



Political and Social Mobilisation for Education for All

The Indian Experience

Country Paper



Second **E9** Ministerial
Review Meeting, Islamabad

14 -16 September, 1997

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The Symbol

This simple, evocative, easy to draw symbol, draws its inspiration from a number of similar forms which have a positive association with education... It can be variously interpreted as... a child reading a book... a bird in flight signifying the freedom of the mind that knowledge brings... the rising sun of hope for a brighter tomorrow... the wave carrying children to greater heights of achievement... the globe, signifying the world of knowledge... It will in fact mean different things to different people... and thus, we hope, be owned by them and become an intrinsic part of their lives.

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Abbreviations

AP	Andhra Pradesh	NEEM	National Elementary Education Mission
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project	NGOs	Non-Government Organisation
BEP	Bihar Education Project	NFE	Non-formal Education
CMP	Common Minimum Programme	NLM	National Literacy Mission
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training	NPE	National Policy on Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme	ODA (UK)	Overseas Development Agency (United Kingdom)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education	SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
EFA	Education For All	SK	Shiksha Karmi
GOB	Government of Bihar	SKP	Shiksha Karmi Project
GOI	Government of India	SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
GOR	Government of Rajasthan	PE	Primary Education
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services	PPs	Prehar Pathshalas
IDA	International Development Agency	PRIs	Panchayati Raj Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation	TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
LJ	Lok Jumbish	UEE	Universalisation of Elementary Education
KSSP	Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad	UP	Uttar Pradesh
MLLs	Minimum Levels of Learning	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
MS	Mahila Samakhya	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
MTA	Mother-Teacher Association	VEC	Village Education Committee
MVF	M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation	ZSS	Zila Saksharta Samiti



Glossary

Aam Sabha	An open meeting of villagers
Aangan Pathshala	Day School/Courtyard School
Aashram Shala	A residential school in a tribal milieu
Bal Jagjagi	Non Formal Centres for Children
Balmela	Children's Fair
Bal Mitra Kendras	Children's Association
Collector	District Administrative Head
Gram Panchayat	Local self government at village level
Gram Sabha	A village common assembly
Jagjagi	Non Formal Centres for Women
Jana Shiksha Nilayam	Literally, a 'Home For Community Education; a Library-cum-continuing Education Centre for 4-5 villages.
Kala Jathas	Cultural Troupes
Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad	A non-governmental organisation in the state of Kerala
Kutir	Hut
Lok Jumbish	People's Movement
Mahila Sahayogi	A woman who escorts girls to schools
Mahila Samakhya	Literally 'women speaking as equals'; a programme of women's development and education being implemented in Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh
Mahila Samooh	Women's Group



Mahila Shikshan Kendra	A Residential Centre for Women's Education
Mahila Prashikshan Kendra	Training Centres for Women
Nari Adalat	A court where women participate in the proceedings
Sahayogi	Facilitator for mobilisation activities at cluster level
Samyuktas	Female development officer at block project officer responsible for women's activities
Sarpanch	Elected Chief of a village
Sangha	Group, collective
Sati	A custom where the wife had to burn herself at the funeral pyre of her husband
Shiksha Karmi	Education worker; Para teacher appointed under a SIDA associated project in Rajasthan
Shiksha Karmi Sahayogi	<i>Shiksha Karmi</i> Associate (A facilitator and supervisor for a unit of 10-15 villages)
Shiksha Sathin	Village women trained to be a women's development worker under the women's development programme
Padyatra	A procession on foot for a particular purpose
Panchayat	Lowest unit of local self governance
Panchayati Raj	The local self government consisting of village, block and district level elected bodies
Panchayati Samiti	Elected body responsible for local government at block level
Prabhat Pheri	Morning procession undertaken for a particular cause
Pradhan	Elected Chief
Prehar Pathshala	Schools of convenient timings
Udan Khatola	Creche for children of working mothers who are also studying
Zila Saksharta Samiti	District Literacy Society

Historical Perspective

Colonial education was highly elitist and was therefore irrelevant to the needs of the masses. Educational efforts were more often directed towards developing an educated aristocracy that would provide a strong support base for sustaining the British rule in India. Ironically, it was because some, amongst these same 'enlightened' Indians, noticed that the British had introduced free and compulsory education in their country, that the demand for the same arose in India. This demand was later articulated by the nationalists who realised the political importance of educating the masses in order to overthrow the colonial regime. Gopal Krishan Gokhale, noted freedom fighter, was one of the first to emphasise the need for mass education. However, the Bill he introduced on compulsory education (1910-12) where he demanded that the local bodies

should take the initiative in the matter, met with resistance so that only half-hearted efforts were made by the British to introduce compulsory education in India.

It was for Mahatma Gandhi to pick up the threads, some twenty years later. He realised that education at the village level was very essential if the people were to overthrow the yoke of the British rule. However, the strength in Gandhi's ideas lay in the fact that apart from making people politically aware, education had a significant role in making them sensitive to the social evils like the caste system, *Sati*, untouchability, and superstitious beliefs. Gandhi's self-financing scheme of Basic Education aimed at making education relevant for the village community, hence an antithesis to the elitist colonial education.



Constitutional Commitment as an Expression of Political Will

Basic education system as evolved by Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the important goals of the freedom struggle. In the Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, elementary education received explicit attention. The Directive Principle contained in Article 45 of the Constitution directed the State to “endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” Alongside, equality of opportunity was also given primacy through various other articles (e.g. Article 29(2) dealt with the right to admission into any educational institution maintained by the state, Article 350-A laid down the right to receive instruction in the mother tongue, Article 46 referred to taking care of the economic and educational interests of the under-privileged sections of the population, etc.) Subsequently, fourteen states and four UTs (Union Territories) enacted the legislation for compulsory primary education. But since

education was a state subject, the centre could not prevail upon the states to enforce compulsion. The states also found that in practice this legislation was difficult to implement due to various constraints.

