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POSITION PAPER  
NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP  
ON

# SYSTEMIC REFORMS FOR CURRICULUM CHANGE



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. It is in the context of 86th amendment to the Constitution of India and the explosive parental demand for education that we need to take a hard look at our continued failure to universalise school education at least up to Class X, to improve the quality of our schools and to transform the Indian educational system so that it is able to realise the vision of society enshrined in the Constitution of India.
2. The school must proactively work against structures of exclusion and replace it by structures for inclusion and ensure full participation of children in school. Schools must enable every child to access schooling; and facilitate those who drop out or are pushed out to get back (older children). They must assure children of their continuance in school without any disruption at least until they reach Class X. It must treat children as subjects with rights and States as duty-bearers with obligations to fulfil these rights. It must demonstrate, promote, and help to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.
3. Further there must be a clear message that poor children and especially the first generation learners just do not have the support systems for learning at home. No child must be allowed to be pushed out of school for being a slow learner or for non-comprehension. The entire education system, its staff and line and the school teachers must realise that their governance system must change in an appropriate manner to be sensitive to such children.
4. It is the teacher who experiences first hand the journey of children to become 'children', and wade through all the social, cultural and linguistic barriers. The non-seriousness in transforming even a "single" non-school going child to a student dilutes the principle of universality and disempowers the teacher. Children's right to education and school participation bestows the teacher with the energy to keep the child in school and not get pushed out. Indeed there is such an intertwining of children's right to education and teacher empowerment. Trusting the teacher must be a non-negotiable.
5. The participation of the community in the classroom and the school at the primary school level requires that a part of the curriculum be formulated at the level of the school or at the level of a group of schools in the area of operation. In this process functionaries of CRC, BRC and DIETs need to be involved and indeed they must spend sufficient time in the schools as well with primary school children and over a sustained duration work with the teachers to evolve materials and ideas.
6. Systemic changes must be made to strengthen processes for democratisation of all existing educational institutions at all levels and mechanisms for gauging such processes must be in place. Democratisation of schools, departments and educational institutions occur only through

a conscious strategy of decentralisation. The local governance systems would require enormous support from the staff and line at all layers of the bureaucracy. The systemic issues in this regard are in laying out the contours of a multi-layered political and departmental system which functions at local, provincial and national levels and in understanding the indispensable role each of such layers have in supporting children's right to education. In other words decentralisation must not be construed as burdening the lower levels of hierarchy with responsibilities disproportionate to their decision-making functions. It is in granting flexibility and autonomy and the same time-taking on all the functions to formulate policies, allocate funds, issue administrative guide lines, provide academic support and a legal and normative framework which enable an autonomous decision making process at the lowest level. Ultimately, the system should be able to enhance school participation, accommodate cultural diversity, and initiate micro planning and social accountability.

7. There is a need to strengthen the community through better participation by the Gram Panchayat and empowering the teacher to perform his/her duties effectively. Yet, the call for decentralisation and local community participation is not a fundamentalist position. It is suggested because of the call for micro planning, accommodating the need for a child-wise strategy, resolving of local conflicts and solving problems at a local level. These decisions cannot be taken up at a level that is removed from the ground, and without the participation of the community as well as the local bodies. It is only in this context that respect for plurality and cultural diversities becomes inevitable, informing the curricular changes in consonance with the local contexts.
8. There should be clarity of roles and the entire structure should function based on the principle of subsidiarity. This will curtail duplication of responsibilities, wastage of time and resources and curb confusion. There should be structures for support to the 'local' and not just monitoring and fixing up targets. Most of all, the system calls for professionalisation and an intense participation of officials at all levels of the hierarchy.
9. The entire system should be process-driven apart from being target-driven. It calls for long-term intergenerational planning and not spurts of small projects for small periods of time. The system, in addition, should have a style of functioning that is receptive to the ground and provide for expertise and technical support in a systematic fashion in response to the demands made by teachers, professionals and educationists. In its annual review/report each layer such as the CRC, BRC, DIET, SCERT, NCERT and all the Departments of Education, Boards of Examination must give a record of number of policy modifications and initiatives that they have made in response to the demands made by the schools, teachers and community. Supply-driven teacher training programmes must be avoided at all costs and

time must be taken to build the confidence of the schoolteachers whenever a “top-down” program is felt necessary. Further all decisions have to be institutionalised and not to be ad-hoc based on personal responses or fund driven agendas.

10. Inclusive Curriculum: The curriculum should respect cultural diversities and formulate policies, which will not exclude the beneficiaries of the system.
11. There is a need to commission studies and reports in a continuous manner to examine the functioning of decentralisation of the education system as it is in operation and what have been the systemic and organisational changes and a constant sharing of experiences.

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## 1. LOOKING BACK, PLANNING THE FUTURE

The 86th amendment (2002) to the Constitution of India has granted the right to education to all children of 6-14 years. This is a renewed promise the country made to 200 million children. The Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 45 of the Constitution of India) provides for care and protection of children from birth till they reach school (0-6 years). This affects 150 million children whose health and well-being is a mandate that the State is obligated to honour. In this context, we need to consider our continued failure to universalise school education, at least up to Class X; to improve the quality of our schools and to transform the Indian educational system so that it is able to realise the vision of society enshrined in the Constitution of India.

### 1.1 High Drop-out Rates, Low Level of Learning

Even after fifty-seven years of independence, an estimated 100-120 million children between the ages of 5-15 years have either never entered school, or dropped out of it. They constitute almost 50 per cent of our country's child population. Being out of school, they are subject to exploitation and the drudgery of work with little hope of realising their full potential. Engaged in unpaid domestic work and in the unorganised sector, these children are invisible both as workers and as children; their work goes unrecognised. Being out of school, girls succumb to the pressure for early child marriage that causes untold harm to their overall growth and development. Children who are physically and mentally challenged are grossly neglected, and they face enormous difficulties in getting any kind of schooling.

It is now a well established fact that government schools primarily cater to the poor. The majority of children who attend these schools do so against all odds. Although the system is one of the largest educational systems in the world, it is woefully wasteful and inefficient. It is indeed a matter of national concern that 54.6 per cent children (56.9 girls) drop out before they complete class 8 and 66 per cent (68.6 per cent girls) drop out before they reach Class X (GOI, MHRD Website, provisional data for academic year 2001-02).<sup>1</sup> These percentages are appallingly low in tribal areas, backward districts and among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Further, even after five years of continuous presence in schools, only 60 per cent of the children are able to read, write and do basic calculations. It is almost as if the system is designed to cater to a small percentage of children entering class one to continue up to class ten. Given the situation on the ground, a child entering class one in a rural government school or an urban municipal school is able to reach class ten by accident, not by design. The range of public and private provisioning of schools in the country accounts for an unfair and iniquitous education system.

