

# Revolution in a transition: How an intervention under India's National Education Mission (*Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*) is resolving long- standing challenges in education

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A 2018 study by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) paints a shocking picture of overburdened government school teachers in India. The report states that these teachers devote only 19% of their time to teaching and teaching-related activities. They spend more than 42% of their time on non-teaching core activities and approximately 38% on school management and other education department-related work. MSC had earlier highlighted concerns about overburdening teachers with administrative responsibilities and suggested the government identify key areas where teachers' workload can be reduced.

Based on similar feedback from other stakeholders, the government revamped the *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* in 2021 to address the teachers' workload-related concerns. The program encouraged transitioning the delivery of child-centric benefits from the in-kind mode to the direct benefit transfer (DBT) mode.

Uttar Pradesh was among the first states to introduce DBT for students' school uniforms in primary and upper primary classes during the 2021-22 academic session. Under this reform, every student enrolled up to the eighth standard (middle school) would receive INR 1,100<sup>1</sup> (USD 13), (now INR 1,200 (USD 15)) in the Aadhaar-seeded bank account of one of their parents through DBT. This move by the state government intended to financially equip the 19.1 million students of 130,000 schools across 75 districts to purchase uniforms, sweaters, shoes, and school bags that the school teachers would distribute manually in school for free.

MSC conducted a study in Uttar Pradesh to assess this new DBT system's efficacy. We interacted with teachers and heads of the schools across the state's districts to understand their perspectives on the transition- from in-kind to DBT. Here, we capture the teachers' experience with the in-kind distribution of school supplies and its impact on the students' teaching hours and educational attainments.



<sup>1</sup> USD 1=INR 82 as on 15th May, 2023

The teachers' responses were starkly uniform when they spoke about how the transition impacts the school's teaching staff and the education ecosystem. The teachers felt that the shift to DBT was a much-required move. They shared that the in-kind distribution was cumbersome and

ate into their time teaching. Below, we map the trail of duties that heads of the schools and teachers were expected to perform to help distribute uniforms before DBT was introduced:



Figure 1: List of duties that teachers are obligated to fulfill for the in-kind distribution of school supplies

The teachers faced a slew of challenges as they grappled with these non-teaching tasks:

**1. High administrative load:** The process from onboarding the vendor to the distribution of uniforms among students stretched across the academic year. Each stage of the disbursement process demanded intense engagement from teachers.



“The onus was on us to facilitate procurement and distribution of the school supplies. We made innumerable visits to the Block Resource Centre (BRC) every year, to fulfil formalities and to collect shoes and bags. Moreover, we bore the transport expenses,” notes a headmistress in Kanpur, while describing her experience with the in-kind system of benefit disbursement.



**2. Compromise with academic responsibilities:** The number of duties that the head of the school is expected to perform took away most of their working hours. When most teachers were occupied with non-academic duties, students from different classes were made to sit in a single classroom. A single teacher, who was present in the school, taught all the students. This hindered syllabus completion and students' learning outcomes.



A teacher from Prayagraj explains the functioning of schools due to excessive administrative work: “On days when many staff members are engaged in non-academic activities, the teacher-student ratio in school deteriorates. The responsibilities for teachers available in the school change from teaching the students to keeping them merely engaged.”



**3. High accountability and responsibility:** The teachers had to ensure every child received the school supplies they were entitled to, as the parents held them responsible for any omissions. They coordinated with several stakeholders to resolve the insufficiency of supplies from the BRC, which often went unaddressed.



“What can we do as teachers if we received inadequate school supplies from the Block Resource Centre (BRC)? We struggle to explain this to the beneficiaries who believe that we teachers deprive the students of their entitlements. The guardians are disappointed in us but we are also helpless after a point,” informs a primary school teacher from Chitrakoot.



**4. Lack of trust from the government and beneficiaries:** Since teachers were the implementing agency for the in-kind system, both the government

and parents largely blamed them for the system's inefficiencies and corruption. This put undue pressure on them for situations beyond their control.

The switch to DBT made delivering the benefits more efficient and changed the school experience for teachers and students. It is thus a positive step to help teachers reprioritize their working hours toward students' academic growth and well-being.

When the teaching staff divert their physical and mental resources to other activities, it can hurt the student's learning outcomes in the long term. The government can consider expanding the scope of DBT from school uniforms and supplies to school books and further streamlining a teacher's role in academics. The state of Bihar has already introduced [DBT for school textbooks for 12.1 million students of classes II-VIII](#) to prevent dropouts.



With the introduction of the DBT, we saved around 50-60 hours that were spent in arranging school benefits and distributing them to the students. – A primary school teacher in Lucknow



Alongside this move, the state governments can also consider setting up an administrative unit to cater to all non-teaching activities, many of which teachers are still expected to fulfill. Every school can have a separate or shared administrative unit depending on the number of students

enrolled. The teaching staff at these government schools should not be regarded as merely administrative resources. They have a much greater role to play in a student's academic development.