



STARS Programme: World Bank

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Why in News

Recently, the **World Bank** has approved the **Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS) Programme**.

It will improve the quality and governance of school education in six Indian states of **Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan** through the **Samagra Shiksha**.

Key Points

- **Expected Beneficiaries:** Around 250 million students (between the **age of 6 and 17**) in 1.5 million schools and over 10 million teachers will benefit from this **USD 500 million** programme.
- **In Line with Previous Assistance:** It will strengthen public school education and support the **country's goal of providing 'Education for All'**, for which the Bank had provided total assistance of more than USD 3 billion prior to this plan as well.
- **Objectives:** STARS will **help improve** learning assessment systems, strengthen classroom instruction and remediation, facilitate school-to-work transition and strengthen governance and decentralized management.

- STARS will **support India's renewed focus on addressing the learning outcome challenge** and help students better prepare for the jobs of the future, through a **series of reform initiatives**, which include:
 - **Providing Customised Solutions:**

Focusing more directly on the delivery of education services at the state, district and sub-district levels by providing customized local-level solutions towards school improvement.
 - **Addressing Specific Demands:**
 - Addressing demands from stakeholders, especially parents, for greater accountability and inclusion by producing better data to assess the quality of learning.
 - Giving special attention to students from vulnerable sections, with over 52% (as a weighted average) of children in the government-run schools in the six project states belonging to vulnerable sections, such as Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and minority communities.
 - Delivering a curriculum that keeps pace with the rapidly evolving needs of the job market.
 - **Equipping Teachers:**

Equipping teachers to manage this transformation by recognizing that teachers are central to achieving better learning outcomes.
 - **More Investments:**

Investing more in developing India's human capital needs by strengthening foundational learning for children in classes 1 to 3 and preparing them with the cognitive, socio-behavioural and language skills to meet future labour market needs.
- **SDGs:** It is in line with the **Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4)** and will help produce better data on learning levels by improving the **National Achievement Survey (NAS)**.
- **PISA:** STARS will assist India in participation in the **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**.
 - PISA is a **worldwide study** by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development** (OECD) in member and non-member nations.
 - It measures **15-year-olds' ability** to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

Success Stories

- India has **successfully achieved gender parity in enrolment in primary education** but that is **not the case in secondary education**. Under STARS, each state is expected to not only stabilize this downward trend but also improve the completion rate for secondary education.

- India has **significantly improved access to education** across the country.
 - **Between 2004-05 and 2018-19**, the number of children going to school increased **from 219 million to 248 million**.
 - However, the **learning outcomes** of students across all age groups continue to **remain below par**.

Challenges

- **Fails to Address Capacity Issues:**
 - Major **vacancies** across the education system **remain unaddressed**.
 - **Without capable and motivated faculty**, teacher education and training cannot be expected to improve.
- **Ignoring Decentralisation:**
 - The World Bank ignores that **decentralising** decision-making **requires the devolution of funds and real decision-making power**.
 - It **requires** not just **investment** in the capacity of the front-line bureaucracy but also in **increasing their discretionary powers** while fostering social accountability.
- **Excessive use of Information and Communications Technology:**
 - **Technology does not address** most of the **systemic or governance challenges** but it simply by-passes them.
 - Its usefulness depends on whether preconditions for effective use of ICT-systems have been put in place otherwise it only worsens the problems.
- **Over-reliance on measurement by standardised assessments:**
 - The programme **spends money on testing infrastructure for standardised assessments** which is a waste of time and resources.
 - Schools in India need improvement so the money **should be invested in improving the capability** of the system to improve learning.
- **Outsourcing:**
 - Outsourcing to non-state partners not just **takes away discretion** from state actors but also takes away the **sense of accountability and ownership** towards their job.
 - **New private initiatives do not have institutional memories**, nor do they have a **grasp of socio-cultural realities** that play an important part in the delivery process.

State structures rely on past experience (institutional memory) to meet new challenges and build additional memories with every new reform they undertake.

Way Forward

- The administration must be **equipped with adequate physical, financial and human resources** because an overburdened bureaucracy with vacancies and without basic equipment cannot be expected to be effective.
- Administrative or governance reforms **must give greater discretion to the front-line bureaucracy** to address local issues and innovate if required.
- Outsourcing, an over-reliance on measurement by standardised assessments and excessive use of ICT will not get people closer to an **Atmanirbhar Bharat**. For that, the education system needs to **enable itself to develop capability to reform itself**.

Source: TH