GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO. 360
ANSWERED ON 18/08/2025

Learning Programs in Rural Areas

*360   SMT. SHAMBHAVI:
        SHRI NARESH GANPAT MHASKE:

Will the Minister of **EDUCATION** be pleased to state:

(a) the details of funds allocated and utilized under the key initiatives and policies implemented by the Government to enhance educational access and learning opportunities in rural areas of the country;

(b) the impact of digital learning programs, rural education infrastructure development and Government schemes on improving education outcomes in villages;

(c) the measures taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to bridge the urban-rural education divide; and

(d) whether the Government has any plans to further strengthen rural education and ensure inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all, if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION
(SHRI DHARMENDRA PRADHAN)**

(a) to (d): A Statement is laid on the table of the House.

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STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (A) to (D) IN RESPECT OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 360 ANSWERED ON 18.08.2025 REGARDING "LEARNING PROGRAMS IN RURAL AREAS" ASKED BY SMT. SHAMBHAVI & SHRI NARESH GANPAT MHASKE, HON'BLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

(a) to (d) The Government of India has framed and approved the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to transform the education landscape into a multidisciplinary, inclusive, and learner-centric ecosystem. It accords high priority to enhancing equity, quality and access to education for everyone. It emphasises on augmentation of physical infrastructure, digital infrastructure & connectivity, integration of ICT based tools, and improving inclusion & equity as critical enablers for expanding access to education, particularly in rural regions. The details of various initiatives aimed at these key enablers are as follows:

NEP 2020 accords priority to strengthen the physical infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas, through the construction of new buildings, addition of classrooms, upgrading of facilities, provision of barrier-free access for children with special needs, and improved sanitation and hygiene. Initiatives such as *Samagra Shiksha, PM-SHRI, PM-USHA, Institutions of Eminence, establishment of new central higher education institutions and MERITE scheme* are contributing to building safe and inclusive infrastructure and learning environments, thereby enhancing access, enrolment, retention, and overall educational outcomes. The details of the initiatives are as follows:

- **Samagra Shiksha:** Samagra Shiksha is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme which aims to ensure that all children, from pre-school to class 12, have access to quality education. Under the scheme financial assistance is provided to the States and UTs for opening/strengthening of schools till senior secondary level, construction of school buildings & additional classrooms, development/strengthening of school infrastructure in northern border areas under Vibrant Village Programme, setting up of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Avasiya Vidyalayas, construction of hostels for PVTGs under PM-JANMAN, construction of hostels under Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan for unsaturated ST population etc. In the last financial year (2024-25) more than Rs 34,000 crore has been released as the central share under this scheme.

- **PM–SHRI:** Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, in which existing schools managed by Central Government/State/UT Government/local bodies are strengthened and upgraded. A total of 13,076 PM SHRI schools have been selected from 33 States/UTs along with Kendriya Vidyalaya (KVS) and Navodaya Vidyalaya (NVS) through transparent challenge process out of which 9,373 PM SHRI schools are in rural areas of the country. In the last financial year (2024-25) more than Rs 3500 crore were released as the central share under this scheme.

- **PM-USHA:** Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed at funding specific State government universities and colleges, so as to improve their infrastructure and quality by ensuring their conformity to prescribed norms and standards. Under PM-USHA, priority is given to districts based on Gross Enrollment Ratio, Aspirational/ Border areas, gender parity and the proportion of disadvantaged categories such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The government has launched its third phase for the period 2023-24 to 2025-26 with an outlay of Rs. 12926.10 crore to cater to the needs of educationally underserved and rural areas. Since the inception of the scheme, an amount of Rs.7,799.69 crore has been released to various States/UTs under different components of the scheme till date.

- **Institution of Eminence (IoE):** Ministry of Education launched the World Class Institutions scheme to grant the status of Institution of Eminence (IoE) to 10 higher educational institutions each from the public and private category and enable them to emerge as world class teaching and research institutions. Twelve institutions have been notified as IoE so far. These include 08 public category institutions, namely - IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IISc Bangalore, BHU Varanasi, University of Hyderabad, and University of Delhi and 04 private category institutions namely - BITS Pilani, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, O.P. Jindal Global University and Shiv Nadar University, Greater Noida. Only public institutions are provided funds under the scheme. An amount of Rs 6198.99 Crore (approximately) has been sanctioned for the 08 public institutions since the inception of the scheme.

