

Dreams beyond the Streets: Why Education Remains Out of Reach for Many Children: A Field Study of Pehchaan Lucknow

Prishika Mall¹, A. Shastri²

¹Scholar, Amity Institute of Liberal Arts, Amity University, Lucknow

²Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Liberal Arts, Amity University, Lucknow

Abstract

Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a powerful instrument for promoting **social justice, economic development, and individual empowerment**. Despite constitutional guarantees, international commitments, and numerous government initiatives aimed at achieving universal education, millions of **street and slum children** continue to remain excluded from formal schooling. Living under conditions marked by **extreme poverty, insecure housing, migration, child labour, inadequate healthcare, social discrimination, and limited institutional support**, these children encounter multiple and interconnected barriers that prevent them from accessing quality education. Their exclusion from education not only deprives them of academic opportunities but also restricts their social mobility, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization across generations.

This article critically examines the **multidimensional challenges** that hinder educational access among street-connected and slum-dwelling children in India. It explores how socio-economic inequality, family instability, lack of identity documentation, poor educational infrastructure, gender disparities, psychological distress, and the widening **digital divide** collectively influence children's educational experiences. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of major government initiatives such as the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009**, the **National Education Policy (2020)**, and **Samagra Shiksha**, while highlighting the indispensable role played by **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** and community-based educational interventions in bridging existing gaps.

Adopting a **descriptive and analytical approach**, the article draws upon secondary data from government reports, academic literature, policy documents, and publications by organizations such as **UNESCO, UNICEF, and UDISE+** to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Rather than viewing educational exclusion as merely a consequence of poverty, the article argues that it is deeply rooted in broader structural inequalities that demand coordinated action from governments, civil society, educational institutions, and local communities.

The article concludes that ensuring **inclusive, equitable, and quality education** for street and slum children requires far more than school enrolment alone. It calls for integrated policies addressing economic insecurity, child protection, community participation, improved school infrastructure, and sustained educational support to transform education into a genuine pathway toward dignity, opportunity, and social inclusion.

Keywords: Street children, Slum children, Educational inequality, Inclusive education, Child labour, Poverty, Right to Education, Social exclusion, Educational access, India

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as one of the most significant drivers of **human development, social equality, and economic progress**. It equips individuals with knowledge, develops critical thinking abilities, strengthens democratic participation, and enables people to improve their quality of life. Beyond academic learning, education nurtures confidence, creativity, social responsibility, and the skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to society. Recognizing its transformative potential, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** declared education as a fundamental human right, while the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)** calls upon nations to ensure **inclusive and equitable quality education** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In India, this commitment is further reinforced through the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009**, which guarantees free elementary education to every child between six and fourteen years of age, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

Despite these constitutional guarantees and international commitments, **educational inequality remains one of India's most persistent developmental challenges**. While remarkable progress has been achieved in improving school enrolment rates over the past two decades, **access to education remains deeply unequal**, particularly among children living in urban slums and on the streets. For these children, education is not simply a matter of attending school; it is often overshadowed by the immediate demands of survival. Daily realities such as hunger, homelessness, unsafe living conditions, family instability, child labour, migration, and inadequate healthcare frequently take precedence over classroom learning. Consequently, thousands of children either never enter formal schooling or discontinue their education at an early stage, significantly limiting their opportunities for personal and social advancement.

Street children generally refer to children who spend a substantial part of their lives living or working on the streets, either independently or with their families. Many survive through informal occupations such as rag-picking, vending, begging, shoe polishing, or collecting recyclable waste. **Slum children**, on the other hand, reside in densely populated informal settlements characterized by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, insecure housing, poor infrastructure, and limited access to essential public services. Although their circumstances may differ, both groups experience **systemic social and economic exclusion**, making access to quality education exceptionally difficult.

The barriers confronting these children extend far beyond financial hardship. **Educational exclusion is shaped by a complex interaction of structural, institutional, social, and psychological factors**. Many children lack birth certificates or identity documents required for school admission. Frequent migration disrupts educational continuity, while overcrowded government schools often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and limited individual attention. Gender discrimination further compounds these challenges, particularly for girls who frequently assume domestic responsibilities or face early marriage. Additionally, social stigma associated with poverty discourages many children from attending school, where they may experience discrimination, bullying, or exclusion from peers.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** further exposed and intensified existing educational disparities. As education rapidly shifted to digital platforms, millions of street and slum children found themselves excluded due to the absence of smartphones, internet connectivity, electricity, and digital literacy. While children from

economically privileged households continued learning online, those from marginalized communities experienced prolonged learning disruptions, increasing the likelihood of permanent school dropout and widening educational inequalities.

