

Minutes- Regional Workshop on School Education, Lucknow, 3rd- 4th August, 2007.

The National Knowledge Commission held a regional workshop on School Education in IIM Lucknow on 3-4th August. The workshop dealt with issues of School Education in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand.

The workshop consisted of representatives from a range of institutions involved in school education: Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, DIETs, Block Resource Centers, School Teachers and Principals, UNICEF, PRATHAM, Eklavya, etc.

However, the state of Uttar Pradesh was inadequately represented: there was no representation of officials from the Department of Education in UP. In addition, the local variations within the state could not be adequately drawn out.

Common School System (CSS)

Dr Madan Mohan Jha, presented the Report on Common Schooling drawn up by the Bihar government. A proposal for CSS had been recommended by the Kothari Commission in 1967, and reiterated in the 1967 New Education Policy.

Certain misconceptions regarding the CSS proposal were clarified: CSS will not disregard the regional variations in the schooling system; neither will privately managed schools be forced to give up their non governmental character; and it will not entail the complete government control over all schools.

The following advantages were pointed out in adopting the CSS proposal:

- Its financial viability is within the parameters of the recommendation of the Kothari Commission that the government allot at least 6% of GDP on Education. Moreover, as 2% of income tax is ostensibly collected for school education these funds should be more effectively utilized.
- Secondly, non conventional sources of finance have to be identified and utilized: these include funding from donations and charity; from financial institutions like the World Bank, RIDF, and NABARD.
- The proposal is practicable with an achievable road- map.
- The Universal Right to Education cannot be achieved without it.
- The Report uses a small rural school as its prototype, rather than inferring the problems of rural schooling from an urban public school environment.

Issues of Implementation:

- Much of the opposition to the CSS proposal came from the elite sections of society and their criticism may be a defense of entrenched privilege and desire to maintain the status quo.
- The nature of internal politics in Bihar, however, has favoured the CSS proposal. In UP however, the proposal was greeted with hostility from influential sections of politicians and bureaucrats.

- Although in Madhya Pradesh, where government schools generally outperform private schools, the proposal had been fairly widely supported, regional variations within the state could not be ignored.
- [*In the NKC conducted workshop on school education in Bangalore, it was felt that this proposal was too abstract.*]
- However, it was also pointed out that selection on the basis of locality of residence could also become a basis for selection on the basis of social privilege.

QUALITY:

(i) Teachers and Teacher Training

- Currently, the teaching profession is the least sought after. Measures have to be taken to raise its prestige, so that the best graduates want to train to become teachers.
- Such a trend is increased in the face of increasing de- professionalization of teachers, in the form of recruitment of shiksha karmis, etc as substitutes.
- Teachers have to be more systematically organized into a profession. For example, the recruitment of those who don't have teaching degrees, should be discouraged.
- Attempts should be made to remove the responsibility of non teaching duties- such as manning polling booths- from teachers.
- The Teachers Commission of Indira Gandhi's time has to be revitalized. It was recommended that the service be organized into an IES- along the lines of the IAS, and commanding the same respect.
- Teacher training, and administrative duties had to be clearly separated in the profession, and the same people should not occupy both positions.
- Many DIETs are currently under- staffed and demoralized, and incapable of giving good quality training to teachers. In part, this is because teacher training positions are often occupied by those who had not themselves been school teachers.
- School teachers, should be able to teach in institutions of Higher Education, for instance DIETs, as well as Teacher Training Colleges. This would need a structural change in the functioning of DIETs. In addition, the link between university departments and school teaching needs to be strengthened.
- B Ed colleges are being run like an industry since the scrapping of the NCTE. This situation needs to be redressed.
- Currently, there is no provision for the training of secondary school teachers at the state level.
- DIET teachers should not have the added responsibility of data collection: this task should be given to an outside agency.
- Teachers should be locally based. This would encourage and incentivise teacher's accountability to the community.
- Their capacity to be active in schools and school administration has to be increased. This can also improve the quality of a school.
- The statement that all teachers do not come to work is untrue: "if 10% of teachers do not teach, 90% do; and this is true of every profession".

- An important question in this context is the ways and means teachers should be made more accountable. Currently, the notion of accountability is met with hostility and suspicion by teachers.
- While teachers can be made more accountable, their specific (and sometimes extreme) problems have to be recognized and addressed alongside.
- Teacher accountability should not become the means through which all blame is placed squarely on the teacher, for a fault of the system as a whole.
- The figure of the inspector has to change his role from being premised on the failings of teachers, to a cooperative supplement to their requirements
- In addition, incentives should be provided to meet certain criteria. These could take the form of rewards, certificates etc.
- The process of giving greater accountability to teachers could be hindered by the increased politicization of teachers transfers. It was recommended that teachers postings should compulsorily be at least 3-4 years.
- The process of On Job training had to be revitalized. It should be provided at the Cluster level during the school term. Teachers should be provided with primary education diplomas at the end of their courses.
- Organizations such as IGNOU and NCERT had to be more proactive in the field of teacher training. The IGNOU programs for these need to be revised. NCERT should also link research into Information Technology with teacher training programs.
- Finally an effective, and de- politicized mechanism to monitor teachers has to be devised.