- **Expansion of Central Higher Educational Institutions (CHEIs):**Government of India has made concerted efforts to improve access and quality of education in the country. Since 2014, augmentation of Higher Education ecosystem has been undertaken by establishment of new Central Higher Educational Institutions (CHEIs) in the fields of Technical Education, Management, Science Education & Research, Information Technology, and Humanities. CHEIs are envisaged to function as pace setter institutions to provide academic leadership to other institutions in the region. Since 2014, 16 Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), 8 Central Universities (CUs), 8 Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), 7 Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), 2 Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISERs) and a National Institute of Technology (NIT) have been established.
- **MERITE:** The 'Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education' (MERITE) Scheme has been approved for implementation in 275 technical institutions comprising 175 engineering institutions and 100 polytechnics. The objective of the scheme is to improve the quality, equity and governance in technical education covering all States/UTs by implementing interventions aligned with the National Educational Policy-2020 (NEP-2020). It is a 'Central Sector Scheme' with total financial implication of Rs.4200 crore for a period from 2025-26 to 2029-30.

The NEP 2020 also emphasises on digital infrastructure, connectivity and integration of ICT-based tools to expand access to quality education. Under *Samagra Shiksha*, ICT laboratories, smart classrooms, and digital boards are being established in rural schools. The *National Knowledge Network (NKN)* initiative provides high speed internet to educational institutions. The Union Budget 2025 includes a provision under the *BharatNet project* to extend broadband connectivity to government secondary schools in rural areas in a phased manner. Initiatives such as *PM eVIDYA, SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), National Digital Library of India (NDLI), Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya* provide multi-lingual e-content for students and teachers, promoting blended and remote learning. The details are as follows:

- **NKN Connectivity:** The National Knowledge Network (NKN), initiated by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), is a secure and

high-speed digital backbone that empowers research, educational institutions and government organizations across India to share data and resources. The project has been extended till 31st March 2026 with a financial outlay of Rs. 7188 crores. Under the connectivity component of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) Scheme of Ministry of Education (MoE), funds are released to Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) to provide 1 Gbps bandwidth NKN connectivity to various Higher Education Institution across India. So far more than 1800 institutions have been provided connectivity under the project including from funds under NMEICT.

- **Samagra Shiksha**: Under the scheme financial assistance is also provided for establishing ICT Labs and Smart Classrooms in schools. The non-recurring/recurring grant under 'ICT and Digital Initiatives' is available to the States and UTs. As per PRABANDH portal, till date 1,76,669 ICT Labs and 1,75,936 Smart Classrooms have been sanctioned to State/UT Governments under this element of Samagra Shiksha.

- **PM eVIDYA:** The Government of India has launched PM eVIDYA as a comprehensive initiative to unify all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to school education across the country. Under the program 200 PM eVidya DTH TV Channels and 400 Radio channels to enable all States/UTs to provide supplementary education in various Indian languages including for classes 1-12.

- **DIKSHA:** Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) is the Nation's One Nation, One Digital platform for providing quality e-content for school education in States/UTs along with QR coded Energised Textbooks (ETBs) for all grades. As a participant in DIKSHA, States/UTs/ABs have generated and contributed over 3.69 lakh content in local/regional languages. Overall, 564.05 crore learning sessions have been completed on DIKSHA by students, teachers and other stakeholders. The stakeholders have access to more than 300 Virtual Labs on DIKSHA. DIKSHA is equipped with assistive features like Indian Sign Language (ISL) videos, audio contents which ensures accessibility for learners with special needs and supports students, teachers, and parents nationwide.

- **SWAYAM:** Ministry of Education in collaboration with IIT Madras has launched Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) platform. The platform hosts content curated by premier Institutions and is available free of cost with the approach of "Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime" Learning. As on date, more than 16000 courses have been delivered. SWAYAM courses have witnessed cumulative enrolments of more than 5.50 crores since its inception.

- **SWAYAM Prabha:** SWAYAM Prabha is an initiative of the Government of India that provides high-quality educational content through a network of 48 DTH television channels, aimed at ensuring uninterrupted learning for students across the country, particularly those in remote and rural areas. As on date, educational video lectures with a total time more than 92,000 hours is on the web platform.

- **NDLI:** National Digital Library of India (NDLI) was launched in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur (IIT-KGP). NDLI provides free access to a vast online repository of educational resources, including textbooks, research papers, journals, archived newspapers and multimedia content, etc to all learners across the nation. The platform has more than 90 lakh registered users.

- **Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya:** The Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya provides quality books to children and adolescents, ensuring accessibility across diverse geographies, languages, genres, and educational levels. The platform offers content in 23 languages and is supported by over 50 publishers, making a wide range of resources available to users. The platform has more than 2300 books and 2.5 lakh registered users who have engaged in more than 13 lakh reading sessions.

- **Centres of Excellence in AI (AI-CoE)**. The Budget 2025-26 has also provisioned for setting up of an AI-CoE in field of Education with an outlay of Rs. 500 crores.