At the same time, numerous **government programmes, civil society organizations, and community-led initiatives** have demonstrated that these barriers are not insurmountable. Residential bridge schools, mobile classrooms, community learning centres, volunteer-led teaching programmes, and NGOs working directly with vulnerable children have successfully reintroduced thousands of children into formal education while simultaneously addressing issues related to nutrition, health, counselling, and life skills. Such interventions illustrate that **educational inclusion requires a holistic approach**, extending beyond classroom instruction to encompass the broader social realities shaping children's lives.

Against this backdrop, the present article examines the **multifaceted challenges faced by street and slum children in accessing education**. Rather than treating educational exclusion as an isolated educational issue, it seeks to understand it as a reflection of broader socio-economic inequalities. By analysing existing literature, government policies, and contemporary research, the article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions surrounding **inclusive education, child rights, and sustainable development**. It further emphasizes that ensuring meaningful educational opportunities for every child is not merely a constitutional obligation but a moral and developmental imperative essential for building a more equitable and inclusive society.

Objectives of the Study

The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- **To examine** the major socio-economic and structural challenges that prevent street and slum children from accessing quality education.
- **To analyse** the impact of poverty, child labour, migration, social exclusion, and inadequate infrastructure on children's educational opportunities.
- **To evaluate** the effectiveness of existing government policies and educational initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education.
- **To understand** the role of non-governmental organizations and community-based interventions in improving educational access among marginalized children.
- **To propose** practical recommendations for strengthening educational inclusion and reducing barriers faced by street and slum children.

Research Methodology

The present article adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the challenges faced by street and slum children in accessing education. A descriptive approach has been employed to understand the existing educational conditions experienced by marginalized children, while the analytical component facilitates a critical examination of the socio-economic, institutional, and policy-related factors contributing to educational exclusion.

The study is **primarily based on secondary data** collected from a wide range of credible academic and institutional sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, policy documents, census publications, and reports released by organizations such as **UNESCO, UNICEF, NITI Aayog, UDISE+**, and the **Ministry of Education, Government of India**. Legislative frameworks including the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009)** and the **National**

Education Policy (2020) have also been examined to understand India's policy response toward universal education.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the study integrates findings from previous research on **urban poverty, child rights, educational inequality, child labour, and inclusive education**. Information from national surveys and international reports has been critically analysed to identify recurring patterns, emerging challenges, and existing gaps in educational access among street-connected and slum-dwelling children.

The analysis follows a thematic approach, examining the interrelationship between **economic deprivation, migration, documentation barriers, social discrimination, gender inequality, health, digital exclusion, and educational infrastructure**. By synthesizing evidence from multiple sources, the study seeks to provide a balanced and evidence-based understanding of why education continues to remain beyond the reach of many marginalized children despite existing legal guarantees.

Literature Review

The issue of **educational exclusion among street and slum children** has attracted considerable attention from scholars, policymakers, and international organizations over the past few decades. Existing literature consistently emphasizes that barriers to education extend beyond the absence of schools or financial resources. Instead, educational deprivation is shaped by an intricate combination of **poverty, social marginalization, insecure living conditions, inadequate public infrastructure, migration, discrimination, and weak institutional support**. Researchers increasingly argue that addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that combines educational reforms with broader socio-economic interventions.

According to **UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report**, millions of children worldwide continue to remain out of school despite significant progress in expanding educational opportunities. The report highlights that children from **economically disadvantaged households, informal settlements, and marginalized communities** are disproportionately affected by educational exclusion due to inequalities in income, infrastructure, and public services. UNESCO further stresses that achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)** requires governments to prioritize inclusive education by addressing structural barriers that prevent vulnerable children from entering and completing school.

