I. Project Context

Country Context

India is uniquely placed to help reduce global poverty and boost shared prosperity. India’s per capita income of US$1,410 (2011) means it is a low middle-income country, but its development challenges are deep and complex despite significant achievements made over the past decades. Between 2005 and 2010, India’s share of global GDP increased from 1.8 to 2.7%, and 53 million people were lifted out of poverty. Progress on human development has been remarkable; life expectancy more than doubled from 31 years in 1947 to 65 years in 2012 and adult literacy more than quadrupled, from 18% in 1951 to 74% in 2011. India has already achieved the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) by halving the proportion of people living on less than US$1.25 a day: rural poverty has decreased by 14 percentage points.

In spite of these positive developments, many challenges persist. About 50% of India’s population lives in low-income and special category states (Low-income states are defined as those below $494GSDP and Special Category States are mostly northern mountainous states, sparsely populated, and those with high transport costs leading to high delivery costs of public services) where poverty rates are close to 40%. Inequalities vis-à-vis disadvantaged groups such as the so-called scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), and women persist. The ratio of girls (World
to boys has decreased steadily over the last fifty years—a trend associated with the “missing women” phenomenon (Country level sex ratio: 933 girls to 1000 boys, with 946 girls in the rural and 900 girls per 1,000 boys, according to the 2011 census); ironically, this ratio is particularly low in some of the more advanced states. Health outcomes compare poorly with those of countries at similar levels of development. At 65.4 years, total life expectancy is more than 5 years lower than the world average. Malnutrition rates remain high: 40% of the world’s malnourished children live in India. Maternal and infant mortality rates and fertility rates also remain high compared with those of other growing economies in Asia.

Sectoral and institutional Context

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is India’s main program for universalizing elementary education. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. India passed its Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which became effective from April 2010, and gave effect to Article 21-A (Eighty-sixth Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution, 2002) making the provision of free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of 6-14 years one of the Fundamental Rights. SSA has been designated as the implementation vehicle for RTE. The main challenge now is to improve pupil attendance and retention, and to focus on learning outcomes, especially for the disadvantaged groups. To achieve this, special efforts are required to enhance social accountability, institutional reform and governance for improved service delivery. One of the mandates of RTE is that all private schools will provide 25% of its places to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their school fees will be subsidized by the government. This unique form of a public-private partnership will be under this SSA III intervention.

The Gains and the Challenges:

SSA interventions have resulted in impressive gains, especially in access and equity. The number of out of school children at the elementary level has declined steadily since 2001, when the Census estimated that 32 million children of ages 6–14 years were out of school as per the Planning Commission’s Working Group on Elementary Education (2011). According to the recent government child census, the number of out of school children in 2012–13 is 3.1 million. Nationally, India has brought down the proportion of out of school children to less than 5 percent and they are mostly located in the low income states (Accelerating Progress to 2015: A Report Series to the Special Envoy for Global Education, April 2013, (Working Paper). Enrolment at the elementary level has reached 200 million. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at the primary level improved significantly from 82% to 99.8% during this period – reaching the MDG target. Gender parity has been achieved and the enrolment shares of SCs and STs have increased relative to their share in the population (20.09% at primary and 19.14% at upper primary enrolment as against a share of 16.4% (2011-12) of SC population and 11.4% enrolment (primary level) and 9.86% at upper primary level as against a population share of 8.2% of ST). The transition rate from primary (grades 1-5) to upper primary level (grades 6-8) improved from 75.0% in 2002-03 to 86.6% in 2011-12. Retention rates in elementary education improved from 32.0% to 54.8% (in states with elementary grades 1 to 8) and from 45.5% to 80.6% (in states with grades 1-7) over the same time period (District Information System on Education, NUEPA, 2002-03, 2005-06 and 2011-12).

