

**DPEP
IN
COOCH BEHAR**

STANDING

ON

FIRM FOUNDATIONS

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First and the foremost requirement for the success of a programme like DPEP is people's participation at all levels. This to start with, more so, with campaign mode being the important gradient of the scheme, is not so difficult to organise. Mass mobilisation and community's involvement have been the corner stones of political activism in West Bengal and thus to expect people's participation with a lot of enthusiasm and vigor in case of DPEP, especially ⁱⁿ initial phases will not be expecting too much. However this leads one to the crucial issue of keeping up this involvement over years together. It is this vital area which requires to be properly addressed to .

While analysing the sustenance factor one must appreciate that the kind of enthusiastic and overwhelming response from people at large one is coming across at present has to dwindle gradually. This is a normal natural phenomenon which can't be avoided. Under the situation what is needed is to plan to check the dwindling process at the minimum threshold level . For this the following strategic issues need consideration:

- 1) the faith of people in the efficacy of exercise , sincerety of effort and honesty of implementation ,
- 2) the outcome of the exercise manifested in quantative (i.e. coverage) and qualitative (i.e. level of academic attainment) terms,
- 3) creation of a delivery emchanism which is self sufficient and has an established entity ,

While the first issue given above comes in to play only after a reasonable passage of time, the other two issues need to be taken care of right from the planning stage itself. Nevertheless proper environment building through effective campaigning has been planned to deliver the message across loud and clear.

The supportive system which is been worked out for primary education in the district , the synergy which is being developed foe DPEP and the emphasis on MLL with equity which has been in-built in the process will certainly go a long way in taking care of the second issue. (These points have been separatly dealt with in the subsequent pages)

So far as the factor of delivering mechanism is concerned it is evident from the district's proposal that the strategy has been not to go for altogether new (and alien) structural arrangement. The DNCIMS is an extension of the office the District Inspector of

School (Primary Education) and the District Project Officer (DPO) . The DLCC and DPT have ex-officio Chairman (Sabhadrpati of ZP) , Vice-Chairman (District Magistrate) and member secretary (D I) suitably strengthened and enriched by incorporation of experts, academicians , teachers , people's representatives , panchayat functionaries, social activists, administrators etc. . The BRC and CRC are again structural arrangements being co-terminus with equivalent Panchayati Raj institutions headed by Sabhpati of Panchayat Samiti and Pradhan of Gram Panchayat respectively. Due representation of all concerned in these committees has been ensured to make them functionally effective.

VEC , the lower most rung in the network of structural arrangement for DPEP is the only creation which does not have a parallel administrative or panchayat institutions. This structural weakness has been taken care of through adequate representation of panchayat functionaries school teachers etc. in it . Moreover , by formulisation of the VEC arrangement through govt. order and its uniform pattern being followed all over the state for UEE through DPEP or through TLC/PLC , some sort of permanence has already been added to VECs.

The functional arrangement proposed for DPEP is similarly based on the existing functional relation amongst various levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions or for that matter that of primary education administration in the district. This has been done with a view to ensure effectiveness of multi-tier structure in functioning and to avoid communication gaps or functional conflicts.

Thus, the delivery mechanism proposed for DPEP is both rigid & flexible - rigid in its existence & flexible in its functioning . The ^{and} sustenance of the mechanism is directly related to the permanence of the institutions it has been proposed to be built upon and thus, there does not seem to be any doubt regarding its efficacy and continuity. The strategy of going for such a system not only generates the present only but ^{guarantees} ~~generates~~ the future also-- a future up to 7 years from hence and beyond when catering to the requirements of ^{primary} ~~system~~ education will become an integral part of the development agenda of the Panchayats and district administration as well.

In undertaking a programme for Universalization of Elementary Education, the task in hand has to be analysed in detail and logical sequencing of the sub-task is to be done. As a result, one can derive the following sequences for the UEE programme :-

- a) Universal enrolment
- b) Universal retention
- c) Attainment of Minimum level of learning
- d) Concurrent development of Secondary Education System

Although (d) above is not directly related to the elementary education, it attains importance as it would be required as a logical consequence of the Universalization of the Elementary Education. Detailed surveys and studies were carried out in the district as a prelude to the DPEP. Details of the same are appended in Annexure I.

