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Sidestepping Education? An Analysis Of Mplads Spending In Telangana

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Abstract
The study attempts to analyse how Members of Parliament (MPs) in India spend their Constituency Development Fund, also known as MPLADS, to understand how an essential sector like education remains neglected compared to other sectors like construction. The study analyses all 17 Parliamentary Constituencies of Telangana. Examining Telangana's case is important because the state's dismal record of literacy rate of 66.5 percent, the second-lowest rate in India, is almost 10 percent less than the national average of 74 percent. Drawing from Amartya Sen's (2000) capability approach to highlight the vitality of education, this study tries to understand why the MPs of the 15th Lok Sabha from Telangana gave less priority to an essential sector like education in comparison to other sectors like construction. Based on MPLAD fund utilisation data for the period 2009-2014, we argue that the education sector does not cater to immediate political benefits; consequently, it remains neglected in MPLADs funds utilization.

KEYWORDS: MPLADS, Education, Telangana, Capability Approach

INTRODUCTION

In a representative democracy like India, the pivotal role of public representatives such as Members of Parliament (hereafter MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) is to make legislations. This being the case, they have a limited say in the execution of the developmental programs. The Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), known as the Member of Parliament Local Areas Development Scheme (henceforth MPLADS) or 'MP fund' in India, is an exception to their conventional roles, as it allows them to exercise a substantive role in allocating funds and implementation of the scheme[i]. Depending on the local needs and demands, the MPLADS funds can be spent on various sectors such as education, construction of roads and bridges, community halls, health care facilities, providing sports facilities, etc. (MOSPI, 2014).

The MPLADS allows MPs to fulfil constituents' needs and help build the infrastructure. This offers a meaningful opportunity to serve as they are connected with their constituents and are aware of their issues and needs. The representatives, using their power to allocate MP funds, can play a crucial role in developing neglected sectors such as education, health, or any other aspects in the backward areas in their constituencies. By focusing and investing in neglected sectors, the MPs, through their MPLAD fund, can be agents of change and help build people's capabilities through structural and infrastructural developments.

Against this context, this article examines how MPs allocate their 'MP fund' towards the education sector. In doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of how allocations are being made by the MPs towards a critical sector, i.e., school education, through their constituency development fund in India. Which sectors are they likely to prioritize, why are specific sectors given priority over others, and why have some essential sectors been neglected? This article demonstrates that MPs of 15th Lok Sabha in Telangana[ii] follow the line of national and state budgets, when allocating funds towards education sector, i.e., minimal funds compared with other sectors. The study is based on MPLAD fund utilisation data for the period 2009-2014 obtained from the Planning Department, Telangana Secretariat, and is also based on various reports published by the government of Telangana and census data.

EDUCATION: A VITAL PUBLIC GOOD TO DEVELOP CAPABILITIES

Education is crucial in fostering the formation of knowledge, ideas and skills, and also in the process of economic, social and technical development of an individual and society (Sen, 2001; Dre'ze & Sen, 2013). Stressing the significance of education, Sen (2001) contends that human wellbeing and economic progress depend on capabilities. Employing the 'basic needs' perspective, he underlined the significance that the per capita income (also known as 'commodity or income approach'), which dominated earlier analysis of human wellbeing, is not a satisfactory measure of a person's well-being, as income alone will not always increase well-being. Thus, his capability approach stresses that everyone should have access to the goods and services that fulfill their needs (Saito, 2003, p. 19). Walker (2005, p. 106) considers that "Sen's capability-based approach to education fosters agency and autonomy from an ethical individual perspective rather than from the ontological individualism-based, self-interest-driven neo-liberal perspective". If a society or polity does not provide educational facilities, it directly or indirectly deprives individuals' autonomy, freedom, and rights. Indeed, education is not only one of the main indicators in measuring the Human Development Index (HDI) but also significantly shapes other HDI indicators (Saito, 2003). Sen (2001) further contends that the lack of appropriate educational infrastructural facilities creates a barrier to fostering societal development and freedom (see Dre`ze & Sen, 2013, pp. 107-110). Before discussing the allocation of MPLAD funds to education, the following section highlights the importance of the education sector.