### 1.2 Teacher Shortages

While the percentage increase in enrolment from 1993 to 2003 has been 26.15 at primary, 37.49 at upper primary, 43.21 at high school level and 28.73 at secondary school level, the percentage increase in the number of teachers has not kept pace with the increase in enrolment or the percentage increase in the number of schools. The implications of this trend are worrisome as the major brunt of teacher shortages is being faced in rural, remote and tribal areas. While the

<sup>1</sup> Drop out rates: Primary (Classes 1 to 5) Boys: 38.4%, Girls: 39.9% and total: 39%. Dropout rate at Upper Primary (Classes 1 to 8): Boys: 52.9%, Girls 56.9% and Total 54.6%. Drop out rate from Classes 1 to 10: Boys 64.2%, Girls 68.6% and Total 66% (Source: DOEEL, MHRD, GOI Website, provisional data for academic year 2001-02)

rate of increase in the number of schools and teachers has been quite significant at the upper primary level, the system is structured on the premise that almost 1/3 of children entering primary school will drop out before they reach upper primary, and another 1/3 before they reach high school, and so on<sup>2</sup>

## 2. TYPES OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

There is a wide range of government schools run by the Government of India, State Governments, local self-government institutions (Panchayats) in rural areas and municipal bodies in urban areas :

- **Formal government schools** – primary, upper-primary, high and secondary schools run by the state governments;
- **Transitional schools** – Education Guarantee Scheme Schools (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh), Rajiv Gandhi Pathashala (Rajasthan), Alternative Schools (several states with localised models and names), Shishu Shiksha Kendra (West Bengal) managed by local bodies or by the state governments;
- **Bridge Courses** (residential and non residential) – short term schools held for older out-of-school children to reach the age specific grade/class;
- **Alternative Schools** – six hour and four hour schools, mobile schools
- **Ashram Shalas** – residential formal schools for tribal children financed by the Ministry for Tribal Welfare;
- **Residential Schools** for disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes – financed by the concerned ministry for the welfare of disadvantaged communities;
- **Kendriya Vidyalaya** – for children of central government employees (including the armed forces) who are transferable across the country;
- **Navodaya Vidyalaya** – residential schools of excellence entirely funded and managed by the Government of India.

<sup>2</sup> Percentage increase in schools, enrolment and teachers, India

### INDIA

<b>Percentage increase in number of schools</b>	<b>1986-93</b>	<b>1993-2003</b>
Primary	7.89	14.18
Upper Primary	17.11	50.65
Secondary	24.74	38.43
Higher Secondary	53.00	85.74
<b>Percentage increase in enrolment</b>	<b>1986-93</b>	<b>1993-2003</b>
Classes 1-5	12.94	26.15
Classes 6-8	24.93	37.49
Classes 9-10	32.11	43.21
Classes 11-12	55.72	28.73
<b>Percentage increase in number of teachers</b>	<b>1986-93</b>	<b>1993-2003</b>
Primary	8.75	17.83
Upper Primary	12.73	40.01
Secondary	14.62	20.09
Higher Secondary	44.30	68.68

Source: 6th All India Educational Survey, 1998 and 7th All India Educational Survey, 2004, NCERT

## 2.1 Private Schools

In addition, there are schools under private management which are government recognized, some of which receive government grant and some of which do not (unaided schools). Though in terms of the overall system these schools constitute only a small percentage, their number is rapidly increasing and their spread constitutes a major challenge to the government school system. There are also private schools catering to children with special needs-especially the blind, hearing-impaired, or slow-learners. It is worrisome that there is a large and growing number of unrecognised private schools and tuition centres that cater to children who can pay – thus loading the dice against children in poverty situations<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.2 Facilities in Schools

While there is variety in the types of schools, there is even greater variety in the basic facilities and amenities available in the schools of the government system. In small villages there are schools that have no buildings of their own and run in public, community or rented premises. On the other extreme, in larger villages there are schools that have pucca structures of stone and brick, with playgrounds and even some trees. The Municipal Corporation schools in the metropolitan areas are often housed in buildings that were once fine structures, but have now deteriorated because of neglect.

Since the government schools are perceived as weak and unable to deliver quality education they are being supplanted by private schools; many of them advertise their unique selling point : ‘English medium’.

## 2.3 Systemic Concerns

Schools today therefore reflect community and economic differentiation, and also reinforce further segregation. A key systemic issue is to position the school as an institution that brings about social transformation and becomes a place for the realisation and protection of children’s rights where equity and justice as enshrined in the Constitution are realised. In the Indian context schools are to be regarded as institutions that protect children against drudgery of labour and work, early child marriage and gender discrimination against all forms of social and cultural discrimination giving the new generation their share in the resources and cultural capital and all the accoutrements that come with being a student. Schools are public places available for public scrutiny. They must be places where children want to come and interact and learn with dignity and self-respect. More importantly, the school needs to transform itself into a place where children are able to realise their entitlement and where their right to education is proactively protected and pursued.

## 3. EXCLUSION OF POOR CHILDREN FROM EDUCATION

In view of the fact that government schools primarily cater to children from diverse poverty situations, the predicament of such children is central to the discourse on systemic reform. It is important to acknowledge that the school system is intimidating to the poor and unless the schools consciously decide to address the barriers, poor children would be excluded from the school system. The efforts needed are in the following direction:-

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<sup>3</sup> *Pratichi (India) Trust: The Pratichi Education Report, New Delhi 2002, PROBE Report, Public Report on Basic Education in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1999 and Ramachandran, Vimala (ed): Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education – Hierarchy of Access, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2004*

### 3.1 Trying to Understand Attendance Problems

The entire school system is designed on the assumption that families already have the means to send a child to school and are competent to deal with the rules that govern the system. It has no capacity to accommodate the uncertainties and instability of the poor family, with no literacy, which might account for irregularity of attendance, and in case of migrant labour, long spells of absence. At times the child's absence from school may also be due to his or her illness, or illness in the family. It could even be due to parents' inability to meet the system's expectations and procure certificates (such as medical, birth, caste, transfer) that govern school, or purchase educational material (notebooks, school bags). It must be recognised that when the school system does not appreciate and understand the difficulties faced by the poor it cannot motivate, counsel and win over the poor. Parents from extremely poor and socially marginalised communities find the system alien, unfamiliar and intimidating. All these lead to the child's exclusion.

### 3.2 Understanding the Child's Home Environment

The school system is not sensitive to children who come from different cultural milieus. The incapacity of the school system to appreciate the cultural specificities of communities results in not tolerating children's absence in schools. Instead of trying to talk to the parents and the families as responsible adults, about the importance and need to abide by the norms that govern schools, the attitude and practices of teachers affect children adversely in many ways. The most

worrying dimension is the effect of attitudes and practices on the innate self-confidence and self esteem of children, causing children to become diffident and fearful. In situations where the children's home language differs from the language of the school, comprehension is indeed a difficult issue. The inability of the school system to gear itself and reach out to such children within a culturally and socially sensitive environment needs serious attention.

### 3.3 First Generation Learners : Discouraged, Humiliated

Since many poor students are first generation learners their parents are unable to help them with their schoolwork. Children find it difficult to cope and are humiliated for being slow learners, dull students. They are classified as non-achievers. Repeatedly discouraged, they often end up failing in the examination. They are also punished for their inability to purchase textbooks, stationery, and uniforms and pay official and unofficial "school charges". In addition, they are subject to corporal punishment. Eventually as is only to be expected, they get pushed out of the school system<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.4 Physically and Mentally Challenged Children

Physically and mentally challenged children are effectively excluded from the schooling process due to lack of support services and inaccessibility both in terms of physical access and pedagogical strategies. Barriers to their learning and participation in the schooling process have seldom been addressed, leaving such children uncared for, and quite beyond the school.

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<sup>4</sup> Jha and Jhingran, *Elementary Education for the Poorest and other Deprived Groups*, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi 2002 and Ramachandran, Vimala and ERU team: *Snakes and Ladders: Factors Influencing Successful Primary School Completion for Children in Poverty Contexts*; South Asian Human Development Sector Report No. 6, World Bank, New Delhi 2004.

