

UPA GOVERNMENT FAILS THE NATION ON HEALTH & EDUCATION

(Primary Response to the [Budget Highlights 2008-09](#))

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Despite the rhetorical recognition of the 'twin pillars of the edifice of social sector reforms', the UPA government has failed to take the historic opportunity to revamp the educational and health infrastructure of the country, even in the fourth consecutive budget of its government.

The Union Budget announced by P Chidambaram today reflects merely a 20% increase in allocation for education, and 15% increase in allocation for health. This is significantly less than the increases implemented in the previous year to the effect of 34% and 24% respectively for education and health.

The extension of the Mid-day Meal scheme to upper primary schools across the country is the only cause for cheer in an otherwise lackluster set of proposals for health & education. The absence of the vision and confidence required overhaul the two 'lifeline' sectors – as called for by numerous experts and committees over the last forty years – is apparent. The government has sidestepped the issues related to universal coverage, quality services and long term investment in infrastructure.

By focusing on building 6000 model schools rather than the provision of a fully equipped & functional school in every village, the government has reinforced that Education continues to be planned as a privilege rather than a fundamental right.

The initiation of a **National Health Insurance Scheme for Unorganized sector workers living below the poverty line and National Programme for the Elderly** are welcome steps but again belie the government's inability to tackle the issues that have crippled the country's public health system and address the urgent health crises that India faces in relation to malnutrition, infant mortality and the highest maternal death toll in the world.

The United Progressive Alliance has failed to deliver on its promise to raise spending on the two sectors to internationally accepted levels of 2-3% GDP for public expenditure on health, and 6% GDP for public expenditure on Education by 2009, as promised in the National Common Minimum Program.

The integration of this target in the 11th Five Year Plan however ensures that the '9% GDP for public spending on Health & Education' goal remains a part of the national development agenda.

(Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, New Delhi)