EDUCATION IS A SIGNIFICANT YET NEGLECTED SECTOR

The Kothari Commission in 1966 and the Acharya Ramamurti Committee (1990) recommended that India allocate 6 percent of its national income towards education and accord the highest priority to education (Tilak, 2018). In this line, international organisations like the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), emphasizing the significance of education, have favored spending at least 6 percent of the national income towards education (ibid, p. 875). Though most governments and political parties promised to allocate 6 percent of national income towards education, it never materialized (Tilak, 2006, p.613). Further, the UN has envisaged an 'inclusive and quality education for all' as one of its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 goals.

Similarly, India has also taken steps in subsidising education in the post-independence period (Tilak, 2004, p. 344). Education coming under the concurrent list after the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, both the union government and the state governments share the costs of education. Various schemes started by the Indian government concerning education are Operation Black Board (OBB), Non-formal

education, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Saakshar-Bharat, Kanya Saaksharta Protsahan yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Yojna, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and so on.

Though the state has tried to implement Acts RTE and various schemes on education, it has yet to provide all the necessary infrastructure and facilities due to a shortage of funds or proper maintenance. In India, nearly 60 lakh children are still out-of-school, and it is the home of the largest population of illiterate adults in the world – 287 million, accounting 37 percent of the global's total[iii]. Over the years, through various schemes and policies, India has seen an improvement in education. But the enrollment level declines as we move towards secondary and higher education (ASER, 2023). The dropout rates increase at the secondary level for various reasons such as having to travel long distances to reach schools, lack of infrastructure such as buildings and toilets, shortage of quality teachers, and increased absenteeism among teachers. One of the main reasons for the increased dropout rate among girls from schools at secondary education is lack of toilets and proper sanitation facilities, nearly 35.7 percent of schools in India do not have useable toilets (ASER, 2015).

Along with a lack of proper sanitation facilities, the government schools lack other infrastructures like computers, science labs, libraries, compound walls, and playgrounds. As per the survey 2015, only 58.8 percent have boundary walls to the school building, and only 65.3 percent of schools have a playground (ASER, 2015). Additionally, more than 60% schools do not have schools and 90% have no access to internet connection (ASER, 2023). Due to the lack of facilities in the government schools, they are no more viable choices; hence, many parents are forced to send their children to private schools due to the government's negligence (Krishnakumar, 2004). So, the lacunas mentioned above stress the importance of MPLAD funds which could be one of the sources to improve the infrastructural facilities in government educational institutions.

The MPLADS was started in 1993. Each MP can allocate projects up to 5 crores per year to meet their constituency's development needs (Prakash, 2013). There are eleven priority sectors on which MPs can allocate these funds, namely: animal husbandry, drinking water, education, electricity, health and family welfare, irrigation, non-conventional energy sources, other public facilities, roads and bridges, sanitation, and sports. Each of these sectors has been further divided into sub-sectors. Under the education sector, MPs can spend on constructing school buildings and other infrastructure such as toilets, sports ground, and purchase of equipment like computers, audio-visual aids and other projects for government educational institutions, government-aided and unaided educational institutions (MOSPI, 2005).

DO MPs IN TELANGANA SHOW INTEREST TOWARDS EDUCATION SECTOR?

This study is based on empirical evidence marshaled from the data on MPLAD fund allocation in Telangana from 2009-2014. We use the Telangana region as our case study because of its peculiar characteristics. First, Telangana state MPLAD fund utilisation for 15th Lok Sabha falls under the high utilisation category with 95.5 percent utilisation (mplads.nic.in). The second reason is that according to the 2011 census, Telangana has the second lowest literacy rate in India with 66.5 percent, outflanked only by Bihar with 63.82 percent. The literacy rate in the state is 9 percent below the national average of 74 percent, and it has higher school dropout rate than the national average according to 2011 census (GOT 2016). However, in terms of State Domestic Product (SDP), Telangana was ranked 11th in 2014.