## 4. HEALTH, MALNUTRITION

Recent evidence has shown that most poor children are malnourished and have no access to safe water, sanitation and health care, leading to frequent bouts of illness<sup>5</sup> like infections, stubborn coughs and cold and other chronic illnesses. An overwhelming proportion of children in government schools are from poor situations; poor nutrition and frequent bouts of illnesses (due to poor sanitary conditions and lack of access to healthcare) affect the ability of children to attend school regularly. While the mid-day meal is indeed a welcome addition to the school routine, a lot more needs to be done if we are to address the impact of poor nutrition and health on education.

### 4.1 Debilitating Theoretical Postures

More than the issue of poverty, the “poverty argument” – that poor children cannot attend schools as they are obliged to earn an income – discourages even an attempt to keep the poor child in school. This argument is so debilitating that poor children fight an every day battle against this ethos to survive in the school system.

### 4.2 Rigidity in Rules and Procedures

Out of school children often confront enormous difficulties in joining school. The system is rigid and does not accept children who wish to join school after the last date of admission is over. Moreover, it is not prepared to accommodate older children who have dropped out of school and wish to rejoin, or those who have learnt for some years outside the formal system. It is insensitive to those children who enter the formal stream through bridge courses, accelerated

learning and special classes and excludes them by not giving time and academic support needed by children to adjust to the school.

### 4.3 Failure in Examinations

Poor children do not have the support system (such as tuitions, coaching classes, learning environment at home and in schools) to cope with the curriculum that is ill designed and loaded with irrelevant information, especially at the elementary and secondary school levels. This results in the failure of roughly 50 per cent of them who take the Board examination. This results in a loss of self-worth, and eventual exclusion from the school system.

## 5. COST ESTIMATES

*Per child cost estimates for the poor children are kept somewhere between Rs. 1200 to Rs. 1500 annually. The system expects that children who find it difficult to go to school and whose parents have also not been to school would be able to learn with this kind of expenditure on them annually. This, when compared with the expenditure on children from middle class and upper class families is much less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of that amount. In order to address the issue of not all children being in school and learning, the cost estimates for poor children would have to be substantially revised upwards.*

### Still to do ...

It is essential that efforts are made to ensure all the above barriers are overcome for schools to be schools, teachers to be teachers and children to be children. If we are to effect systemic reforms in curriculum framework, we must deal with issues of both sustaining

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<sup>5</sup> Government of India, Planning Commission, *Mid-term Review of the Ninth Five Year Plan*, New Delhi 2001; Government of India, Planning Commission, *Report of the Working Group on Child development for the 10th Five Year Plan*, 2001; World Bank, *Reaching the Child: An integrated approach to child development*, Oxford University press, Delhi 2004,

children in schools until they reach Class X and preparing the school system to accept and support every child who is out of school into school.

## 6. ALLOWING TEACHERS TO DECIDE

Teachers derive their status as professionals from the multiplicity of challenges they face in deciding the specific nature of education that has to be imparted to each child, protecting his or her right to education. They need to have the power to decide what they are to teach, and how they are to assess the children. It is the teacher who experiences first hand the difficulties children encounter while negotiating social, cultural and linguistic barriers. Every single child out of school must be transformed into a student. Teachers must accept this as a professional challenge.

The universality of education cannot be achieved unless we have teachers whose commitment is beyond question; in whom we can trust entirely.

### 6.1 Tackling the Erosion of the Teaching Profession

The teacher is the fulcrum around which the education system revolves. In the current context, the issue of

providing adequate numbers of teachers in a rapidly expanding school system and in a situation of fiscal deficits (especially in the states) have led to the introduction of different kinds of teachers. The social status of the school teacher is also rapidly eroding and the teacher is blamed for almost all the ills of a dysfunctional government school system. While acknowledging that teacher accountability is indeed an important issue, the de-professionalisation of teaching as a vocation is inextricably linked to the following:<sup>6</sup>

### 6.2 Inadequate Teachers

The ratio of teachers to students is much below the required norm in many areas, and there is often an oversupply of teachers in many urban schools. Recent estimates point out that 15 per cent (95,588) of all primary schools are single classroom schools, with rural schools accounting for 95 per cent of single classroom schools; 17.51 per cent (1,11,635) of schools have only one teacher. 96 per cent of single-teacher schools are located in rural areas (DISE, NIEPA, 2005). This implies that teachers do not have the time and the energy to do all that is necessary to keep all the children in school and learning. In addition, State Governments

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<sup>6</sup> Almost all key reports since 1950s emphasise the importance of appointing adequate numbers of teachers, ensuring minimum standards with respect to entry level qualifications, providing ongoing academic support through in-service teacher training and in-site academic support and most importantly paying attention to morale and motivation of teachers. This has been a running theme in policy documents such as the National Education Commission of 1964, National Policy on Education 1968, 1986 and 1992. The NPE 1986 devotes a section on "The Teacher":

"The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The government and the community should endeavour to create conditions that will help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines. Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, and to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs, capabilities and concerns of the community. The methods of recruiting teachers will be reorganised to ensure merit, objectivity and conformity with spatial and functional requirements. The pay and service conditions of teachers have to be commensurate with their social and professional responsibilities and with the need to attract talent to the profession. Efforts will be made to reach the desirable objective of uniform emoluments, service conditions and grievance-removal mechanisms for teachers throughout the country. Guidelines will be formulated to ensure objectivity in the posting and transfers of teachers. Systems for teachers' evaluation – open, participative and data based – will be created and reasonable opportunities of promotion to higher grades provided. Norms of accountability will be laid down with incentives for good performance and disincentives for non-performance. Teachers will continue to play a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of educational programmes." (National Policy on Education 1986 (with modification undertaken in 1992), MHRD, GOI, 1992, part IX, pages 43-44)

### **Recommendations Regarding Teacher Education**

- *Students at the senior secondary level are unique in several ways and hence their education would require teachers who are trained accordingly.*
- *There is no pre-service teacher-training programme for +2 teachers in the country. Such a programme, which once existed in the form of the M.Sc. Education programmes in the Regional Institutes of Education. Such programmes may have to be offered on a larger scale if suitably trained teachers are to manage the curriculum at this stage.*
- *Teacher training programmes at the pre-service level needs to have a paper on guidance and counselling to provide them the required orientation and training in the discipline.*

### **Manpower Planning:**

- *There seems to be a vast gap between the demand and supply of trained manpower at the secondary stage.*
- *This is because of an absence of an agency or a mechanism to determine how much of excess manpower is acceptable for a state.*
- *Surplus trained manpower has not only caused unemployment, it has also lead to an exploitation of teachers by the management.*
- *There seems to be no difference between the private and the government management in this regard.*

have relaxed norms for both the number of teachers per group and lowered the eligibility qualifications, adding to their de-professionalisation<sup>7</sup>.

## **7. NON-TEACHING FUNCTIONS**

School teachers are asked to do a range of non-teaching work such as collection of data for rural development schemes, national census, election work and other campaigns assigned to them by the district officials

taking them away from the classroom. Indirectly, this legitimises the non-performance of the school teacher, undermining him/her as a professional.