BACKDROP

It would be pertinent, out here, to introduce the strengths, both innate and those that have been developed over a period of time, that can be utilized to go ahead with an enhanced enrolment. It is perceived that when this strength is adequately and properly built upon through various facilitative and supportive measures, one can proceed towards the goal of enhanced enrolment.

Time and again reference is made to the fact that 51.75 % of the population of Cooch Behar belongs to the Scheduled Castes. The district has the highest concentration of Scheduled Castes in the state. This predominant demographic characteristic has its manifestations in the aid that is given to this district for providing infrastructural support for the benefit of the people belonging to the Scheduled Caste populace of the district.

Another salient feature of this district is a long running international border with Bangladesh that qualifies the district for special aid from the Govt. of India under Border

Area Development Programme. Preponderance of Scheduled Castes and lack of any viable industry render this district extremely backward. This is further compounded by over dependence on low agriculture that is typified by sustenance agriculture with low yield as it's major characteristic. As a consequence the district is classified as one of the more backward districts, and hence eligible not only for higher quantum of aid for rural development but also higher grants from the North Bengal Development Fund.

STRENGTHS

Against this backdrop, we would like to introduce a fully functional and healthily ticking Panchayati Raj System. In the state of West Bengal there is a three tier Panchayati Raj system with the Zilla Parishad, at the district level, at the apex. The intermediate tier comprises of a Panchayat Samity at the block level followed by the Gram Panchayat, an agglomeration of a few villages, at the base of the pyramid. A salient feature of the Panchayati Raj system in the state of West Bengal is the reservation that has been extended to women as a Governmental policy, thereby reducing the possibility of gender biases against women. One out of every three members are accordingly female at all levels of the Panchayati Raj system. This Panchayati Raj system takes care not only of rural development alone but also of the much more important aspect of decentralized planning. As a consequence one can say with complete equanimity that with the active involvement of the Panchayati Raj institutions one is assured of the community's needs being reflected in the planning stage. Further, the involvement of this grassroot level representative body ensures the community's participation at large. This fact has been amply demonstrated in the running of the TLC.

Total Literacy Campaign has been taken up with a great amount of success in the district of Cooch Behar. Out here also one of the salient aspects was the active role played by the various women Panchayati Raj functionaries in conjunction with the active role taken up by the various women's organization of the district. The active role played by the various fora for women and their emergence as a major pressure group automatically

insured against any gender biases creeping into the programme. The impact of the TLC can be gauged from the fact that the incremental effect in the literacy status in the district, due to TLC, was a handsome 28.67 %. The TLC followed by PLP automatically entails broadening of the objectives to increase the emphasis from only the 3 Rs to also actively involve the literacy mission's infrastructure in promoting the cause of UEE, without which the initial achievements obtained would be rendered fruitless. The neo - literate parents, coupled with the heightened social awareness, would ensure that the need for primary education converts itself into a steady and strong demand for UEE. Thus, to render the results of the TLC permanent, it is absolutely imperative to follow up the literacy efforts with the Universalization of Elementary Education.

SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR UNIVERSALIZING ENROLMENT

An impetus has been given to increased and sustained enrolment of the target group in various Primary Schools resulting in achievement of near Universal enrolment. The active involvement of Panchayats along with conducive environment has further strengthened this aspect. A series of facilitative and supportive measures have been taken to further bolster the enrolment status.

i) Birth Certificate.

Non-possession of a birth certificate by a majority of target group children becomes a big impediment in the way of their admission into primary school. It has been experienced that many legal guardians face difficulty in getting their wards admitted into recognised schools because they find it extremely difficult to produce any documentary evidence regarding the age of their wards at the time of admission. The State Govt. after careful consideration of the matter issued an order that the wards whose legal guardians cannot produce any documentary evidence regarding the age of their wards at the time of admission in the recognised schools be admitted into such schools as per declaration by their legal guardians, at the time of admission, of their age.

ii) Extension of Admission Period.