This indicates that though Telangana stands in the middle-income category in terms of state GDP, the state lags in educational development. Though the state's literacy levels are below the national average, why the representatives are not interested in developing the education sector becomes an important question to which we now turn our analytical focus.

A study shows that more than 17,000 schools in Telangana do not have running water facilities (Balakrishna, 2016). The enrollment percentage in government schools has decreased from 50.10 percent in 2011 to 46.06 percent in 2015. Conversely, enrollment in private schools has progressively increased from 49.90 percent in 2011 to 53.94 percent in 2015 (ibid). This could be because of the lack of infrastructure facilities in government schools especially given that Telangana has been witnessing high corporatization of education[iv], which has systematically alienated and marginalized the poor from education sector. Since Telangana is below the national average in terms of educational indicators (GOT, 2016), it is essential to examine how the state's representatives are concerned about education.

Telangana has a total of seventeen Parliamentary Constituencies. In the 15th Lok Sabha, in the state of Telangana, the Congress Party represented 12 constituencies, MPs from Telangana Rasthra Samithi (TRS) and TDP (Telugu Desam Party) represented two constituencies each and one was represented by AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen). Though MPs belonging to four different political parties represented the constituencies, from the following data analysis (Table 1), we can notice a pattern in how the MPs of various parties allocate funds towards education. Each MP was allocated a sum of 19 crores from 2009-2014. They were sanctioned two crores each for 2009-2011 and five crores for the subsequent three years.

Table 1. Sector-wise Allocation of MPLAD Funds in Telangana in 15th Lok Sabha

Priority Sectors	**Funds allocated(in crores)**	**% of Funds allocated out of the total utilisation (in Crores)**
Roads, Pathways & Bridges	117.62	38.89
Drinking -Water Facility	59.96	21.26
Other Public Facilities	58.47	19.93
Electricity Facility	25.83	8.00
Sanitation & Public Health	18.42	5.93
Education	5.49	1.19
Health & Family Welfare	2.97	0.95
Irrigation	2.96	0.95
Sports	1.99	0.64
Non- Conventional energy sources	0.077	0.02
Animal husbandry	0.044	0.01

Source: Authors Calculations based on MPLADS data obtained from Planning Department, Secretariat, Telangana State (2015).

The figures in the table 1 shows that funds allocated to the education sector were just 1.75 percent of the total funds, i.e., out of 294 crores only 5.4 crore was spent towards education. As mentioned earlier, literacy levels in Telangana are below the national average. Hence, after examining the allocations made

to different sectors, one can note that there is no correlation between the needs and spending towards the education sector in Telangana. Though the state lags behind educational indicators such as literacy rate, the number of educational institutions, the proportion of teachers, and the high dropout rate, MPs have allocated minimal funds from their 'MP funds' towards the education sector.

The above table shows that most funds were allocated towards constructing roads, pathways, and bridges. A study (Latha, 2015) on sectoral allocation of MPLAD spending found from the workwise details on MPLAD spending in Telangana that multiple community halls were constructed in the same village/locality. The MPs spend more on community halls because they want to satisfy different caste communities in the village and establish patronage network in a bid to seek votes during elections. This indicates that MPs are spending their funds in this sector, which helps them get re-elected.