## **8. POLITICISATION OF EDUCATION**

Systemic issues involving corruption (payment for transfers/prevention of transfers, deputation to teacher education institutions and other favoured appointments) for promotions and for special

<sup>7</sup> *The number of teachers has steadily increased from 16,16,000 in 1990 to 18,96,000 in 2001 at the primary level and from 10,73,000 in 1990 to 13,26,000 in 2001 at the upper-primary level. Out of this 2,59,099 are Para teachers (or contract teachers) with primary schools accounting for 67.94 per cent of Para teachers in the country as a whole. (Source: Dr. Arun Mehta, presentation on DISE Data 2003-04, NIEPA 2005)*



assignments, and court cases have seriously eroded the respect for the teacher in the community. Teacher cadre management is highly politicised, affecting the recruitment policy of new teachers in several states. A few states have even declared regular teachers a 'dying cadre' – arguing that it makes fiscal and administrative sense to opt for contract teachers.

## 9. INDIFFERENT TEACHERS' TRAINING

Teachers' trainings on improvement of quality of education in recent years have very often become a goal in themselves than a means to provide the child

*Some suggestions:*

*The school at the primary school level should work towards demystifying the understanding of curriculum and syllabus. There must be a public awareness on what the parents must legitimately demand from the system regarding what children can learn and must learn in a language and rhetoric that makes sense to them. Expectations of achievements from poor children must be the same for all children. In other words it must be recognized that low levels of expectations or emphasis on minimum levels of learning would lead to further marginalisation of poor children.*

*The gram panchayats must be equipped to bring to the notice of concerned authorities the kind of support school teachers would need to teach in the school.*

*Any attempt to improve quality of education as a patronizing, top-down, supply driven programme becomes unworkable and counterproductive.*

her/his right to education and strengthening the school system. Many potentially powerful ideas like 'child centred learning', 'activity based learning', natural learning situations and so on have become hackneyed jargon words devoid of any meaning. These words have neither evolved as an organic process in response to teachers' own demand for professionalisation of their services nor have they emerged from a systematic analysis in which the implementers and policy makers have faith. The multiplicity of situations and contexts that the teachers engage with requires them to be equipped with capabilities to construct and apply rules rather than follow directions. They require support and flexibility to deal with their particular situation. The training programs, support mechanisms and the trainers are not equipped to deal with these requirements.

## 10. THE SCHOOL AS PART OF A SYSTEM

Education policy in India is couched in the rhetoric of decentralisation and habitation level planning. Policy documents recognise the need for context specific planning, for assigning an important role for people's participation through local institutions such as the SEC/VEC/SMC as well as the elected bodies such as the gram panchayats.

In actual practice, however, schools are the tail end of the system, receiving instructions and orders from above. They are expected to follow guidelines provided by the Central Government through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. To the last detail, the amounts to be spent and the budget lines are fixed, leaving little autonomy to the wisdom of the school – and its teachers and the needs of the children.

There needs to be a considerable amount of flexibility in the process of addressing the schooling and learning demands of first generation learners in schools. Corrective administrative changes by the education department to make the child comfortable

are integral to the definition of curriculum framework and the provision of quality of education. Administrative guidelines need to be issued to encourage flexibility in transacting textbooks, producing material, conducting examinations and continuous assessment of children. The peer group of teachers must be given autonomy to design the schedule of examination and assessment of children as all transitional interventions, and effective tackling of the backlog can be operationalised only at a micro-level. In an environment of so much regional and social diversity, we cannot hope to improve the quality of education through a patronising, top-down, supply driven programme.

As a first and non-negotiable step, there needs to be clarity of roles. Decisions on the nature of classroom teaching need to be taken by schoolteachers; all those in the higher levels of education bureaucracy must work towards supporting the teachers. The system must have transparency and should deal with participants in it in an equitable manner. Mechanism need to be in place to filter out interest based, parochial and partisan application of rules and inequitous interpretations of aims of education from the Constitution. It must provide teachers the confidence to explore new directions in fulfilling the constitutional rights of children. The political and bureaucratic structures, systems and individuals need to be endowed with a long term vision, continuity of purpose and policy. Processes of transformation and reform need to be planned over long periods and not reduced to repeated expectations of unachievable and unlikely short term outputs. This would involve a reversal of the present system.

## 11. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

The bureaucratic system, as it functions presently, tries to co-ordinate till the last point in the chain school and

the teacher. It does not reach beyond the school to the wider community. In order to ensure greater participation of the community and bridge the gap between the community and the school, local institutions such as the SEC/ BEC/ SMC/ PTA/ School Cluster Committees at the village, block and District level have been set up. In practice, however, these new organisational arrangements have been used by the government structure to execute and implement their schemes. These committees have been involved in the construction of school buildings or in the appointment of para-teachers. However, they do not participate in decisions regarding attendance and regularity of teachers and children, or the problems encountered by children in school. They are not concerned with the problems faced by teachers, the day to day issues that may arise; they do not liaise with authorities or elected bodies to bring to their notice the difficulties children or teachers face such as lack of text books, physical infrastructure, public transport and so on.

It is necessary to insist on the genuine participation of such institutions with a sense of ownership. In this context decentralisation means bringing schools close to the community rather than building.

## 12. DECENTRALISED EDUCATION SYSTEM

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment provides for transfer of the responsibility for primary and secondary school education to the elected bodies. Consequently, there is no uniformity in the manner in which local bodies have been involved in school education across the states. While in several states a vast gamut of functions is assigned to PRIs at every level, in practice the PRIs, especially Taluk and Gram Panchayats, discharge few education-related tasks. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) set up a

**Real Decentralisation**

- Power to spend money
- Power to collect money
- Discretion in spending money
- Power to hire, fire and control staff
- Direct accountability

**Meaningless Decentralisation**

- Bound to scheme related expenditure – no discretion in spending money
- Staff on deputation – no control over staff
- Limited power to raise resources
- No direct responsibility – somebody else is responsible

There have been overlaps and ambiguities among functionaries.

**Overlaps and Ambiguities in Functions:**

11 <sup>th</sup> Schedule	Gram Panchayat	Taluk Panchayat	Zilla Panchayat
Education, including primary and secondary schools	Promotion of public awareness and participation in primary and secondary education Ensuring full enrolment and attendance in primary schools	Promotion of primary & secondary education Construction, repair and maintenance of primary school buildings Promotion of social education through youth clubs and Mahila Mandals	Promotion of educational activities in the district, including establishment and maintenance of primary and secondary schools Establishment and maintenance of ashram schools and orphanages Survey and evaluation of educational activities
Technical training and vocational education		Promotion of rural artisan and vocational training	Establishment and maintenance of rural artisan and vocational training centres Encouraging and assisting rural vocational training centres
Adult and non-formal education	Promotion of adult literacy	Implementation of adult literacy	Planning and implementation of programme of adult literacy and non formal education

Committee on Decentralised Management in 1993 to formulate guidelines on decentralisation in education in the context of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.<sup>8</sup>

It also proposed creation of standing committees on education at different levels, assigning comprehensive powers, functions and responsibilities to these bodies.

In practice, however, there has not been any such devolution of funds except in Kerala. The moot point is that such decentralisation is also fraught with problems, as discussed in the table given in the table to the left.