The District Primary School Council extended the period of admission for the primary schools, firstly for 3 months, and then for the remaining part of the academic session taking away the factor of time-bar to facilitate admission.

iii) Rational posting of Teacher.

The DPSC has agreed for rational posting of teachers based on roll-strength to bring about the desired parity.

iv) Linkage with Pre-Schooling Activities.

As a component of supportive measures towards universalization of enrolment the pre-schooling activities have been given a boost in the district through the Anganwadis of the ICDS. The very objectives of the scheme, as outlined below, shall indicate the vantage position that this programme enjoys in the scheme of things as envisaged : -

1. To improve the nutritional & health status of all children in the age group of 0 - 6 Yrs.;
2. To lay foundations for proper psychological, physical & social development of the child;
3. To reduce incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition & school dropout ;
4. To enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health & nutritional needs of the child through proper nutritional health education : &
5. To promote child development through the joint / coordinated efforts of the various departments.

The package of services in the scheme, thus includes, among others :

Non - Formal education ; Supplementary nutrition ; Health check - up ; Immunization; Nutrition & Health education, & Referral services.

These services are provided primarily by an Anganwadi worker who is a local woman with the assistance of a local female helper. The AWW derives support in her endeavours from the local community, including the local Panchayati Raj institutions, Health and other departments. This AWW is supervised by female Supervisors who in turn are supervised at

the block level by the CDPOs and at the district level by the DPO. In furtherance of the aim of UEE it has been decided to involve the ICDS setup in its totality. The fruitfulness of using the ICDS has been seen when their help was taken in implementing the UIP and other family welfare programmes that are run by the health department. There has also been a major improvement in the control and management of various health problems like control of gastro - enteritis, malaria etc. It would not be out of place to mention that, due to the concerted efforts that were put in by the ICDS set up to support the health department in the district of Cooch Behar and the consequent integrated approach, the district has stood first in the state, in terms of achievements, in the referred to programme. This dovetailing of efforts has also provided us with valuable insights as to how to optimize results with inter departmental coordination. A masterplan to house all Anganwadi centres in buildings of their own is on the anvil. It has been decided that the A.W. centres shall function as A.W. centres in the day and literacy centres in the night. They shall also double up as centres providing preventive primary health care at the grass root level.

IMPROVING RETENTIVITY

With universal enrolment not being a major impediment the next logical step is retaining the enrolled pupil and effecting a qualitative improvement in the status of learning imparted and imbibed. It is at this stage that the Governmental and non-Governmental efforts in the district gets stymied due to non-availability of adequate funds to carry out the relevant infrastructural, both qualitative and quantitative, improvements that would help in increasing the level of retentivity in the various schools. Of the problems faced, a part of the problem involves supportive infrastructure while the other part would involve the qualitative development of the existing human resources and the physical infrastructure.

A part of the supportive infrastructure is being taken care of by local initiative and endeavour. On analysing the supply demand scenario it was perceived that if the convergence of the activities of the various development departments is ensured and a qualitative improvement is brought about in the delivery mechanism, we would be closer to the goal of

Universalizing the Elementary Education. It was proposed that as the quantum of work involved would be of a very high magnitude it would be of utmost importance to dovetail the resources of all developmental departments and institutions and utilize them towards achieving the goal of UEE. Among the departments that have accordingly been identified for this purpose are : Social Welfare (ICDS), Health, Scheduled Caste & Tribal Welfare department, Rural Development department, School Education & Higher Education besides the Primary Education Department. These would function in conjunction with the Development & Planning Department & the General Administration. This would involve not only infrastructural support but also fiscal support, wherever possible.

A start has already been made in this direction with the taking up of the programme of provisioning of Toilet and Drinking water facilities in the existing Primary Schools. A proposal to the tune of Rs. 30.83 million has already been sent to the Government of West Bengal in the Rural Development Department for providing the same in association with CAPART. The details for taking up the execution of this scheme in conjunction with various NGOs are being worked out. On completion of this project all the existing primary schools in the district would have provisions of safe drinking water and separate toilets for boy and girl students.

