skills will be developed in convenient linguistic system. NEP 2020 makes adequate provisioning of local requirements and diversity by accounting for local variations in “culture, geography, and demographics”. This cures the inequalities created by such factors.¹⁹ Thereby the policy focuses on outcomes rather than inputs. SEDGs require development of essentials life skills through holistic development and sharpening of critical thinking skills. This will be attained through the focus on experiential learning.

NEP 2020 identifies education as the optimal tool for attainment of social justice.²⁰ An inclusive and equitable education system is directly transformable to equitable society²¹ The policy proposes an education system which is neutral to “circumstances of birth or background”. This is sought to be achieved by increasing

- a. Access
- b. Participation
- c. Learning outcomes

NEP 2020 recommends multiple measures for modifying the educational ecosystem for SEDGs through measures such as

- a. ECCE
- b. Foundational Literacy
- c. Numeracy
- d. Access
- e. Enrolment
- f. Attendance

The table 3 shows the specific recommendation of NEP and how it will translate to benefits to SEDGs

¹⁹ Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal, Nature of Access to Higher Education in India: Emerging Pattern of Social and Spatial Inequalities in Educational Opportunities, (Reflections on 21st Century Human Habitats in India) (2021), DOI: 10.1007/978-981-16-3100-9_14

²⁰ Bourdieu P, Passeron JC, Reproduction in education, Society and Culture (1990)

²¹ National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, (Sep. 10, 2023, 8:20 PM), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf , (Para 6.1 NEP 2020)

Table 3: Recommendation of NEP and corresponding benefits to SEDGs

S.No.	Specific Recommendation of NEP	Recommended Measure	Benefit to SEDGs
1	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECCE • Focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy • Improved Accessibility • Focus on increasing enrolment • Improved Attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on foundation building and enhancement of social capacities with respect to SEDGs • Socio-emotional-ethical development of SEDGs
2	6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted scholarships • Providing bicycles for transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation of SEDGs in the schooling system especially female students. • Safety benefits and comfort to the parents of SEDGs students
3	6.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open schooling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective for children with disabilities

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peer tutoring • counsellors or social workers that support to connect students to improve attendance • One-on-one teachers and tutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality ECCE reap for children from economically disadvantaged families • Improvement in attendance • Better learning outcomes for children in urban poor areas.
4	6.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirational Districts: Geographical areas where population of SEDGs is substantially higher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative change in the educational landscape of SEDGs
5	6.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the education of girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce exclusion and inequity for the women belongs to SEDGs group. • Quality education to girls to increase the education levels.
6	6.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Gender- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable quality education for girls and

		Inclusion Fund”	<p>the transgender students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in access to education • Eliminates inequalities in access to education
7	6.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of free boarding facilities like Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in aspirational districts and other disadvantaged areas • Expansion and Strengthening of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. • Addition of Pre-school sections to Kendriya Vidyalayas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance girls enrolment in quality schools till grade 12 • Increase the high-quality educational opportunities

7	6.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive education in educational institutions • Ensures participation of Children with disabilities in regular schooling process.
8	6.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate technology-based tools and assistive devices. • Recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training. • Adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier free access for all children with disabilities
9	6.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice of regular or special schooling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of home-based education for children with severe and profound disabilities

10	6.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customised curriculum tailored to specific needs. 	c.
11	6.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher education programmes focusing on the teaching of children with specific disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reversal of underrepresentation of Marginalised sections.
12	6.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance for curriculum enrichment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances enrolment of students in HEIs. • Infrastructure development for strengthening SEDGs.
13	6.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships • Implementation of bridge courses • Financial assistance through fee waivers • Special hostels in dedicated regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the disparities in the educational development of SCs and STs • Fee waivers and scholarships are offered to brilliant students from all SEDGs to increase their participation in higher education

14	6.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of NCC wings for the students in tribal dominated areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of student's special talent and potential in order to make a prosperous career in the armed forces.
15	6.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of “single window system” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of all scholarships on single window system so that all students from SEDGs can get the equal benefit.
16	6.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of value of equity as a key aspect of teacher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of leaders from SEDGs to set the role models for all students. • Provide a pathway for the students to become empowered individuals
17	6.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of biased and stereotypes in school curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of study material which is related and pertinent to all communities. • Provide insights into varied cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc.

III. CONCLUSION

Education has proved to be one of the most effective ways for capacity enhancement of marginalized sections. For such system to be effective, it should be based on notions of universalization and equitable access with the positive bias towards SEDGs. It requires sustained and continuous efforts to reform the process with appropriate policy initiatives backed by technology.²² NEP 2020 is expected to provide the necessary push towards capacity enhancement, inclusivity and equality of SEDGs in this regard.²³

Such inequitable access to education is more pronounced as we move to upper levels of education. Not only efforts should be made to increase awareness of the opportunities but also a multi-pronged approach should be adopted for removal of varied constraints like financial, linguistic, cultural, geographical. It also involves training and “teaching the teachers”.²⁴ This entails provision of adequate funds towards meeting of specific targets for SEDGs such as higher gross enrolment ratio, increased retention, and enhanced gender representation, improved accessibility not only through geographical proximity but also linguistic accessibility. It also involves specific outreach programs and provision of financial assistance to SEDGs. Technological support such as digital education will ensure the upliftment of SEDGs in a 21st century modern Indian Education System and a move from “assessment based education system” to a “needs based education system”.

²² Goldin CD, Katz LF, *The Race between Education and Technology: The Evolution of U.S. Educational Wage Differentials, 1890 to 2005*, NBER Working Paper No. 12984 (2007)

²³ Govind Kumar Inakhiuya, *National Education Policy 2020 and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in higher education: A new approach to inclusivity*, *International Journal of Humanities & social Science studies*, 11(2):33-45 (2024)

²⁴ Dnyaneshwar Kishanrao Chakradev recommends introduction of compulsory teacher education for an effective teaching learning process in *Need for Compulsory Teacher Education Courses for Higher Education Faculty for Effective Implementation of NEP 2020*.