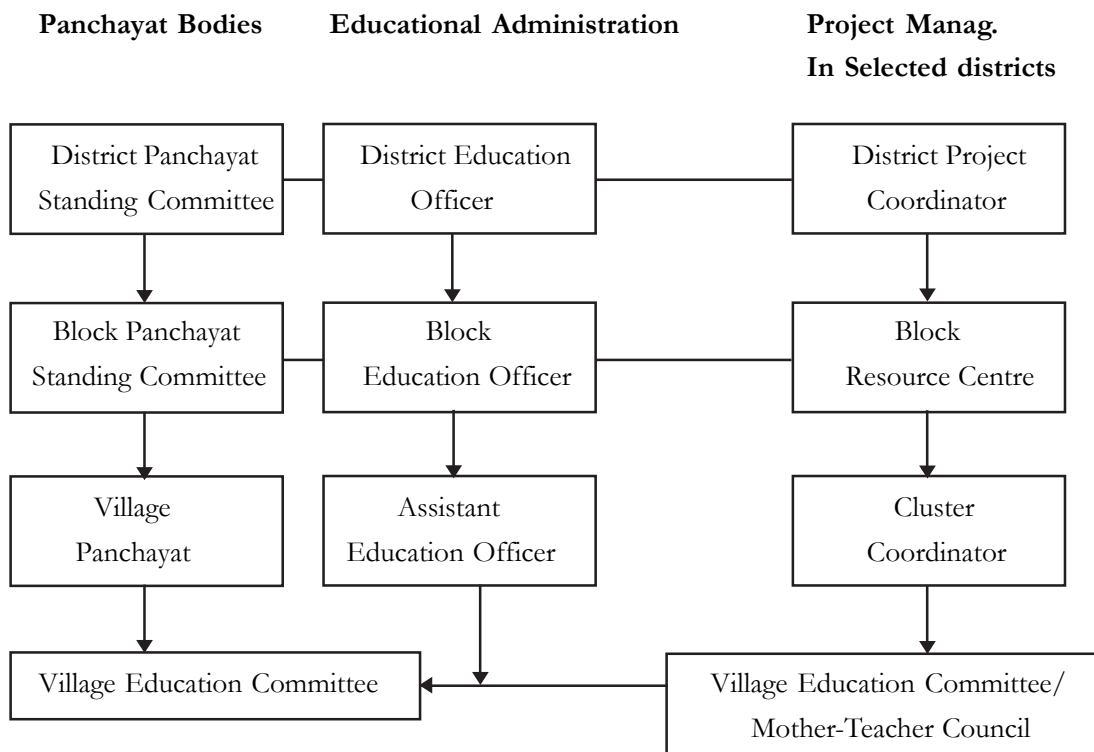
In effect PRIs have been reduced to implementing agencies rather than “deciders”, with the staff working under them as “doers”. Further, the tendency to execute

programmes through parallel committees at the village level without involvement of the Gram Panchayats has resulted in undermining the stature of democratically elected local bodies. There has thus not been clarity in the demarcation of roles between PRIs and the Education bureaucracy.

### 12.1 Issues at the Cluster, Block and District Levels

A host of institutional structures between the district level and the schools have been set up in the last one decade to strengthen the schools as well as the curriculum framework, namely: Cluster Resource Centres, Block Resource Centres and District Institutes of Education and Training. The purpose of these

**Chart 1: School Education: The Range of Institutional Actors at District and Sub-District Levels**



<sup>8</sup> Manabi Majumdar, “Decentralisation Reforms and Public Schools A Human Perspective”, *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, Volume XVII No. 4, October 2003, pp 481-506.

ostensibly to empower through decentralisation the teacher and teacher groups in order for them to fulfill the role of the school towards all children.

### 12.2 Cluster Resource Centre

The CRC was to enable a peer-group of teachers to meet on a regular basis and discuss academic issues. These teacher resource centres are in various stages of actualisation across the country under the SSA. There is some variability in the structures, staffing and functions of teacher resource centres, and in some states, they are represented by the cluster organisers or resource persons without a full fledged centre. In practice however it has been noticed that these centres have become appendages of the administrative structures, offering little or no academic support to the schools. The personnel of the cluster resource centre have only worked to collect reports, data from the school teachers and supply the information to the district level, except for some exceptional interventions in select areas.

***There is a need to develop these Centers with facilities and infrastructure (library, computers, small laboratory, duplication facility, place to hold meetings etc.) to fulfill the resource needs of teachers and become capable of functioning as forums that pool the experiences of teachers and help them make curricular choices.***

### 12.3 Block Resource Centres

There are usually between 100 to 300 Primary schools and between 50 to 100 middle schools in the Block. The Block Resource Centre was envisaged as an important unit for teacher's capacity building at the elementary school level. But they too have become data collection and administrative units rather than academic units.

There should be an active participation of peers as professionals in sharing their experiences. The staff CRC and the BRC seldom offered academic support in response to the direct experiences of the school teachers, through actual visits to the school, just so that they observe and play a supportive role and not that of a school inspectorate monitoring the teachers from a position of authority and power. They must be equipped to provide conceptual clarity and guidance based on teachers' own sharing of their activities and interventions in order to help the child learn.

***The organisation of the BRC and placement of persons in them also needs to be reviewed. With over 200 schools in the block the support needs to be organised in a framework that actually makes for a live contact with the school and for the school teachers. As is for the CRC it also needs to have infrastructure and resources to provide support and inputs and serve as a forum for sharing.***

All such experiences must crystallise into policy initiatives and reforms at the district level through DIETS as well as the office of the District Education Officer and DPEP. These would be in the area of academic material and supplies, technical as well as governance and administrative support.

## 13. DISTRICT INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING (DIET)

Subsequent to the NPE-1986 and the adoption of the process of decentralisation, the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) was established in each district exclusively to cater to the needs of elementary education of the particular district, and the CTEs and IASEs for secondary and senior secondary levels of education. The DIET Guidelines (1989) define the mission of DIETs as: "to provide academic and resource support at the grassroots level for the success

of the various strategies and programs being undertaken in the areas of elementary (and adult) education.” The focus was to respond to local contingencies and introduce curricular units pertaining to topics like local geography, folklore, legend, customs, forests, flora and fauna, fairs and festivals, demography, geology, minerals, agriculture, industry, service occupations, folk art, handicrafts, communities and tribes, institutions to suit local circumstances, and develop new items that can be used in elementary education and elementary teacher education programmes. In the case of districts that have a substantial tribal population DIETs were to design special primers for classes I and II in tribal languages

It was also to evolve systems for assessment and evaluation, design techniques and guidelines for continuous and summative learner evaluation. Further, it was required to support schools to evolve tests, question/item banks, rating scales, observation schedules, guidelines for diagnostic testing/remedial programmes talent identification procedures etc. It was to undertake testing on sample basis to assess achievement levels among learners, especially with reference to minimum levels prescribed for the primary and upper stage and for adult learners under NLM. DIETs were also meant to conduct workshops for the adoption/development work mentioned above, as also in-service programmes relating to CMDE.

In practice however it could not offer academic support or generate local material as envisaged. Lacking in resources, it failed to establish linkages with the CRCs, BRCs and take up innovations in material development at the District level. Lacking administrative support, the DIETs were not encouraged to take independent and autonomous initiatives in formulating work plans for the district as a whole. The recruitment of the DIET staff has been mostly on deputation drawing personnel

with little experience (or interest) in educational planning or support to schools. This lack of professionalism is evident in the performance of the DIETs.

#### **14. STATE COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING (SCERT)**

SCERTs are basically state government institutions, but through its centrally sponsored scheme of Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education, the Government of India has provided assistance for strengthening SCERTs, on condition that the state government gives a matching grant.

The SCERTs were set up to provide academic leadership within the state and act as the hub of academic research innovation, inspiration and motivation. These institutions were to be a symbol of quality and provide philosophical and sociological insights into education for transformation of society.

Although the responsibilities of SCERTs vary across states, in most states they are responsible mainly for designing the curriculum, production of textbooks, supervision of DIETs and teacher training.