Another scheme that is being taken up is that of providing improved accessibility to the various schools in the form of providing all weather connectivity from the main roads in the form of approach roads to the school. It has been found that a total of 726 schools require to be connected thus. The total financial involvement entailed would be to the tune of Rs. 58.08 million. The funds shall be provided by the Rural Development Department, in the form of devolvement of JRY funds through the Zilla Parishad, Cooch Behar, and the Development & Planning Department in the form of devolution through the District Plan Fund.

It has also been decided to open Literacy centres / Rural libraries @ 2 per Gram Panchayat. These would be funded by JRY & other Rural Development funds in conjunction

with the District Plan Fund. The infrastructure support by way of establishing Libraries, providing teaching - learning aids etc. will be available from the National Literacy Mission funds. Besides proving to be strong catalytic agents, these would serve as a powerful social tool reminding the people of the principles of the TLC. One of the spin offs would be that they would, at the very least, continue to serve as symbols of the TLC and act as motivators for the community at large, ensuring that the children are enrolled in the schools in even larger numbers. Another important spin off from the PLP of the TLC is the availability of funds to the tune of Rs. 6 million to improve the general sensitization through the holding of seminars, workshops etc. As has already been stated, one of the primary implicit targets of the PLP would be the universalization of Elementary Education. The referred to sensitization would automatically give a higher weightage to this aspect.

Over a period of time, when the advantage of the TLC were coming in , a decision was taken to construct as many primary school buildings as possible under various Rural Development schemes by Gram Panchayat / Panchayat Samiti. A substantial no. of Primary school buildings are either constructed , extended or renovated under NREP / RLEGP / JRY Programme. In undertaking a more holistic approach to the solution of probable pressures on poor parents to sustain primary education for their children, Ashram hostels are being constructed attest to primary schools. There are nine Ashram hostels running in the district at present with six more ready with construction. 20 more such hostels have been proposed to be constructed during 1996-97. The funds provided for these hostels come from Sch. Castes and Tribes Welfare deptt. and this facility is available for SC & ST students of primary schools, which form the most vulnerable target group for the DPEP. These hostels take care of food, lodging and medical facilities of the economically weaker section of scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe students at the primary school level.

DPEP, as conceived in Cooch Behar, would take up the lacuna that remains after the supportive infrastructure referred to above has been taken care of. This would involve emphasis on human resource development besides ensuring a major improvement in the quality of teaching imparted. Attainment of minimum levels of learning would be an indicator of the level of success achieved in real terms. Accordingly details are given in the following paragraphs about what is proposed in these terms.

ATTAINMENT OF MINIMUM LEVELS OF LEARNING

The logical sequence of universal enrolment followed by endeavour to ensure universal retention is not enough for UEE unless these two crucial areas are followed up by ensuring the minimum levels of learning. The quality issue of leaning is not only related with retention but is also very crucial in the context of a district like Cooch Behar, where to a large number of primary student opportunity for education is not likely to be available beyond the primary stage and therefore it is essential that whatever they learn must sustain them through out their life i.e. to say They become permanently literate.

With the policy of no detention in vogue, the relevance and necessity of a sound procedure of evaluation integrated with the process of learning becomes and imperative. This evaluation system has to take into consideration the question of quality coupled with equity. With attainment of mastering label of learning by majority leading to development of both cognitive and non-cognitive aspect of learning. Thus the evaluation system proposed in the district under DPEP shall have the following features :

1. Concurrent in formal evaluation as apart of teaching learning process
2. Unit test based periodical assessment for academic monitoring aiming at quality with equity.
3. Periodical appraisal of non-cognitive aspects of growth.

To supplement the above and to decide the pace and direction of implement, two additional exercises will be undertaken in the district from the current academic year. Firstly, to facilitate decision making with regard to quality, equity and efficiency, evaluation for ascertaining the attainment of actual standard of performance shall be conducted by DISTRICT PLANING TEAM (DPT) through surveys and other techniques. This will be coupled with pre-testing and post-testing to assess the status of MLL.