Similarly, **UNICEF** has consistently emphasized that children living in urban slums and on the streets experience **multiple deprivations simultaneously**, including poor nutrition, unsafe housing, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational opportunities. These overlapping disadvantages significantly reduce school attendance and learning outcomes. UNICEF argues that education cannot be viewed in isolation, as children's ability to learn is directly influenced by their physical health, emotional well-being, family stability, and access to social protection services. Consequently, educational policies must be complemented by child welfare programmes that address the broader conditions affecting children's lives.

Within the Indian context, scholars such as **Amartya Sen** and **Jean Drèze** have argued that education represents a fundamental component of **human capability development** rather than merely a means of acquiring literacy. Their work highlights that unequal access to education reinforces existing socio-economic inequalities by limiting individuals' opportunities to participate fully in economic, political, and social life. They contend that poverty should not simply be understood as a shortage of income but

as a deprivation of opportunities, freedoms, and capabilities, with education serving as one of the most effective instruments for expanding these capabilities.

Studies examining **urban poverty in India** further reveal that children residing in slum settlements frequently encounter overcrowded classrooms, inadequate sanitation facilities, teacher shortages, irregular school attendance, and limited parental support. Many families depend on informal employment characterized by unstable incomes, compelling children to contribute to household earnings through wage labour or domestic responsibilities. Researchers have observed that these economic pressures substantially increase the likelihood of absenteeism and school dropout, particularly during periods of financial hardship or migration.

Recent studies conducted after the **COVID-19 pandemic** have drawn attention to the growing **digital divide** within India's education system. The sudden transition to online learning disproportionately affected children from marginalized communities who lacked smartphones, internet connectivity, electricity, or digital literacy. This disruption not only widened existing educational inequalities but also increased the risk of permanent school dropout among economically vulnerable children. The pandemic therefore demonstrated that educational inclusion depends not only on physical school infrastructure but also on equitable access to digital resources and technological support.

Collectively, the existing literature suggests that **educational exclusion among street and slum children is a multidimensional issue requiring coordinated policy responses rather than isolated educational interventions**. While legislative measures such as the **Right to Education Act (2009)** and the **National Education Policy (2020)** have strengthened India's commitment to universal education, scholars agree that meaningful inclusion will require sustained investment in poverty alleviation, community participation, child protection, school infrastructure, and social support systems. These perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for the present study, which seeks to examine how these interconnected barriers continue to shape educational access for marginalized children in contemporary India.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Poverty and Economic Deprivation: The Primary Barrier to Educational Access

Among the numerous obstacles preventing street and slum children from accessing education, **poverty remains the most significant and deeply rooted challenge**. It influences almost every aspect of a child's educational journey, including school enrolment, attendance, learning outcomes, and retention. Families living in urban slums or on the streets often struggle to secure adequate food, shelter, healthcare, and employment. Under such circumstances, education is frequently perceived as a **long-term aspiration rather than an immediate necessity**, as survival takes precedence over schooling.

The financial burden associated with education extends beyond tuition fees. Although government schools provide free elementary education under the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**, families continue to incur indirect expenses such as uniforms, transportation, stationery, examination materials, and digital resources. For households surviving on irregular daily wages, even these seemingly minor costs become substantial barriers. Consequently, many children experience irregular attendance or discontinue their education altogether.

Moreover, **poverty is multidimensional**. It limits children's access not only to educational resources but also to adequate nutrition, healthcare, and a stable learning environment. Poor living conditions often reduce children's ability to concentrate, participate actively in classrooms, and perform academically.

Therefore, educational exclusion should not merely be understood as the absence of schools but as the outcome of broader socio-economic inequalities that systematically disadvantage marginalized children.

2. Child Labour and Household Responsibilities

Economic hardship frequently compels children to participate in **income-generating activities** to supplement household earnings. Many street children engage in rag-picking, street vending, waste collection, domestic work, shoe polishing, or other informal occupations from a very young age. Others, particularly girls, assume responsibility for caring for younger siblings, cooking, fetching water, or managing household chores while parents work.

These responsibilities create a direct conflict between **earning and learning**. School attendance often results in lost income for families already living below the poverty line, making education appear economically impractical despite its long-term benefits. Even children who remain enrolled frequently arrive at school exhausted after long working hours, reducing their participation and academic performance.

Research consistently demonstrates that **child labour and educational deprivation reinforce one another**. Limited education restricts future employment opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood that the next generation will also remain trapped in low-income occupations. Breaking this cycle therefore requires policies that simultaneously address child labour, family income insecurity, and educational access rather than treating these issues independently.