In its functioning however it has been found that the SCERTs are driven not by academic but bureaucratic leadership. They say in planning or decision-making. Lacking in autonomy as well as funds for infrastructure development, even their libraries are poorly stocked and managed. Linkages with the units at the district or school level are poor; they lack the energy to keep abreast of ideological and theoretical debates in universities and international fora. They are, largely, ignorant even of the innovative work of NGOs in the country.

It is imperative that the SCERT emerge as the nodal point for the development of curricula; that it maintain a close link with teachers and schools. Curriculum reform is not a one-time exercise but a process of

continuous learning and reflection, to be followed by well-planned action. Only an institute that has a high degree of capacity within itself can undertake such a process. Strengthening SCERTs and making them more professional is therefore a necessary and urgent area of institutional reform.

In accordance with the recommendations of the working group of the Tenth Plan, the Group also feels that there is a need for administrative, financial and academic autonomy. For example, the SCERTs must be actively involved in formulating the annual plan. No ad hoc directives must be issued, no matter how senior the bureaucrat issuing the directive, or how powerful the politician.

The SCERT must have the flexibility and the autonomy to invite experts from the university system and provide a forum for reflective practitioners from the school system. It must also have the institutional framework to identify and involve voluntary organisations and resource persons outside the government system who have contributed to fulfilling the objectives of children's right to education and have intervened with some amount of success in government schools, and aided teacher empowerment. It must pass the necessary directives, circulars, orders and guidelines governing inclusion of all children in schools. It must make policy recommendations regarding variations in assessment systems and in the system of examinations that are being introduced, to keep pace with the specific needs of the children concerned.

It must adequately address the diverse background and experiences children bring to the classroom – the different language, caste and class or communal affiliations of the homes they come from. Academic

and administrative mechanisms that recognise and support such diversity must be put in place. The SCERT must also have a well-oiled institutionalised response to the demands made on them from the schools, the CRC, BRC and the DIETS. The functioning of the SCERT cannot be left to the availability of highly motivated and creative individuals; systems need to be established to promote and nurture creativity within the institution and among teachers. Equally, funding needs to be long term and reliable, thereby giving the institution a sense of stability and continuity.

It should encourage all processes leading to the creation of textbooks and other educational material by the CRC/BRC and DIET. In doing so, it must undertake research and support ground level researches in textbook development to set a standard for world class textbooks. It should also provide support to institutionalised procedures for teacher participation in the entire process of curriculum and textbook development. It should ensure that all the facilities are in place at the ground level for teacher training and other academic activities.

There is an urgent need to revise recruitment procedures to ensure that vacancies can be filled with the right candidates. We need highly motivated, energetic professionals; not disinterested people with neither the aptitude nor the inclination to work for the country's children. There is need to reform the SCERTs from within. Unless this is done, it would become difficult for intelligent and sensitive professionals to participate at various levels to enhance the capacities of teachers and the quality of schools. The active primary teacher who has contributed to the strengthening of schools must also find a place as a resource person in the DIETS or SCERT.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Working Group of the Tenth Plan has made some of these recommendations.*

## 15. NATIONAL LEVEL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES

The NCERT, NIEPA, NCTE are institutions at the national level with the mandate to help improve the quality of education in schools of the country. These institutions should be seen as facilitators and partners with the state level institutions rather than implementers themselves. Given the nature of the task and the current capacities at the state level, these institutions need to function as capacity enabling agents and as support institutions.

These institutions should be at the forefront of educational thought, engaging in quality research, which could inform ground-level practice. They need to analyse ideas being generated continuously, and develop mechanisms facilitating appropriate, high quality education. As pace setting institutions, they need to have the capacity and temperament to critique themselves.

As they are responsible for the functioning of the institutions at the taluk and at the village level, the national institutions must be aware of the conditions prevailing at these places: in terms of real contact and interaction with different sites of education, rather than in terms of statistics or written reports. These institutions therefore need to have programmes that involve them directly; that seek for multiple methods and ideas that can be broad based and extend to a large number of schools and teacher training institutions. The process of dissemination should be facilitative - enabling with a range of inputs, rather than only prescriptive.

In order that decentralisation and academic capacity building at the state level emerges as a possibility and further local level planning and action become possible, the system needs to build capacities at all levels. If all the tasks are done by the central institutions and textbooks, research reports, syllabus and curriculum

avoid laying down guidelines for everyone. What they need to develop is better concepts and processes through which people at the State level become capable of looking for their own answers. The present system rather than encouraging, discourages people to think of their own answers because the expectation is, that they would follow the answers provided from the national institutions. For research, State institutions are used basically as data conduits or arrangement managers for studies designed for the purposes known only to the national level institutions.

The NCERT needs to reorient its own faculty and start looking at knowledge not as a finished product to be handed down from the higher levels to the lower levels of hierarchy. Apart from having strong linkages with schools and teacher training institutions, the national institutions need to develop forums looking at issues of education in order to widen the scope of discussions. These forums may include people from the universities, NGOs working in education as well as other interested individuals including schoolteachers. These forums would not only deliberate issues among themselves but also to be available to help states in their efforts to improve their textbooks and other processes.

These national level institutions need to review their mechanisms of recruitment and promotion, and the choice of roles, both as individuals in the organisation as well as for the organisation itself. Lateral channels for entry should be opened, and also opportunities for people who have worked at the field level to spend a specified period of time in national institutions. This will inject much-needed energy into national institutions which are, often, alienated from ground realities.

It must show case the best practices in terms of systemic reforms and processes, periodically through workshops and seminars. It must inform the Secretaries of Education and Heads of School Education,



guidelines etc. are produced by national level bodies then there is no decentralisation and no effective usage of these. What must happen is that the national institutions support states to develop their capabilities in all these and function as a forum and melting pot of ideas. The role of the NCERT must be to help states, develop their own textbooks.

The institutions need to reduce centralisation and SCERT and SSA about the initiatives taken up elsewhere and act as an institution for 'Education Watch'.

**The NCERT must commission studies on different aspects of the curriculum and work towards disseminating such studies up to the school level. It must work towards developing an index of quality in the context of socio-economic factors and implementation of policies.**

The Ministry of Education at the Central level must ensure **that the fund flow is predictable and without disruption**, and must be willing to make **long-term commitments**. It must respect the local initiatives and stop issuing detailed instructions and guidelines on how money ought to be spent. This goes against teacher empowerment and nurturing of creativity.

## 16. PARALLEL STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

The decade of the eighties and the nineties saw the emergence of a range of centrally sponsored schemes and projects<sup>10</sup> (many of them with external donor

funding) to address the challenge of universalisation. These were autonomous bodies, which were registered under the Societies Registration Act and run by the functionaries within the government. This structure, it was hoped, would provide flexibility and openness, and ensure that funds meant for the project would be "safe" and not absorbed into the general treasury account of the State. This was also seen as a necessary mechanism to reach out to children in remote areas through para professional teachers, and to mobilise girls. Further structures for training and resources were set up to meet the dynamism of the local community as it was perceived that the existing departmental structures were incapable of organising intensive on going training. Experiences of different state level structures reveal a disturbingly mixed picture. The interaction of these structures with the mainline education department tended to be minimal; Institutions like the SCERT were sidelined, with project level efforts at textbook development, teacher training and micro planning. The autonomous bodies ended up weakening the formal system by taking away experienced professionals and administrators.