The DPT is already at work to develop evaluation tools consisting of competency

based test items, unit test, observation criteria for non-cognitive aspects of evaluation etc. Assistance of SCERT and also of experts in the field has ~~been sent~~^{bought} for. The CRCs are proposed to be developed as school clusters for co-operative work in the field of evaluation. This network of evaluation clusters will be ultimately merging at BRC level, which will be providing the requisite feedback to DNCIMS at district level. The experience of IPCL text books, gathered through the literacy campaign in the district in terms of in build concurrent evaluation exercises is available with most of the primary school teacher and volunteers of the campaign which will come very handy for the DPEP as well.

The teacher, who will be playing the most crucial role to ensure MLL will be assisted by a teachers hand book, which will be prepared under the aegis of DPT with the help of experts. Similarly brochures and writeups are proposed to be prepared for those associated with DPEP as supervisors and local functionaries.

Appropriate orientation of teachers at regular intervals shall be one of the crucial exercise undertaken to ensure MLL. Similar recurrent orientation shall also be conducted for supervisors and local functionaries.

Accountability of the primary education system at the district level shall be directly related with the achievement of the pupil. This will be done through summative assessment and shall be related to comparison and performance between schools, CRCs and BRCs .

The no detention policy places the onus upon the teacher and the school and thus upon the primary education system to create conditions, whereby learning effectively takes place . This accountability will ensure that " no detention" is not taken to be " no testing "

The DPEP in Cooch Behar places a lot of emphasis on non-cognitive aspects of learning and incorporates it in the concept of MLL. While the school organisation and its surrounding environment is proposed to be developed in a manner so as to provide

inspiration to the people on aspects like cleanliness, industriousness, regularity, punctuality etc. . Appreciating the fact that non-cognitive learning is caught rather than taught, it is proposed to develop the personality of teacher in true sense. Whom the pupil will observe and imitate as per normal human being. Physical education, work education and co-curricular activities including Arts and Music will form a part of the daily routine of primary schools for holistic development of the child.

Joint endeavour of all concerned through Parents-Teachers association, periodic interaction among parents, teachers and educational administrators with involvement of the entire community through an effective environment building process to ensure that home community and school perform a complimentary and mutually re-enforcing role will be the haul mark of the DPEP of the district.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

With a vast qualitative change proposed under DPEP with regard to the Primary Education System of the district training and orientation of not only teachers but also of parents, administrator and various functionaries associated with the project assume crucial importance. While various training and orientation modules are proposed to be developed to suit the changing needs and local situation, the development of man power resource has already been taken up in the district as a prelude to DPEP. Thus, during 1993-1994 10 selected personnel have undergone training at SCEPT as key persons (K Ps). These KPs have in turn trained 107 Resource Persons (R Ps) selected from various parts of the district in two batches.

Similarly from 1993-94 onwards the District Primary School Council has been organising Orientation Camps for the primary school teachers covering areas like curriculum, ALP, Concurrent Evaluation, Methodology and non-scholastic subject. Orientation Course exclusively for Head teachers and Administrators has also been organised last year in the district. Again during last year and year before last a decentralised orientation course was

organised through 46 centres through out the district covering a total of 5169 teachers. The duration of each camp was 6 days. These training and orientation courses organised during the last 2 years involved a total of Rs. 250 thousand.

The district having achieved successes to a large extent in impl-ementation of Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) and its Post Literacy Campaign (PLC) has over the last couple of years gathered vast experience and required expertise in organising academic as well as managerial training and orientation courses. For the purpose of TLC and PLC all together 1131 KPs, 1951 RPs/Master Trainers and 66029 volunteer teachers have been trained and / or given orientation 2 to 3 time under the aegis of District Literacy Committee. This has been possible because of existence of a conducive environment for the purpose in the district wherein help and assistance has been received from not only the Panchayats and Government Organisations but also from the people at large. Participation of primary school teachers as RPs/ MTs or as volunteer teachers in the campaign has already set in the desired attitudinal charge and required efficiency up gradation amongst them. Similar is the case of other functionaries, opinion leaders as also parent of school going children in the district.

