

Standing Committee Report Summary

Working of Ashram Schools in Tribal Areas

- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (Chairperson: Mr Hemanand Biswal) submitted its report on the working of ashram schools in tribal areas on February 18, 2014.
- Ashram schools are residential schools which impart education up to the secondary level to children belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- **Integrated action plan:** While the literacy gap at the national level between STs other groups has decreased to 14%, there is significant inter-state variation with the literacy gap at 28% in some states. The Committee recommended collaborative effort by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Human Resource Development, state governments and non-governmental organisations to improve the literacy rate of STs.
- **Central scheme on ashram schools:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been implementing a central scheme which aims at establishing ashram schools in Tribal Sub Plan areas since 1990-91. Under the Tribal Sub Plan approach, a sub plan specifically related to tribal welfare is formulated for areas that have been defined as having a high concentration of tribal population.
- The Committee pointed that there is limited data on ashram schools. It also pointed out that only 862 ashram schools have been sanctioned till date. Of the 862 schools sanctioned, 246 have not been constructed as yet. The scheme has not been implemented in all Tribal Sub Plan areas. No schools have been established in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Rajasthan and Jharkhand have established only nine and two schools respectively. Additionally, there has been significant delay in the construction of these schools.
- **Funding pattern:** The scheme provides for 100% central financing for the construction of ashram schools for girls and for ashram schools for boys in naxal areas. The Committee recommended providing 100% central financing for all ashram schools.
- **Financing:** The Committee expressed disapproval at the reduction of the budgetary allocation for the scheme from Rs 75 crore to Rs 61 crore at the revised estimate stage in 2012-13.
- **Umbrella scheme for the education of ST Children:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has proposed a scheme for the education of tribal children under the 12th Plan, in which larger funds will be made available to state governments to upgrade ashram schools. The Committee recommended expediting the approval process for the scheme so that it may be implemented during the current fiscal year.
- **Quality of food and infrastructure:** The Committee pointed out that sub-standard food is being provided at schools and hostels and schools are currently overcrowded. It recommended fixing norms for sharing of rooms and opening more schools where enrolment exceeds seat availability.
- **Death of children in ashram schools:** The Committee pointed out that 793 children died in ashram schools in Maharashtra between 2001-02 and 2012-13 as a result of scorpion/snake bites and minor illnesses. It recommended that the Ministry seek information from states regarding this issue and that schools take steps to prevent the recurrence of these events.
- **Appointment of teachers:** The Committee recommended that: (a) ST youth be encouraged to take up teaching in ashram schools and (b) special training be provided to non tribal teachers.
- **Dropouts:** A large number of ST children drop out of school, 55% at the elementary level and 71% at the secondary level. This is 22% higher than the national average. The Committee recommended developing local language textbooks and teaching children in their local language with a gradual shift to Hindi or English to address this.

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