The process of educational planning and policy making has a long history, which has evolved as an organic process over a period of time. Thus the recommendations of Commissions and institutions have informed the policies which had critiqued the status of education planning and offered corrective

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<sup>10</sup> 1987 onwards: creation of autonomous quasi-government bodies outside the formal administrative structure for implementation of EFA projects, namely: Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project, 1987 (Sida funded and then by DFID)  
Bihar Education Project, 1991 (Unicef funded)  
Rajasthan Lok Jumbish, 1992 (Sida funded and then by DFID)  
UP Basic Education Project, 1992 (World Bank funded)  
District Primary Education Project (DPEP), 1993 (Donor consortium including World Bank, European Commission, DFID, Netherlands Government, UNICEF)

steps time and again. This long track record of education planning that had continuity, and evolved as an organic process of public debate and institution building was ignored and disrupted by setting up fund-driven parallel institutions. The irony is that these parallel structures not only had a negative impact on the morale and the efficiency of formal and mainstream structures, but even the learning from these “innovations” was lost when the projects were wound up.

### 16.1 Short Projects Versus Long-term Vision

Planning for education requires a long-term intergenerational vision. In the past decade, this was substituted by a time bound project mode with a disjunction between long-term policy perspective and short-term project strategies. Instead of investing in augmenting the capacity of the state governments, externally aided projects pressured such governments to fix targets and produce outcomes quite mechanically. All that occurred was ad hoc spending driven by an energetic official heading the parallel system or the Secretary of Education. This resulted in subverting entrenched institutions, in deinstitutionalised decision-makings. Many states spent money on contract appointments of teachers in schools, and on faculty of DIETs and SCERTs, and used precious resources for unproductive purposes.

This aggravated the lethargy of institutions such as the CRC/ BRC/ DIET and the SCERT, which became essentially bureaucratic structures established to carry out tasks assigned to them by the government. Having no self-motivation, space to innovate, explore or analyse, they only implemented programmes designed elsewhere. Given this situation, they were not in a position to respond to the needs of teachers and schools – and in fact treated the teachers and the schools “under them” as subordinate bodies, perpetuating a hierarchical and non-democratic culture.

Given this situation, we need to ask who is accountable, and to whom. The biggest challenge is to set in place accountability systems that ensure that the institutions are **ultimately accountable to the children and their families**; that they are held accountable for ensuring the realisation of the right of every child to quality education.

## 17. RESOURCE AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The resources for education have to be examined in detail. The extent of funding and the quantum of support to education would be a part of the detailed reports/estimates made by committees set up by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. There is a need to consider the manner of fund disbursement and the procedures of monitoring expenditure and accounting for utilisation. The current processes tend to emphasise procedures and norms rather than the nature and quality of work. In the context of the diversity of the situation that the system is engaged with, the need for flexible and sensible norms is acute.

This Focus Group feels that the division of funds available for education between the State Government and the Central government also needs to be examined. While the Central support for funding is often tied to pre-determined schemes (CSS) the ability of state Governments to meet the finances required for universal education is compromised, especially when many state governments face serious fiscal shortages. This has also resulted in the inability of state governments to sustain activities initiated in time bound projects.

The Group deliberated on the issue of rigidity of financial processes, especially vis-à-vis unit costs and the impact of this on the capacity to undertake meaningful activities. Government of India schemes,

including the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan indicate unit costs, for example, of Rs. 70 per day per teacher for training in SSA, the number of bridge courses and number of children in bridge courses, unit costs for residential bridge courses and non residential bridge courses, compulsory inclusion of a model cluster school in the NPEGEL programme under SSA) that are uniform all over the country, and funds are sanctioned on the basis of such fixed unit costs. The limitations imposed by such uniform unit costs prescribed across the country need to be addressed in order to enable institutions to carry out their activities effectively. This is particularly important in remote and tribal areas, for specific communities/social groups and in certain situations.

As is apparent, unit costs cannot be uniform across such a large and diverse country as ours. The cost of training a teacher varies, depending on where the training is held, the particular travel costs within a particular region etc. Equally, the costs of running bridge courses or of intensive activities to promote girls' education cannot be the same across the length and breadth of the country. The impact of unit cost driven planning is indeed quite grave. SSA plans are distorted to 'fit in' with uniform unit costs. This absurd situation needs a common sense solution. Designing programmes according to area specificity and needs of specific communities of teachers must become the norm.

Even more important, 'unit costs' circumscribe the very range of activities that can be undertaken. Goals of programmes such as improving quality, bringing all children to school etc. can involve a wide range of

activities, and it is impossible to anticipate all such activities, much less cost them, in advance. However, the fact that unit costs are defined for some sets of activities and not others, leads to the exclusion of activities for which unit costs are not indicated. This effectively cuts short the capacity to innovate and respond to emerging needs in a programme. Unit costs thus add to the proclivity for mechanical implementation of schemes, a huge impediment in approaching problems more imaginatively.

It is sometimes argued that such unit costs are 'indicative', but in fact, they become yardsticks for appraisal of district plans and financial auditing<sup>11</sup>. Thus government officials prefer to stick to activities for which unit costs are available, and prefer to exclude valuable activities for which unit costs may either not be indicated or for which these may be inadequate, as any transgression of unit costs invites audit objections. It is also argued that unit costs are needed to calculate the financial requirements for UEE. Without doubt, the financial requirements for UEE are calculated assuming some broad unit costs for various activities. However, it does not follow that such estimations also need to become strict guidelines for implementation. For instance, while calculating UEE requirements, a teacher's salary may be estimated at the rate of say Rs. 8,000 per month per teacher. However, the actual salary of teachers would vary, depending on state government scales, seniority, allowances etc. Thus a norm developed for calculation cannot become a unit cost for implementation. This logic also applies to other activities such as teacher training, community mobilisation etc.

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<sup>11</sup> District SSA plans and state SSA plans are appraised by Ed CIL, NCERT and NIEPA faculty purely on the basis of compliance to unit costs. This needs to be acknowledged as an important limitation and efforts made to move away from unit cost driven appraisal to a process where the state government is trusted and empowered to make its own plans.

Another reason why unit costs are preferred is that they are seen to inculcate financial discipline and accountability. However, when unit costs are prescribed across the country, the impact can be the opposite. The maximum permitted amount may be used, even when it is not necessary. Designing activities to fit unit costs can actually lead to a waste of financial resources.

As the range of activities of centrally sponsored schemes has grown, along with the need for taking up a diverse set of activities, it is necessary to re-think the idea of fixing unit costs nationally. To do so, it would be necessary to devise more sophisticated ways of ensuring financial accountability, and if unit costs are used, these may need to be devised for much smaller units than states. In the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), districts were allowed to devise their own, activity specific unit costs. This allowed programme planners and implementers to undertake a much wider range of strategies to address a particular situation than would have been possible with a single all-India unit cost.

For better programme implementation, **it is recommended that unit costs be devised locally, for specific activities**, rather than nationally. A mechanism for scrutinising such unit costs can be set up to ensure financial accountability.

## 18. PROFESSIONALISATION OF EDUCATION SERVICES

At present there is a lack of professionalism in education across the board - from the level of the schoolteacher to the institutions that are meant to provide academic support. The recruitment of staff is not necessarily based on their academic interest or competencies. There is a need therefore to look into recruitment policy and build the capacities of the staff and personnel. In addition, there must be lateral linkages at all layers of operation and systematic sharing of thoughts and experiences both laterally as well as vertically across clusters, blocks, districts, states and at the national level. This requires sufficient flexibility and autonomy for local officials vis-à-vis their superiors and in creating of processes of review and feedback that would enrich the intellectual capacities of all participants.