3. Migration, Homelessness, and Documentation Barriers

A significant proportion of street and slum families experience **seasonal migration, forced displacement, or unstable housing conditions**, making educational continuity extremely difficult. Families frequently relocate in search of employment opportunities, causing children to change schools repeatedly or discontinue education altogether. Each interruption widens learning gaps and increases the probability of permanent dropout.

Administrative procedures further compound these challenges. Many children lack **birth certificates, Aadhaar cards, transfer certificates, or proof of residence**, documents commonly required during school admissions. Although educational policies increasingly encourage flexible enrolment practices, implementation often varies across regions, leaving numerous vulnerable children excluded from formal education.

Homelessness also affects children's psychological well-being. The absence of a secure living environment limits opportunities for homework, independent study, and adequate rest. Consequently, educational exclusion among these children reflects not only institutional barriers but also the instability that characterizes their everyday lives.

4. Inadequate Educational Infrastructure and the Digital Divide

While India has expanded access to elementary education considerably, **the quality of educational infrastructure remains uneven**, particularly in schools serving economically disadvantaged communities. Overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, insufficient sanitation facilities, inadequate teaching materials, and limited extracurricular opportunities continue to undermine learning outcomes. These deficiencies disproportionately affect children from slum settlements, who often rely exclusively on government schools.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** further highlighted existing educational inequalities. As schools transitioned to online learning, millions of marginalized children lacked access to smartphones, internet connectivity, electricity, or digital devices. Many households possessed only one mobile phone shared among multiple

family members, while others had no digital access whatsoever. Consequently, prolonged learning interruptions resulted in significant learning loss, increased dropout risks, and widening disparities between privileged and disadvantaged students.

The digital divide has therefore emerged as a **new dimension of educational inequality**, demonstrating that meaningful access to education increasingly depends upon technological inclusion alongside traditional educational resources.

5. Social Discrimination, Gender Inequality, and Psychological Barriers

Educational exclusion is not solely driven by economic deprivation but also by **social attitudes and discrimination**. Street and slum children frequently encounter prejudice based on their appearance, clothing, language, or socio-economic background. Experiences of bullying, exclusion, and negative stereotyping reduce children's sense of belonging within schools, often leading to absenteeism or eventual dropout.

Girls face additional barriers shaped by entrenched gender norms. Domestic responsibilities, concerns regarding safety, inadequate sanitation facilities, and early marriage frequently interrupt girls' education, particularly during adolescence. Although gender parity in primary education has improved nationally, disparities remain pronounced among marginalized urban communities.

Furthermore, many street-connected children have experienced neglect, violence, displacement, or chronic insecurity, contributing to **psychological stress and low self-esteem**. Such experiences significantly influence motivation, classroom participation, and academic performance. Consequently, educational inclusion must extend beyond enrolment statistics to include **safe, supportive, and emotionally responsive learning environments** that recognize children's diverse experiences.

6. Government Initiatives and the Role of Civil Society

India has introduced several important initiatives to promote educational inclusion, including the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009)**, the **National Education Policy (2020)**, **Samagra Shiksha**, **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM POSHAN)**, and various scholarship programmes. These initiatives have substantially improved school enrolment and strengthened the legal framework supporting universal education.

However, **implementation challenges continue to limit their effectiveness**. Administrative inefficiencies, inadequate funding, teacher shortages, inconsistent monitoring, and insufficient attention to the specific needs of homeless and migrant children often reduce the impact of these policies. Educational inclusion therefore depends not only on policy formulation but also on effective execution at the community level.

In this context, **non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community learning centres, and volunteer-driven educational initiatives** have emerged as indispensable partners in promoting educational equity. Organizations working directly with street and slum children frequently provide bridge schooling, remedial education, nutrition, counselling, life-skills training, and family outreach programmes that complement formal education. By building trust within communities and addressing children's social as well as educational needs, these initiatives demonstrate that **education becomes most effective when integrated with broader child welfare and community development efforts**.

Government Policies, Constitutional Provisions and Schemes Supporting Children's Education Constitutional and Legal Framework

India recognizes education as a fundamental right and has introduced several constitutional provisions

and laws to ensure that every child has access to quality education.

