

School Education Regional Workshop, Delhi, 20th November '07

Summary of Discussions

The National Knowledge Commission held a regional workshop on School Education at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi on 20th November 2007. Participants from across the range of stakeholders were invited from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh (U.T.) including administrators, teachers, and civil society representatives. The discussion was broadly structured around quantity, quality, access, and management issues in school education.

Important insights emerged specifically with regard to revamping the National Literacy Mission. Increased professionalism in teaching, decentralised management and ensuring access in geographically remote areas emerged as other important issues.

I. QUANTITY

Central commitment for Right to Education

- It is mandatory for the Right to Education Bill to be enacted by the Centre, with adequate provisions for planning and implementation. The responsibility for ensuring this right must not be left to the states alone, given the existing disparities in economic resources and rates of school enrolment across different states
- In addition, a clear financial commitment must be given from the centre as uncertainty of finances leads to delay and lapse of annual plans in states.
- Continuation of adequate funds from the centre is crucial in view of upgrading and universalising secondary education.

More residential schools in geographically remote areas

Geographical zones like Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir are plagued by unique problems due to vast tracts of land, difficult topography, and a sparse and nomadic population. In such areas, well equipped residential schools must be set up instead of an insistence on setting up a school in every habitation. These schools must be additionally equipped to look into the needs of very young children living away from their families.

Allocating resources

Resources for school education must take into account the needs of the modern learning society, for instance, internet connectivity and computer literacy are crucial especially in secondary schools. Funds must be demarcated after comparative studies with *developed* countries.

Increase funds for the National Literacy Mission (NLM) and revamp its programs

- The centre must commit adequate funds for the NLM and its programs for the 15-25 age group that has slipped through the SSA net. Literacy and continuing education for a significant proportion of the population must not be left to voluntary organisations alone.

- The post-literacy and continuing education programs of NLM must be oriented to the emotional, physical and psychological needs of adults as distinct from those of children. Issues regarding citizens' rights, human rights, sex-education, health etc must be mapped into NLM program policy and implemented fully.
- Synergies must be created between NLM and the proposed Skill Development Mission. At the same time, local needs and field requirements must be taken into account to avoid mismatch between skills provided by NLM and the knowledge needs of the community. For instance, the undue emphasis on industrial skills in ITI's may be incongruous in a primarily agrarian economy like Himachal Pradesh, where horticultural and animal husbandry skills may be more relevant.

Funds for mainstreaming and integrating alternative education schemes

Instead of being perceived as an alternative and informal mode of schooling, EGS centres must be made an instrument for large scale mainstreaming and integration of marginalized children into regular school education. Funds, resources and expert personnel must be provided for this purpose, and a monitoring mechanism instituted to ensure that this function is fulfilled.

Data collection

- The household survey for school education should cover all children up to 16 years of age in order to determine the number of people not receiving secondary education
- The primary objective of the special cadre of block and cluster resource persons created by SSA must be to provide academic information and support rather than data collection for the administration.
- In addition, data collection and use must be treated as a management rather than a quantity issue in order to facilitate planning at the local level.

II. MANAGEMENT

Indian Education Service

Several stakeholders recommend the formation of a special cadre for education, along the lines of the Indian Administrative Service. The proposed Indian Education Service (IES) would produce well-trained professionals for both academic and administrative purposes at an all-India level. However, other stakeholders felt that the creation of a national level cadre would further centralise and rigidify structures of school education. It was suggested that the state should focus on building local capacities and strengthening local participation via SMCs etc rather than look for pan-Indian solutions

National level body for quality assessment

There is a perceived need for capacity building at the national level for quality assessment in schools, in terms of revamping monitoring standards, laying down essential competencies, establishing achievement indicators etc. However, this national body must not constrain capacities for decentralised assessment. The monitoring formats laid out by NCERT/NIUPA, for instance, are impossible to realise in several local contexts. The

proposed national testing body must, therefore, aim to enhance the capacity of schools to test quality rather than impose formats for quality assessment.

Non-teaching duties

- Teachers are reduced to general level workers at the school level due to obligatory duties for elections, economic surveys, cattle surveys, household surveys for SSA etc. The cumulative time taken up by extra-academic duties often reduces required teaching time by half and causes irreparable losses to school education.
- A concerted effort must be made to reduce the burden of extra-academic activities on teachers. Public functionaries other than teachers must be invested with some of the tasks – for instance, staff from departments that are being wound up. Synergies with NREGA may be forged to divide such duties more equitably.
- Election duty is the most time intensive of these activities. As far as possible, elections should be held during summer vacations and not during peak term time like October November. In addition, key mission personnel like state project directors must be exempted from general duty.

Appoint officers at district and sub-district level and ensure accountability

Education coordination officers must be appointed at district and sub-divisional levels and provided with adequate personnel and resources for overall administration.

Private schools

Monitoring and regulation of private schools is a must. Private schools must have teachers and educationists on the board to indicate competency and seriousness of purpose.

Schools in urban areas

- SSA norms have been formulated with an eye on the rural scenario. A special plan is required to meet the needs of schools in urban areas
- The head of school is a critical link especially in urban schools and therefore must provided managerial skills and more powers and responsibility.

Proposal for establishing a School Education Commission

A School Education Commission may be established along the lines of the University Grants Commission (UGC) to regulate the working of school boards, disburse funds and maintain quality standards.

III. QUALITY

Teachers and teacher training

- The B.Ed. guidelines for a mandatory 60 day practical training for would-be teachers should be strictly enforced. In this context, B.Ed candidates may serve as assistant teachers in SSA
- All B.Ed. programs should be for a duration of 2 years

- The mismatch between the current classroom curriculum (in view of NCF 2005) and the B.Ed syllabus and training must be addressed. The latter must be updated and made more relevant in this light.
- In service training should not take place during term time but on holidays. Instead of providing compensatory leave, it should be linked to financial and career incentives.
- Teacher interactions must take place at the block/zila level on a regular basis to exchange experiences and discuss best practices, and a magazine/journal taken out for this purpose
- Monitoring via ICT and computerised attendance record for teachers has been instituted in Delhi and has significantly checked absenteeism and improved accountability of teachers.

Curriculum development

The curriculum should be oriented towards the holistic development of a child's personality and equip the child to think critically and be self reliant. It should not be geared only towards imparting skills required in the market.

IV. ACCESS

Access for remote areas/nomadic populations

Mobile school and residential schools must be regularised, strengthened and the number of teachers increased.

Gender disparity

- Gender disparity must be addressed in an intensive manner at the institutional level. This includes the relentless tackling of mindsets that consider girls to be incapable of doing science and maths.
- The state must allocate funds for providing drinking water and toilet facilities for all schools. The latter has a particularly significant impact on female enrolment in the higher classes.

Strengthen local participation

Parents' forums must be constituted for training and capacity building, especially amongst communities with low enrolment in school education and a large proportion of first generation learners.