Further, NEP 2020 promotes equitable access to quality education for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), including girls, children with special needs, and learners from rural, tribal, and marginalised communities. Government's measures to fulfil these aims include providing nutrition, scholarships, and instruction in the mother-tongue. Initiatives such as *PM-Poshan, PM-Vidyalaxmi, PM-USP,* and *National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS)* provide nutrition and financial

assistance to students to access education and aim to ensure retention. *Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA)*

connects Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with rural communities to provide technology-based solutions to societal problems. The details are as follows:

- **PM – POSHAN:** Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) Scheme is one of the foremost rights-based Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented in partnership with the States and UTs for providing one hot cooked and nutritious meal to all children studying in Bal Vatika and classes I to VIII of Government and Government-aided schools. The aim of the scheme is to provide nutrition to students and ensure their retention in the education system. The Scheme benefits more than 11 crore children in more than 10.35 lakh schools in all the States/ UTs. For FY 2025-26, budget allocation for the PM Poshan Scheme is Rs. 12,500 crore by Government of India and the State/ UT share as per the sharing pattern is around Rs. 7,500 crore.

- **NMMSS:** National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS) has been implemented to award scholarships to meritorious students of economically weaker sections to encourage them to continue their education at secondary stage. One lakh fresh scholarships are awarded to selected students of class IX every year and their continuation/renewal in classes X to XII for study in State Government, Government-aided and Local body schools under the scheme. In the last financial year (2024-25) more than Rs 300 crore were released for more than 2.70 lakh scholarships.

- **PM Vidyalaxmi:** It is a central sector scheme that has been launched on 6th November 2024. The main objective of the scheme is to ensure that no student is denied the opportunity to pursue higher education due to financial constraints. Under the scheme, collateral-free and guarantor-free education loan is provided to all the students, including students from minority communities who get merit-based admission in top Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs). Further, for students with annual family income up to ₹ 8 lakh, the scheme provides 3% interest subvention on education loans up to ₹ 10 lakhs.

- **PM USP-CSIS:** Ministry of Education is also implementing the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Protsahan Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme (PM USP-CSIS). Under this Scheme, full interest subvention is provided to all students who

are pursuing technical/professional courses from approved NAAC accredited HEIs/NBA accredited courses and whose annual family income is up to ₹ 4.5 lakhs for loans up to Rs. 10 lakhs, during the moratorium period. There is no upper limit on number of student beneficiaries for this Scheme.

- **PM-USP CGFSEL:** Under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Protsahan Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans (PM-USP CGFSEL) of the Central Government, credit guarantee is provided for education loans sanctioned up to ₹ 7.5 lakhs. The guarantee cover is up to 75% of outstanding default. Further, under the model education loan scheme of the Indian Banks' Association, the repayment period for education loan is up to 15 years after moratorium period (course year plus one year).

- **UBA**: Ministry of Education launched Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA) in September 2014. It connects Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country with the villages and local communities to identify challenges faced by the rural communities and to provide technology-based solutions to them. As on date, there are 4335 HEIs called Participating Institutions (PIs) covering 20534 village. So far, 543 technology-based solutions have been implemented covering different subjects of sustainable agriculture, water resource management, and rural energy system etc.

- **Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme:** The Union Budget of 2025-26, makes a provision for Bharitya Bhasha Pustak Scheme wherein the textbooks and study materials for the subjects being offered for schools and higher education are aimed to be made available in 22 Indian languages in digital form.

The concerted efforts by the Government of India to improve access to education has resulted in significant gains across the education ecosystem. As per UDISE+ report, Electricity availability has jumped from 83.4% to 91.8% of schools in the period 2019-20 to 2023-24. Library facilities in schools expanded from 76.4% to 89%; access to computers improved from 38.5% to 57.2% of schools; and internet facilities rose from 22.3% to 53.9% during the same period. As per UDISE+ 2023-24 report, 4,76,669 schools have functional Desktops/PCs; 2,56,392 schools have functional laptops/notebooks; 2,75,857 schools have functional tablets and 3,59,457 schoolshave functional Smart Classrooms used for teaching with Digital Boards/ Smart Boards/ Virtual Classrooms/ Smart TVs; and 7,92,992 Schools have internet facilities across India.

Similarly, India's higher education system has witnessed improvement in access, inclusivity, and equity. As per AISHE report, enrolment has increased by 26.5% i.e. from 3.42 Cr in 2014-15 to 4.33 crore in 2021-22. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education has improved from 23.7% (2014-15) to 28.4% (2021-22), with female GER at 28.5. At national level, the Gender Parity Index (GPI), reached 1.01 in 2021-22, indicating that female GER has surpassed male GER. This reflects the success of broad-based gender-inclusive policies.