Despite these gains, education in India faces many challenges, including:
Low Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes for children in Indian schools are low and the learning trajectories for children who remain in school are almost flat (Planning Commission, GOI – 12th Five-Year Plan). According to the National Achievement Survey (NAS) for grade 5, administered using IRT for Class III for the first time in 2009, the national average achievement in mathematics was 46.5%; in language 58.6%; and in environmental studies 50.3%. Moreover, the depth of the problem is illustrated by the variation in test scores; the standard deviations in the average achievement for mathematics, language and environmental studies were 21.3, 18.3 and 20.7 respectively. NAS shows marginal improvement on 10 common indicators and reflects variation across states that is surprising, with low-income states often out-performing more advanced states. Uttar Pradesh, a state with low human development indicators, was the top performer in 2012 NAS as also mentioned by the 17th Joint Review Mission (JRM). In fact, students in Uttar Pradesh represent by far the highest performing State group in mathematics, much higher than students in the more advanced state of Tamil Nadu. Surprisingly, NAS shows that there is no significant difference in achievement between urban and rural students across the country, which the 17th JRM has highlighted. It is pertinent to note here that moving forward, learning assessment systems need strengthening and triangulation with other assessment sources (Findings from the 17th Joint Review Mission of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Development Partners (Jan 14-28, 2013)

The Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER), which use a different sampling and testing methodology from NAS, indicate that learning achievement has been decreasing over the years since 2010. Reading proficiency has deteriorated; in 2012, 11.6% of students are unable to read anything compared with 7.7% in 2010. (The percentage of students who are able to read an entire story or at least comfortably read a paragraph from the story reduced by 2.4 percentage points and 2.7 percentage points respectively from 2010 to 2012). A similar trend is observed for arithmetic proficiency (The percentage of students in Class IV who do not recognize a single digit from the numeric system has increased from 7.6% in 2010 to 9.6% in 2012. The percentage of students who are able to comfortably deal with three digits by one digit division has decreased from 35.8% in 2010 to 26.5% in 2012.) While it is not surprising that the large influx of students has made efforts to improve outcomes more difficult, the fact remains that too many children are not learning what they need to learn. Even India’s top schools perform poorly in international comparisons. The performance of children in Class 4 is below international standards, as established through bespoke assessments using test items from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) {The study showed that students in India exhibit rote learning and perform comparatively better in questions/problems that are procedural or do not involve a deep understanding or application of concepts. Practical competencies such as map reading, developing language and vocabulary skills for better writing, measurement, general awareness of well-known facts, etc. Additionally, students seem hold on to a number of misconceptions in different subjects throughout their education, indicating a lack of remedial measures}.

Dropouts and Attendance: A large percentage of children enter primary schooling but drop out before entering upper primary schooling. The net enrolment rate (NER) at the upper primary level i.e., grades 6 – 8, increased from 43.1% in 2005-06 to 67.03%, which is still a serious concern (DISE: 2011-12). Further, dropout rates are higher amongst the marginalized groups and communities such as girls, SC/ST and the Muslim community. There also seems to be a strong correlation between existing parental literacy levels and student attendance rates.

Children with special needs (CWSN): According to the Government of India (GOI), there are over 3.2 million children with special needs, of which only 2.7 million are enrolled in regular, neighborhood schools (This does not include students enrolled in special school). Many Non-
Government Organizations, however, argue that the number of CWSN is actually much higher. Under the RTE 2009, addressing the needs of CWSN is a state obligation/mandate. However, there are inter- and even intra-state differences in the measurement, implementation and the understanding of what constitutes inclusive education for these children. Special efforts are needed to provide CWSN scholastic and co-scholastic parity with other children.

- Variations in state performance. Some of the more educationally backward areas of states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh register some of the lowest student attendance rates (less than 60.0%). A large proportion of students in these states belongs to economically weak segments of the population, and is prone to migrate on a seasonal basis. Furthermore, strong variations are observed across geographies, indicating that certain states are clearly doing better than the others. For example, NAS results for grade 5 indicate that average achievement score for the state of Manipur was 74.5%, much higher than the 30.5% in the state of Goa. The latest Educational Development Index (EDI, 2012-13) released on December 5, 2013, reveal that West Bengal, UP and Goa and continue to slide down on the EDI (Educational Development Index, 2012-13). EDIs are based on parameters like access, infrastructure, student-teacher ratio, teacher training besides outcomes vis-à-vis GER, SC/ST/Muslim enrolment, dropout rates etc) and Jharkhand is at the lowest spot at 35. Much could be learned from further examining these stark inter-state differences since these differences can provide useful cross-state learning. There is a clear need to support governments in states with poor achievement scores to help them in developing the requisite capacity to improve internal efficiency in schools as well as the quality of education.