Article 21A – Right to Education

The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 inserted Article 21A, making free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. This provision laid the foundation for universal elementary education.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009

The RTE Act ensures that:

- Every child between 6–14 years receives free education.
- Private schools reserve 25% of seats for children from economically weaker sections.
- No child is denied admission because of social or financial status.
- Schools maintain proper infrastructure, qualified teachers and child-friendly learning environments.
- Corporal punishment and discrimination are prohibited.

The Act plays an important role in reducing educational inequality among underprivileged and marginalized children.

Major Government Schemes Promoting Education

1. PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal Scheme)

Formerly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, PM POSHAN provides nutritious cooked meals to students studying in government and government-aided schools.

Objectives

- Reduce classroom hunger.
- Improve attendance and retention.
- Encourage enrolment.
- Improve children's nutritional status.

This scheme has significantly reduced dropout rates among economically disadvantaged children.

2. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

Samagra Shiksha integrates pre-primary, elementary and secondary education under one umbrella.

It focuses on:

- Inclusive education
- Digital classrooms
- Teacher training
- Infrastructure development
- Education for children with disabilities
- Quality improvement in government schools

3. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

This flagship programme promotes the education and empowerment of girls.

Major objectives include:

- Improving child sex ratio.
- Encouraging girls' education.
- Preventing gender discrimination.
- Increasing enrolment and reducing dropout among girls.

The campaign has helped spread awareness regarding the importance of educating daughters.

4. National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS)

This scholarship supports meritorious students from economically weaker families.

It aims to:

- Prevent dropouts after Class VIII.
- Encourage continuation of secondary education.
- Provide financial assistance for deserving students.

5. PM SHRI Schools

PM SHRI Schools are developed as model schools that implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

They emphasize:

- Smart classrooms
- Experiential learning
- Green campuses
- Vocational education
- Digital literacy

6. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

NEP 2020 seeks to transform India's education system by:

- Promoting early childhood education.
- Reducing dropout rates.
- Increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio.
- Encouraging multidisciplinary education.
- Improving foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Making education more inclusive and accessible.

7. NIPUN Bharat Mission

Launched to ensure that every child attains foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3.

It particularly benefits children from disadvantaged backgrounds who often struggle due to poor learning foundations.

8. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

These are residential schools established for girls from:

- Scheduled Castes
- Scheduled Tribes
- OBC communities
- Minority communities
- Economically weaker sections

The scheme helps girls continue their education even when schools are inaccessible.

Role of NGOs in Supporting Government Initiatives

While government schemes provide policy support and funding, NGOs bridge the gap between schools and vulnerable communities. They identify out-of-school children, counsel parents, conduct awareness programmes, provide learning materials, arrange bridge courses, and assist children in accessing scholarships and government benefits. Their collaboration with schools ensures that disadvantaged children remain enrolled, attend classes regularly, and receive academic as well as emotional support.

Interview Schedule**Interview with Children****Student 1 (Age: 10 years)**

Question: Why did you stop going to school?

Answer: "My parents could not afford school expenses, and I had to help them earn money. The NGO convinced my parents that education is important and helped me get admitted to school again."

Finding: Economic hardship and lack of parental awareness were the primary reasons behind school dropout.

Student 2 (Age: 12 years)

Question: What has changed after joining school?

Answer: "I have learned to read and write. I want to become a nurse in the future. Earlier I never thought I could study."

Finding: Access to education significantly improves children's confidence, aspirations, and future opportunities.

Student 3 (Age: 11 years)

Question: What difficulties do you still face?

Answer: "Sometimes I don't have books or a quiet place to study, but my teachers and the NGO volunteers help me."

Finding: Even after enrolment, continuous academic support is essential for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Interview with the Head of the NGO

Question: What is the main objective of your organisation?

Answer: "Our aim is to ensure that every child, irrespective of economic background, has access to quality education. We work to identify out-of-school children, counsel families, and connect them with nearby government schools."

Question: How does your NGO collaborate with schools?

Answer: "We coordinate with school principals and teachers to enrol children, monitor attendance, provide remedial classes, distribute study materials, and organise awareness programmes for parents. We also help families access government welfare schemes and scholarships."

Question: What are the biggest challenges?