In a way, such a multi-layered intervention that draws upon community support for schools, active involvement of the PRIs at all levels, technical and academic support through district and sub-district level units requires reforms in governance and introduction of new processes of consultations with all the stakeholders. It should result in universalisation of school education and draw upon technical and educational expertise

## 19. PERSPECTIVES OF THE FOCUS GROUP: A SUMMARY

We do not propose to set up new institutions or demolish existing ones. However, attempts must be made more sincerely and vigorously to:

**1. Proactively work against structures of exclusion to ensure the full participation of children in school.** Schools must ensure every child access to schooling; they must facilitate those who drop out or are pushed out to get back (older children). They must assure children continuous education at least until Class X.

**2. Schools must be child-centred** and act in the best interests of the child aiding in realising the child's full potential. The school must be holistic: her health, nutritional status, and well-being, and what happens to children before they enter school and after they leave school are also part of the school's concerns. Schools must respect diversity and ensure equality of opportunity for all children (girls, working children, children with disabilities, victims of exploitation and violence).

Flexible norms need to be put in place to define what may be referred to as a school in policy documents and in the discourse on education. These norms have to be based on educational principles and on principles of equity and justice for children. They must be formulated with a view to actualise a functioning school that provides learning to all children.

### **Physical Conditions:**

*Education fundamentally is process of providing opportunities to learn and happens through conscious or unconscious engagement and dialogue. The school must be empowered to ensure this possibility and have space for the child to explore and have teachers with the time and patience for engagement. It should be the responsibility of the school body to ensure conducive socio-emotional conditions for the inclusion of all children in the learning process. For this the necessary infrastructure, capable and sensitive teachers and appropriate and amenable learning environment for has to be provided by the system.*

Since younger children need more intensive engagement and interaction— therefore teacher: student ratios need to be the best for the beginning classes. For example a reasonable set could be; 1:20 for pre-primary to class two 1:30 for class 3 & 4; and for middle school 1:40.

Children in the elementary school need a lot of hands-on experiences on which to reflect – therefore there need to be appropriate learning materials in adequate quantity & ample storage space.

Children need to work with peers – ample space for group work needs to be provided. Well-Covered and well lighted 9 sq. ft. space per child is needed . The furniture should be such that it allows the children to interact with each other & with the teacher.

Each school must have a proper playground for children.

**3. Our school system must trust school teachers.** If we are to effect any quality reform in the system, all support systems from the cluster to the state level will have to base their support on trust and respect for the teacher, granting him/her space a measure of autonomy. Teachers also need to be encouraged and assisted in forming their own support groups.

States must do away with contractual arrangements within the system. Elementary school teachers should have career path opportunities enabling them to join the district and state level curriculum development and capacity building organisations (DIETs and SCERTs), at the same time affording them the option to return to elementary school teaching if they so desire.

**4. The participation of the community in the classroom and the school at the primary school level requires that a part of the curriculum be formulated at the level of the school or at group of schools in the area of operation.** Functionaries of CRC, BRC and DIETs need to be involved in this process – they must spend sufficient time in the schools as well with primary school children, and over a sustained duration work with the teachers to evolve materials and ideas. **Systemic changes must be made to strengthen processes for democratisation of all existing educational institutions at all levels and mechanisms for gauging such processes must be in place.**

All institutions above the school – the cluster, the block, the district, State and National levels will have to play facilitative and empowering roles rather than monitoring and supervisory ones.

**5. The number of schools at the upper primary and secondary school levels must be increased,** keeping in view the right of children to education and the pressure for a larger number of higher classes. Since the content of subjects at this stage is based on constructing formal logical connections and conceptualisations which are not necessarily related to concrete experiences, schools must offer the possibility of conducting experiments, surveys, studies and other individual as well as group tasks within the curriculum framework. This requires that we set up processes and opportunities for constant consultations amongst teachers of the school, and other school teachers, as well as access to materials, a well-stocked library and so on. Higher-level authorities must be able to support innovations with the required technical assistance in training teachers and providing them the resources that are necessary.

### **First Generation Learners**

We must acknowledge the fact that poor children, especially first generation learners, just do not have support systems for learning at home. No child must be pushed out of school for being a slow learner or for non- comprehension. The entire education system must be geared to support the requirements of such children, and treat with sensitivity and respect, so that they too feel encouraged to return to school each day.

### Examination Reforms

For many students the Standard X year is a time of unremitting stress. Failure in the examination seen as a major disaster; among the better students, even failure to get sufficiently high marks causes grave anxiety and guilt. From the standpoint of the school, the examination determines the content and methodology of schooling right down to the upper-primary level. Thus if we are to conceptualize meaningful reforms in the educational system as a whole, it is essential that we turn a critical eye at this examination and the associated curriculum, syllabi and textbooks.

Whether one assigns marks or grades, one of the most fundamental reforms that must be effected is alternatives to the concept of overall pass or failure in the Standard X examination. The student who cannot make the grade at the X Standard exam must not have to go through life with the ignominious label “tenth standard fail”. **Schools must be evaluated on the basis of the numbers of children who have continued their study, not on the basis of their performance in examination.** The 15 or 16 year olds in Class X are adolescents; the schools must be ready to engage with them, providing them guidance and counselling as integral part of education.

### 6. Decentralisation

Democratisation of schools, departments and educational institutions can occur only through a conscious strategy of decentralisation. The local governance systems would require enormous support from the staff and line at all layers of the bureaucracy. **Issues in this regard are in laying out the contours of a multi-layered political departmental system which functions at local, provincial and national levels and in understanding the indispensable role each of such layers have in supporting children’s right to education.** Care must be taken to see that decentralization does not burden the lower levels of hierarchy with responsibilities disproportionate to their decision-making functions. There must be sufficient flexibility and autonomy in the educational system; policy formulation, fund allocation, provision of administrative guidelines, academic support must be geared to support the autonomous decision-making ability at the lowest levels.

### 7. Strengthening the community and local bodies

Gram Panchayats need to be more involved, empowering the teacher to perform his/her duties effectively. Yet, the call for decentralisation and local community participation is not fundamentalist. It is necessary for micro planning, adopting child-wise strategy and resolving local conflicts. There is really no other solution. *The local bodies are best equipped to find solutions to problems. They are best acquainted with;* It is only in this context that respect for plurality and cultural diversities becomes inevitable, informing the curricular changes in consonance with the local contexts.

### **8. Avoiding duplication of roles**

**There should be clarity of roles and the entire structure should function based on the principle of subsidiarity.** This will curtail duplication of responsibilities, wastage of time and resources and curb confusion. There should be structures for support to the 'local' and not just monitoring and fixing up targets. **Most of all, the system calls for professionalisation and an intense participation of officials at all levels of the hierarchy.**

### **9. Planning and Communicating progress of work**

The entire system should be process-driven, apart from being target-driven. It calls for long-term intergenerational planning and not just spurts of small projects for limited periods. The system, in addition, should have a style of functioning that is receptive to the ground and provide for expertise and technical support in a systematic fashion in response to the demands made by teachers, professionals and educationists. In its annual review/report each layer such as the CRC, BRC, DIET, SCERT, NCERT and all the Departments of education, Boards of examination must give a record of the policy modifications and initiatives that they have made in response to the demands made by the schools, teachers and community.

### **10. Need for continuous evaluation**

From time to time we must commission studies and reports to examine the decentralisation of the education system; to see what systemic and organisational changes have occurred, and what impact they might have had.



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