However, education, essential in building human capital, has received minimal funds. The most plausible explanation for the education sector receiving low funds from MPs is that they would often allocate funds only to those items/sectors through which they can get more votes. Since the money given to school education caters primarily to the needs of under 18 years age group, who are not the immediate voters (clients) group, MPs plausibly think that spending on this sector does not fetch more votes immediately. Further, spending on providing basic infrastructure in schools does not give them much visibility like a community hall or building a compound wall for a religious structure. Since MPLADS funds are non-lapsable, most MPs spend their money towards the end of their tenure (Latha, 2015). This gives us a clear sense of the political motives of MPs. Therefore, instead of allocating money based on the needs/requirements of different sectors like education, they spend on those sectors to gain publicity, visibility, and votes.

Table: 2 Parliamentary Constituency (PC) Wise Spending Patterns of Funds on Education Sector in Telangana (2009-2014)

Sl.No	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount allocated for education in percentage	Top priority Sector in each PC	Difference between the Top Priority Sector and education sector in each PC
1	Adilabad	0.056	44.57 (Sanitation Facilities)	44.51
2	Bhongir	0.31	36.11 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	35.8
3	Chevella	0	49.08 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	49.08
4	Nalgonda	3.33	40.53 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	37.2
5	Malkajgiri	0	40.4 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	40.4
6	Hyderabad	7.79	36.06 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	28.27
7	Secunderabad	3.22	34.51 (Roads, Pathways, and	31.29

			Bridges)	
8	Warangal	1.78	44.85 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	43.07
9	Zahirabad	0	48.96 (Other Public Facilities)	48.96
10	Medak	0.03	40.98 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	40.95
11	Nizamabad	3.06	78.55 (Other Public Facilities)	75.49
12	Mahabubnagar	2.65	23.56 (Other Public Facilities)	20.91
13	Nagarkarnool	0.58	70.86 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	70.28
14	Peddapalli	0	62.81 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	62.81
15	Karimnagar	0	73.32 (Other Public Facilities)	73.32
16	Mahabubabad	0.03	49.01 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	48.98
17	Khammam	0.1	67.61 (Roads, Pathways, and Bridges)	67.51

Source: Authors' Calculations based on MPLADS data obtained from the Planning Department, Secretariat, Telangana (2015).

The figures in the above table indicate how MPs of Telangana have allocated their 'MP funds' in their respective constituencies towards education. From the above table, we can observe that MP from Adilabad allocated only 0.056 percent of funds towards education. However, the district lags in educational indicators like literacy rate, and number of educational institutions. The literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes is 49 percent against the state literacy rate of 66.46 percent (2011 census), i.e., almost 17 percent below the state average and around 25 percent below the national average. Adilabad constitutes the second highest tribal population in the state, next to Khammam (GOT, 2016). The literacy rate in the Adilabad district is the second-lowest among the ten districts of Telangana and also lowers than the state average of 66.46 percent and the national average of 73 percent (2011 Census). Despite being backward regarding educational indicators, the constituency has received minimal funds.

In contrast to Adilabad, Hyderabad parliamentary constituency (PC) has the second-highest literacy rate of 83.25 percent in Telangana. Yet, the MP of this constituency has allocated 8 percent of funds towards education. The reason could be that the people in urban areas are more informed of the need for proper educational facilities. Hyderabad district has the highest number of government schools in the state. As a result, there would be more demand to improve the educational facilities. Interestingly, Warangal and Mahabubabad, whose literacy rates are less than the state average have received only 2 percent and 0.03 percent of funds towards education sector respectively.

The literacy rate in Mahbubnagar district is 55.04 percent, which is the lowest among all districts of Telangana. But, the allocation of funds towards education in two PCs- Mahabubnagar and Nagarkurnool (as district has two PCs), was only 2.65 percent and 0.58 percent, respectively. The Chevella and Malkajgiri constituencies are under Ranga Reddy district, and the literacy rate of the district is 75.87 percent which is the third-highest in the state and it is slightly above the national average. It is surprising