Against this back drop the achievement of the desired goal of quality assurance appear to be well within reach.

POST PRIMARY EDUCATION SCENARIO

The DPEP is a time bound programme which will result in an upward movement of students in much larger numbers. Due to this demand of a higher quantum level there is bound to be an increased pressure on the existing resources of the secondary schools. Accordingly , an integrated approach is being adopted to improve the status and available infrastructure in the various secondary schools for the post primary impact of the DPEP. This concurrent development of secondary schools shall be effected by supplementing the normal Governmental initiative by efforts from Border Area Development Project, grant from Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribes Department, MPLADS scheme etc.

Steps have already been taken on these lines. Under BADP 24 schools are already being developed / upgraded / renovated at a total cost of Rs. 3 million. In addition, through the various funds devolving from the Development & Planning Department , 136 schools have been taken up with the total fiscal involvement of Rs. 14.15 million in the form of schemes under the aegis of DPF & MPLADS.

The Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe Department has taken up a total of 60 schools in the last two financial years with a total financial involvement of Rs. 11.854 million for their development / upgradation. Proposals to the tune of Rs. 7.5 million involving 30 schools have already been taken up with the department for the current financial year. Over and above this, not only are there two central Hostels that are functional at the district and subdivisional level but one additional central Hostel has also been sanctioned by the department. The total financial involvement is to the tune of Rs. 5.84 million. In addition ,4 more Hostels are to be taken up involving a further Rs. 4.5 million.

In short the Primary Education Administration in conjunction with the various tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions through people's participation and synergy of development activities in the district is planning to supplement the efforts that would be taken up with the aid provided by the ODA in the form of funding the DPEP for the district of Cooch Behar. It will also be seen that in the cost projections made in the plan document, provisions for a lot of items like cost escalations in civil works, maintenance costs for civil works etc. have not been made. Moreover the costs that have been earmarked for the various components of civil construction are on the lower side. This outlines the basic philosophy that for proper take off of a programme it is not enough to gift a programme to the community but to ensure that the community at large has a stake in the programme as a whole. It's only in that situation that

one can be assured of the success of the endeavour. Accordingly a community effort and participation of the various Panchayati Raj Institutions is envisaged in the form of both physical as well as fiscal efforts to make up for these aforementioned factors. The plan document has outlined the details of the actual requirements etc. while this document tries to put across in no uncertain terms the fact that the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education is very much achievable and shall be achieved.

ANNEXURE I

STANDING ON REALISTIC FOOTING : SURVEY AND STUDIES CONDUCTED IN THE DISTRICT AS A PRELUDE TO DPEP.

The project proposal of DPEP is as a matter of fact based on various surveys, studies and structured and unstructured collection of information both from formal as well as informal channels.

The DPSC conducted the first survey between Nov.'94 & Jan.'95 covering all primary schools of the district. This was done under the technical guidance of WBBPE & SCERT. The result of this bench survey formed the foundation of the first project proposal of DPEP for the District.

In the months of May and June '95, a base line study was conducted by a team from Indian statistical Institute, Calcutta at random sampling basis. Altogether 36 schools were covered, spread over 6 Blocks of the district. The areas under taken for study through this exercise included attainment level of students, principal reasons of drop out etc.

The Office of the District Inspector of Schools (Primary education) conducted study in the month of September '95 on the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) to ascertain the actual strength of students in each class age groupwise. This study was also done on the basis of random sampling covering urban, semi-urban and rural schools.

Another survey was conducted through the primary education set up in the district by the district administration for the purpose of ascertaining the actual studies of certain key areas with regard to primary schools. The survey included the areas like availability of drinking water facility, toilet for the boy and girl students, further studies of the school and linked road studies. Under this survey all the schools were covered. It was conducted in the month of January - February '96.

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Apart from this structure studies, every informal and unstructured studies and information-collection exercises have been undertaken by DPSC, DI(primary), Zilla parishad and district administration as well. Farther elaborate and total studies having a bearing on qualitative improvement have been incorporated in the project proposal as a concurrent activity of the DPEP in the district.