- Monitoring and accountability for performance. Teacher performance can be judged by a range of measures, including competence, effort and student outcomes. These in turn can be variously measured. Standards for teacher performance need to be simple, understandable and monitorable. However, as of now, no systematic national-level effort has been made to develop teacher standards in India. Measurement of student performance now has a robust foundation, with the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) having carried out a national assessment in a cyclical format. The NCERT has completed 2 rounds of achievements surveys for Classes –III and VII/VIII and 3 rounds for Class V. The reports on the third round for classes III and VIII are expected to be completed by March 2014 as the assessments were carried out in 2012. However, this assessment methodology has to be extended to other grades and over time. State-level assessments are few and far between, limiting the states’ ability to carry out innovative and remedial programs that clearly address gaps in teacher, school, and student performance.

World Bank’s previous support to SSA: SSA has been supported by the Bank, DFID and the EU through a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp). Since 2004, the International Development Association (IDA) has contributed US$1.85 billion to the program, US$500 million in SSA I (2004-07) and US $1.35 billion in SSA II (2008-12). DFID and the European Union (EU) together contributed an additional US$546 million to SSA I and US$375 million to SSA-II. The Implementation Completion Reports rated SSA I as Satisfactory and SSA II as Moderately Satisfactory.

II. Proposed Development Objectives

The PDO is to improve education outcomes of elementary school children in India

III. Project Description

Component Name

Improving Quality and Enhancing Learning Outcomes
Comments (optional)
The project will provide special attention to quality improvement with inherent accountability measures through the special components that will inform the SSA program in all its dimensions.

Component Name
Strengthening monitoring and evaluation for improved accountability

Comments (optional)
The project will support a three tier strategy for assessment of learning outcomes for enhanced accountability, through provision of consulting services, training and learning materials.

Component Name
Enhancing access and retention for disadvantaged children

Comments (optional)
The project will continue to make special provisions to enroll the marginalized children through special training centers to prepare them for grade and age appropriate mainstreaming.

IV. Financing (in USD Million)

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V. Implementation

The management and implementation arrangements under SSA III will follow those used in SSA I and SSA II.

The implementation agency for SSA III will be the MHRD, through EEB II bureau, which will be responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the Program and shall maintain the PAB throughout the Project implementation period. It will ensure that the State Implementation Societies (SISs) and other Project Executing Agencies remain operational throughout the Project implementation period. The MHRD, through EEB II, will ensure that the PAB meets regularly and whenever necessary to, inter-alia, approve and sanction AWP&Bs and the National Components and the State components, ensure adherence to the financial norms envisaged in the Program, with the overall objectives of the Program and the Project, ensure cost effectiveness of all proposed interventions at various levels and co-ordinate the activities of Project Executing Agencies. The MHRD as the implementing agency will ensure that the SISs provide funds to various Project Executing Agencies as per approved AWP&Bs and the provisions of the Manual on Financial Management and Procurement.

At the State level, a State Mission Authority whose governing council is chaired by the Chief Minister operates as an autonomous SIS which provides direction and oversight at the State level. The SIS, through the State Project Office (SPO), coordinates with District and sub-District level organizations, supports districts in AWPBs, is responsible for monitoring and evaluation, and serves as a channel for the flow of funds to the lower levels. The SPO will report on implementation
progress, and submit and negotiate the consolidated AWPBs, to the national level.

At the District level, the oversight function is carried out by District Elementary Education Committees, chaired by the District Collector. The District Project Office (DPO), which works in close collaboration with the SPO, prepares the district AWP&B, and monitors physical and financial implementation progress. The district office is headed by the District Education Officer (DEO) who also performs the duties of the District Project Coordinator (DPC). At the sub-district level, Block Education Offices (BEOs) have administrative responsibility for the schools, working in close collaboration with BRCs and CRCs on academic support. They work through close coordination with the SMCs to oversee educational management and implementation in the block.

Under the RTE Act, the SMCs have been provided greater powers and responsibilities. They can take the support of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), to effectively monitor and implement SSA, through community mobilization, preparing school development plans, identifying out of school children and monitoring students’ and teachers’ attendance. SMCs have representation from the Gram Panchayat (the village level elected government).

VI. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

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Comments (optional)

VII. Contact point

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