to note that MPs of these two constituencies have not allocated funds towards the education sector. Zahirabad PC is under Medak district with a literacy rate of 61.42 percent which is 5 percent below the state average. But Zahirabad PC did not allocate funds towards education. Medak spent only 0.03 percent of the funds. The literacy rate in Peddapalli and Karimnagar is 64.15 percent which is 2 percent below the state average, yet MPs of these two constituencies have not allocated money towards education. Khammam and Bhongir spent less than 1 percent on the education sector, and the literacy rates of these PCs are 64.81 percent, and 64.2 percent, respectively, which is almost 10 percent below the national average. Secunderabad, Nizamabad, and Nalgonda spent around 3 percent each, and the literacy rates of these PCs are respectively 87.75 percent, 61.25 percent, and 64.2 percent.

As the figures from the table indicate, five MPs have not allocated any funds towards the education sector. Besides this, five MPs have allocated less than one percent. Further, five MPs have allocated less than 3 percent. By comparing the literacy rates and the funds allocated towards education, we can notice that many PCs have allocated fewer funds than by the MPs of respective constituencies while allocating funds. When we examine the demand/requirement of the sector, there is a low percentage of schools with toilets for girls in Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, Medak, Rangareddy, and Warangal (GOT, 2016). In the composite Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, Medak, Nizamabad, and Warangal districts schools with access to drinking water are lower than the state average (GOT, 2016). These aspects have been entirely neglected spending of representatives towards education, it is noted that education has received low priority than other sectors, despite the grim scenario of each districts. Not surprisingly. Telangana is lagging behind other Indian states in terms of educational indicators.

CONCLUSION

In this study, our empirical evidence suggests that the MPs allocate fewer funds to the education sector than other sectors despite the significant role of education in building capacity and providing dignity to individuals and society. This is because the education sector provides them with limited scope for name, visibility, and patronage relations, which would be harvested for immediate political benefits. The state and public representative must spend more on important yet neglected sector like education. If a state achieves a high literacy rate, it is likely to do better in other social indicators like health and sex ratio, as the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu bear these out. Among the electoral promises made by TRS in 2014, providing free education from KG (Kinder Garten) to PG (Post-Graduation) brought lots of hope among the Telangana people. Nonetheless, the government has not implemented its promise even in its second term. In addition to prioritizing foreign investments and industry expansion[v], the government should also give equal attention to other critical sectors, such as education, which is crucial for the development of children's talents and Skills, which in turn attracts investment and ensures the advancement of society. This would help the state achieve its dream of 'Bangaru (Golden) Telangana' in a real sense and provide a more secure foundation for the 'right to education'.

Along with the representatives, the citizens should play a role in achieving educational indicators. Instead of demanding community centers/halls, which might not be very useful except on some occasions, citizens should demand that their representatives implement better infrastructure in schools so that they become attractive centers for learning. Investing resources in education might take time to bear fruits, but the critical role education plays in securing the growth and development of the nation and its citizens has become increasingly apparent as this study demonstrates.

End Notes

[i] Similar to MPLADS, states have MLALADS. However, the fund that an MLA can allocate for the development projects varies from state to state. For instance, in Delhi an MLA can allocate up to 10 crores per year, whereas in states like Punjab and Kerala it is 5 crores. In the rest of the states, it varies from one crore to 4 crores.

[ii] The study uses 15th Lok Sabha MPLAD fund utilisation data for the Telangana region in the erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh and the analyses is also based on the socio-economic and political conditions of newly formed Telangana state.

[iii] See (10 facts on illiteracy in India that you must know" (https://www.oxfamindia.org/education/10-facts-on-illiteracy-in-India-that-you-must-know).

[iv] The percentage of children going to private schools is more in Telangana (33.1 percent) when compared with coastal Andhra (28.5 percent) and Rayalaseema (23.9 percent) (Srikrishna Committee Report).

[v] Telangana state has received the most promising state of the year award by the CNBC -TV 18 channel as part of its annual India Business Leader Awards (IBLA) for the year 2016. (See, https://tinyurl.com/5csjxby2).

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