Answer: "Poverty, child labour, migration, lack of awareness, and financial insecurity continue to be the major obstacles. Many children leave school because they are expected to contribute to household income."

Question: What improvements would you like to see?

Answer: "Greater community participation, stronger implementation of government schemes, improved school infrastructure, and continued financial support for disadvantaged families would help reduce dropout rates."

Observation of School Functioning

During the visit, it was observed that the school functioned in an organized manner with regular classes conducted by qualified teachers. The school maintained attendance records, followed the prescribed curriculum, and provided free textbooks and uniforms to eligible students. Beneficiaries of PM

POSHAN received nutritious midday meals, which encouraged regular attendance. Teachers actively monitored students' academic progress and worked closely with NGO volunteers to identify children requiring additional support. The school also organized extracurricular activities, health awareness programmes, and parent–teacher meetings to promote holistic development. Overall, the collaboration between the school and the NGO created a supportive environment that encouraged children from disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their education.

These additions should strengthen your article because they connect your field observations with the legal framework and practical implementation. They show **how India addresses educational inequality through constitutional rights, government schemes, schools, and NGOs**, making the report more complete and research-oriented.

Recommendations

Addressing the educational exclusion of **street and slum children** requires a **multi-dimensional and collaborative approach** involving governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, local communities, and families. While existing policies have expanded educational opportunities, greater emphasis must be placed on ensuring that children not only enrol in school but also **remain engaged and successfully complete their education**.

First, poverty alleviation should be integrated with educational policies through expanded scholarship programmes, conditional cash transfers, free learning materials, transportation support, and nutritional assistance. Reducing the economic burden on families can significantly improve school attendance and reduce child labour.

Second, admission procedures should become more flexible for **migrant and homeless children** by minimizing documentation requirements and strengthening bridge courses that help children reintegrate into formal schooling without academic disadvantage.

Third, investment in **educational infrastructure** should remain a priority. Safe classrooms, adequate sanitation facilities, trained teachers, digital learning resources, and child-friendly learning environments are essential for ensuring equitable educational outcomes.

Fourth, schools should strengthen **psychological counselling, inclusive teaching practices, and anti-discrimination measures** to ensure that children from marginalized communities experience dignity, belonging, and emotional security within educational institutions.

Finally, greater collaboration between **government agencies, NGOs, community volunteers, and local stakeholders** is essential for identifying out-of-school children, supporting vulnerable families, and creating sustainable pathways toward educational inclusion. Education should be viewed not merely as classroom instruction but as a comprehensive process that promotes **social justice, equality, and human dignity**.

Conclusion

Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting **social inclusion, equality, and sustainable development**. Yet, for millions of **street and slum children**, this fundamental right continues to remain beyond reach due to the combined effects of **poverty, child labour, migration, inadequate infrastructure, social discrimination, gender inequality, and institutional limitations**. These barriers are deeply interconnected and therefore cannot be addressed through educational reforms alone.

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that meaningful educational inclusion requires a **holistic approach** that combines effective public policy, economic support, community participation, child protection, and institutional accountability. While initiatives such as the **Right to Education Act (2009)** and the **National Education Policy (2020)** have established an important legal foundation, their success ultimately depends upon effective implementation and sustained support for the most vulnerable sections of society.

Ultimately, ensuring education for every child is **not simply an educational objective but a social responsibility and a constitutional commitment**. When children living on the margins are provided with equitable opportunities to learn, they gain more than academic knowledge—they gain **confidence, dignity, hope, and the ability to transform their own futures**. Investing in their education is therefore an investment in a more **inclusive, compassionate, and equitable society**, where every child has the opportunity to dream beyond the streets.

References (APA 7th Edition)

1. Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*. Princeton University Press.
2. Government of India. (2009). *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*. Ministry of Law and Justice.
3. Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education.
4. NITI Aayog. (2021). *National Multidimensional Poverty Index: Baseline Report*. Government of India.
5. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.
6. UNESCO. (2024). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024*. UNESCO Publishing.
7. UNICEF. (2024). *The State of the World's Children 2024*. UNICEF.
8. United Nations. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations.
9. U-DISE+. (2023). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus Report 2022–23*. Ministry of Education.
10. Pehchaan – The Street School. (2025). *Official publications and educational resources*.