(ii) Quality of Learning

- There are many flaws within the existing system. It was too examination- oriented, and clearing these had become the benchmark of what had been learnt in schools.
- This also leads to a situation of the educational experience of someone who had failed their Class XII exams being completely unrecognized.
- There is a great shortage in learning material for both teachers and students, which is, in any case always limited within the textbook. Because of this shortage, basics are often not mastered at the primary school level.
- The quality of textbooks often varies between those prescribed by NCERT and those of the state governments. The quality of textbooks, particularly of the state boards has to be improved.
- In addition, there are no measures to provide a learning environment which is conducive for first generation learners.
- Monitoring structures have to be more specifically addressed at improving the quality of schooling: for instance checking learning outcomes, quality of teaching etc.

QUANTITY:

- The Center and the state should work together on school education. The State: Center ratio of funding was 25: 75. The central government currently wants to decrease its share of funding in states school education.

- The position of the NKC should be that it is illogical to expect states to be able to spend more on education. State governments will not be able to bear additional funding requirements, for instance, for teacher recruitment.
- The capacity of schools to accommodate all children who enroll into it has to be increased. Recruiting more teachers is required for this purpose.
- The increase in teacher's salary that has been provided for in the Sixth Pay Commission has to be implemented, and the funding for this has to be found.
- At the same time, resource requirement of states have to be focused on as well as resource utilization.
- The situation- described by a delegate from UP- as well as in other states, of some thousands of school buildings being currently locked, needs to be urgently redressed.
- Secondary education is currently extremely under- financed. The National Knowledge Commission has argued that the funds allocated by the central government in states for Secondary Education should take the form of dedicated funds, as has been the manner in which the NREGA funds were allocated.
- All government schools do not receive the same funding. Good Kendriya Vidyalas and Navodaya Vidyalayas (which are often attended by children of government servants) are qualitatively different from other state funded schools.
- The task therefore, is to bring all government schools to the level of Kendriya Vidyalas and Navodaya Vidyalayas.
- Government policies relating to KV's and Navodayas need revision. For example, Navodayas have a good deal of excess land, are increasingly expensive to maintain, and their admissions are too selective.

ACCESS:

(i) Urban Schools

- There is an urgent need for an Education Policy that focuses specifically on urban schools, and recognizes the different requirements of urban and rural schools. For instance, all the schemes of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan only address rural schools.
- The catchment areas of different urban schools have to be studied and analysed, to get a better idea of their requirements.
- Urban schools require the delineation of a clear and unambiguous structure of authority within which they can operate. For example, they have to be brought within the purview of Nagar Palikas.
- In addition, Parent Teacher Associations need to become more active, and influential in school administration.

(ii) Enrolment and Retention

Means of retaining students in school have to be intensive, flexible and imaginative.

- Daily school- going has to become as firmly entrenched a habit in the more remote, rural areas, as it is in most cities.
- There is an urgent need to introduce a more organized pre schooling structure. This would also help in making school- going a part of everyday life.

- There has to be a universally recognized and non negotiable set of criteria as to what defines a school. If these are met, the school should be a hospitable place for teachers and students to come daily.
- Primary schools should extend into secondary schools, so that it is easier to retain children over the transition. This would also help address the problem of marginalized children who may find it difficult to enroll into another school.
- Bicycles are increasingly a viable means through which girls from slightly further away localities could come to school.
- The practice of resorting to contract teachers should be discouraged. This, amongst other things, deprives the child of proof of his enrollment into the school.
- One means of increasing retention was to give teachers and principals the responsibility of individually ensuring that the children of their locality attended school everyday. This had worked on a small scale: for instance in the Vaisavi Block in Vaisali, Bihar.
- It should be the responsibility of teachers to ensure that those who had enrolled should take their secondary school exams.
- A mechanism could be created through which the teacher actually goes to localities with high percentage of drop outs, teaches them at home, and over a period of time motivates them to rejoin school.
- Alternative Institutions of Education are viable means by which those who had dropped out of school could be brought back. For instance, in Bihar they provide bridge courses for different levels, in intensive semester wise courses, so that students can eventually return to school.
- However, the purpose of the AIE should not be corrupted, and they should not be reduced to a facility which is the only option of access to education for poorer children.
- The Open School was originally designed as a means for adult literates to carry on with their education. However, it is increasingly being used as a substitute for those who fail in the conventional system. This has to be regulated. In addition, it was pointed out that its results are not treated at par with CBSE results.

