

Foreword

As the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) presents its second annual Report to the Nation, we are excited about the UPA government's commitment to the knowledge initiatives in the XIth Plan adopted by the National Development Council. The Plan places high priority on education as a central instrument for achieving rapid and inclusive growth with specific emphasis on expansion, excellence and equity. This is reflected in the proposed allocation of Rs. 3 trillion, a five fold increase over the Xth Plan. The share of education in the total plan will accordingly increase, from 7.7 percent to 20 percent, representing a credible progress towards the target of 6 percent of GDP. The vision of the Prime Minister and support of our leadership from across the political spectrum is indeed laudable. This is a landmark initiative in the history of government planning. We believe the education agenda outlined in the XIth Plan is a critical step towards realizing the objective of an equitable society. It is also fundamental to our continuing growth, employment generation, infrastructure development and other developmental priorities.

The second Report to the Nation includes recommendations on Portals, Health Information Network, Legal Education, Medical Education, Management Education, Open & Distance Education, Open Educational Resources, Innovation, Intellectual Property Rights, Legal Framework for Public Funded Research and Traditional Health Systems. Together in the last two reports the Commission has covered 20 subjects and outlined about 160 concrete action items. The Commission also published, in November 2007, a compilation of its recommendations on education, to coincide with the final deliberations on the XIth Plan document. Most of our recommendations on Education, Vocational Training, Libraries, Translation, National Knowledge Network, Innovation, IPRs, Traditional Health Systems etc are integrated in the Plan and adequately funded.

Our recommendations, also accessible through the web, have been widely distributed, discussed, debated and are being considered at various levels in the government for implementation. The Commission has received excellent input and advice from academicians, scientists, teachers and various other stakeholders from both public and private domains, Central and State governments and the Planning Commission. The Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Secretariat have provided tremendous support in taking our recommendations forward. We are indeed thankful to all of them for their support and encouragement.

While releasing the first NKC Report to the Nation on January 12th 2007, the PM emphasized that the Commission "must be involved in ensuring the implementation of their innovative ideas". The focus of our work has therefore been on ensuring that while the Central government designs appropriate strategies supported by financial allocations to implement our recommendations, we engage simultaneously with diverse stakeholders to build up a groundswell of favourable opinion and assist preparation of implementing strategies at the grassroots. Continuing dialogue with a wide and diverse set of stakeholders has been a critical part of our process both in formulating recommendations and in their subsequent dissemination. We have tried to provide a platform for sharing and debating ideas, a critical requisite for accepting and steering change.

We are now moving on to the next stage of our work which is formulating Knowledge Initiatives at the State and the District levels to ensure that there is institutional and mental preparedness at the grass root level to absorb the financial outlays of the XI Plan. At present we are engaged in discussions with about 17 States to this end.

Based on our work on implementation with various government ministries and agencies in the last one year, we have learned the following:

- There is indeed a great deal of enthusiasm and emphasis on education as a means for achieving personal growth and development. The growing aspirations of children and parents across the cross-section of society are reflected in an increasing demand for education, which has far exceeded the supply.
- There is still resistance at various levels in the government, to new ideas, experimentation, process re-engineering, external interventions, transparency and accountability, due to rigid organizational structures with territorial mind sets.
- As a result, the real challenge lies in organizational innovation with new regulatory frameworks, new delivery systems, new processes etc. In their absence, increasing resources could well result in more of the same.
- Our country is too large, too complex and too diverse for 'one size fits all' solutions. Decentralization and community participation at the local level would be the key to devising effective programmes for implementation.
- We need to create various collaborative models, dispelling mutual suspicions. Public-private-partnerships, academia- industry partnerships, academia-research laboratories, Public-NGOs, Public-community etc. will need to be the models rather than working in separate compartments.
- This can be done most effectively through launching focused missions on education in a variety of areas, with appropriate leadership, autonomy, flexibility, accountability, tangible deliverables, measurable milestones and well defined specific goals.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship have been and would continue to be the key drivers of India's growth story. Together with skilled manpower, they form the pyramid on which our economic powerhouse will emerge. Our education system at all levels, namely, school, vocational, higher and technical must respond to this challenge.

We look forward to working with diverse stakeholders including the Central and State governments to build synergies for bringing about the generational changes we have proposed. Critical to the realization of this objective, is effective implementation that takes into account some of the organizational and structural changes outlined above. This will require concerted effort with an open mind from all quarters and active participation of the community. NKC hopes to serve as a catalyst in this mission.

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