(iii) Marginalized Communities, Seasonal Migrants

Educational policies have to address in a more systematic way the concerns of those who slip through the nets of mainstream education policies: children marginalized and economically backward communities, and children of seasonal migrants.

- It was recommended that the NKC should set up a reliable education- related statistics centers. This should include a comprehensive mapping of schools and school children, so as to have accurate information on which children in which localities are enrolled at and attending which schools.
- This is especially relevant for marginalized communities, and children of seasonal migrants, since these sections are most likely to slip through the nets of ordinary tracking mechanisms such as census surveys.
- In addition, a tracking mechanism of all school children should be set up, to track their individual school going status, and progress in school.

- Without reliably gathered and accurate information, all efforts of policy and planning would be unsuccessful.
- In this context, non enrolled, less than 60% attendance, and drop outs could constitute a common group, which would be targeted for remedial action.
- One policy targeted at children of frequently migrating parents, who are especially vulnerable to having to drop out, is to record their permanent addresses in that place itself. When they have to move, schools in the locality to which they had transferred should be intimated.
- Children of seasonal migrants may be enrolled into AIE, run by the SSA, so that they may catch up with their education at any given point, and at any place.
- Their admissions should be guaranteed by Navodaya schools, who could also certify their educational experience.
- Another hindrance to retention is the overly bureaucratic procedures in matters relating to school education, that destroy any opportunities of teacher innovations, which may otherwise have helped in keeping children in school.
- The question of separate schools for those who had dropped out because they felt themselves to be discriminated against was discussed, but it was argued that a better measure would be to sensitize teachers to the problems of students from marginalized communities, and first generation learners.

(iv) Muslim Education.

- The NCF has taken sharp notice of the fact that the cultural world view of text books is alienating to Dalits and Muslims, as well as being strongly biased in favour of the caste system
- Many policies directed at Muslim children isolate them. If the modernization of madrassa education is the only policy for increasing access for Muslim schoolchildren to modernized education, it would only isolate them further.
- Moreover, as pointed out in the Sachar committee report, 96% of Muslim children do not study in Madrassas. Therefore, policies for increasing access to education for Muslim school children have to be redirected.
- DIETs should be provided for better means for training in Urdu language teaching. If Urdu language teaching had not been neglected (by design or otherwise) there may have been greater Muslim enrollment into mainstream, government schools. Secondly, teachers who speak the same language as their students teach better.

(v) Language and Education.

- Tribal Communities are not taken as a minority, because although they have a separate language, they do not have a script. Therefore it was difficult for them to have an education in their mother tongue.
- For example, although Jharkhand had a large tribal and minority population, Bengali is taught as a second language, although it is a minority language in that state.
- There are very few matriculated teachers speaking the same language, who can be hired for tribal communities. The SSA had been following the policy of recruiting teachers from outside.

- Finally, the demand for an English education, even amongst marginalized sections, has to be met with.

MANAGEMENT

(i) Models for Decentralization

- While most people agreed that there was a need for decentralization in school education, there are fewer consensuses on its specific shape: what is to be decentralized, and how.
- One recommendation was that the authority of recruitment should also be decentralized and located within the community and school. In addition, Headmasters must have the autonomy to promote and detain.
- In Jharkhand, the Chairperson of the School Management Committee is often a parent of a child from the school, so that he has a personal stake in its efficiency.
- The Village Education Committee, which generally has a fairly democratic composition, must be empowered to plan, and execute, its own decisions with regard to school education. Currently, however they lack any power to implement their suggestions.
- Parallel and confusing structures of authority had to be done away with: for instance, the PRI runs parallel to the SSA run VEC, and the policy intentions of both become diluted in the process.
- It was recommended by a delegate from UP, that NKC assess the competency of PRIs to manage school education locally.
- The District and Block levels should be invested with greater power over administration and planning. The Murli Report had recommended that their roles be clearly divided, so there is no confusion in the administrative hierarchy.
- There have to be greater levels of co-ordination between different levels of government over school education policy. For instance, often the intention behind a policy framed at the central level is lost in the district level because of excess bureaucratization, and a simple misunderstanding of the idea behind the policy.
- The Kothari Commission had recommended that there be different, though localized authorities responsible for administration, recruitment, and the disbursal of funds. An independent monitoring body, distinct from the PRI would also be responsible for allocation of funds.

(ii) Monitoring of private schools

- Conditions for registration and affiliation of private schools must be set down by a independent, and representative, regulatory body. These criteria should be the same as government schools.
- Policies of enrolment and admission of private schools have to be transparent.

The Workshop concluded at 5.00 pm on the second day.