With regard to the education of adults, on the other hand, there was no such explicit Constitutional commitment. Rather, there seemed to be an implicit understanding that over the years the expansion of primary education would automatically take care of the problem of mass illiteracy.

How was the political commitment reflected in the Constitutional Directive to provide free and compulsory education to children in the 6-14 age group, translated into action? In order to understand this, it would be necessary to analyse policy documents to see how this mandate was articulated in various education policies as well as in the plan documents, and to see what were the financial resources that were allocated.

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Universalisation of Basic Education in Planning and Policies

Immediately after independence, Indian planning had to contend with three competing claims: the Constitutional obligation regarding eight years of compulsory education, the manpower needs of a growing economy and the growing demand for expansion of educational institutions. In 1947, when the country achieved independence, there was no accepted plan of a national system of education. Three definite steps were therefore expected of the government that came to power viz. (a) to prepare a blueprint of a national system of education (b) allocate sufficient financial resources (c) transform the entire educational system so that all educational institutions became national schools. All this, however, did not take place and there was merely a linear expansion of the existing educational system through allocation of financial resources to this system. It was in the late fifties and early sixties, that a strong demand was made that the Government of India set up an Education Commission that looked at education holistically and which also included primary and adult education. It was in response to this demand that the Central government appointed the Education Commission (1964-66) and entrusted it with the task of looking

at the entire system of education so that a national system of education would emerge.

The report of the Education Commission recommended a radical transformation in the prevailing education system and suggested that it should be related to life, to the needs and aspirations of the people, and that there should be a qualitative improvement in its standards and a quantitative expansion of educational opportunities on the basis of manpower needs and equalisation of educational opportunities. While reiterating Article 45 of the Constitutional commitment, but in view of the tremendous human and financial resources that this mandate entailed, it recommended that elementary education be phased by providing 5 years of effective education to all children by 1975-76 and 7 years of such education by 1985-86.

The first National Policy on Education was formulated only in July 1968. In many ways, the policy diluted the recommendations of the Education Commission. On the one hand, Article 45 was emphasised and most of the recommendations of the Commission were incorporated, such as free and

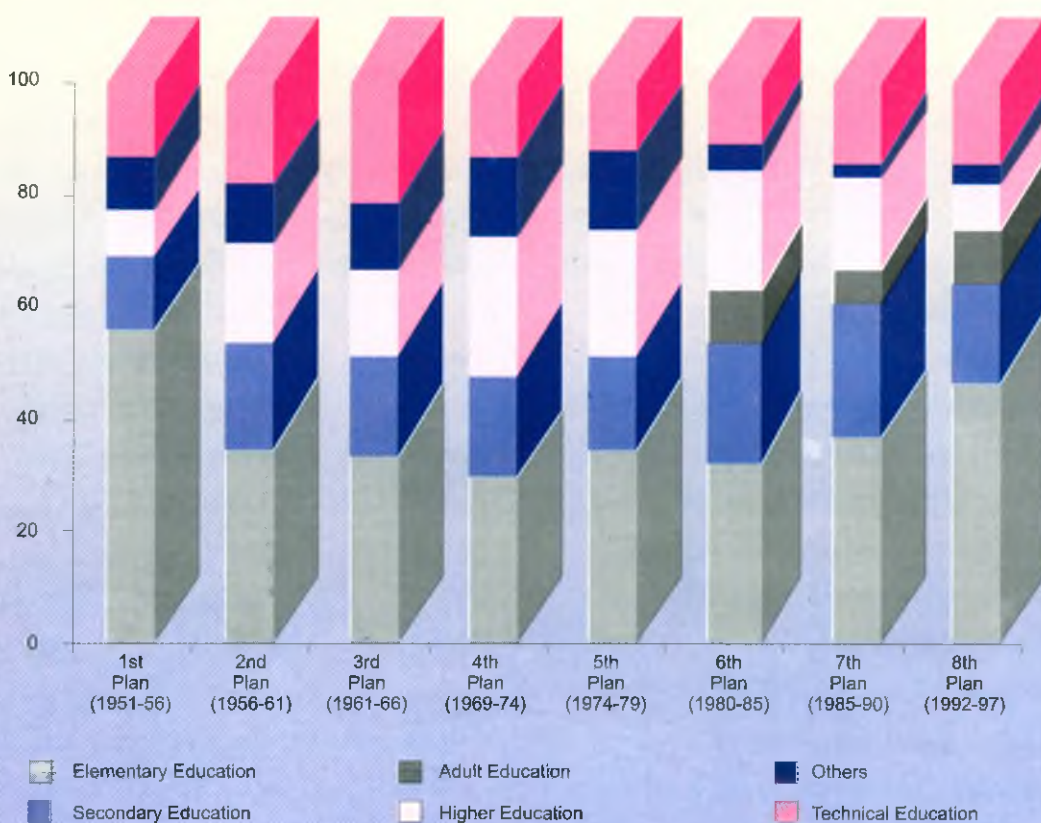


compulsory education, equalisation of educational opportunities including education for girls, spread of literacy and adult education through literacy campaigns etc. But at the same time, the policy was somewhat ambivalent about the overall importance of mass education. Also, one of the major problems of the policy was that it did not articulate how the policy directives could be translated into action.

The plan allocations for education in general have never been adequate. But even within the education budget, the tension between the Constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory

education to all children in the 6-14 age group and the development imperative of training skilled manpower through provision of higher and technical education, has persisted through the years. Thus, while every commission and committee on education during the post-independence period reiterated the importance of fulfilling the Constitutional obligation, and every Five Year Plan attempted to reach this goal, in reality the share of higher and technical education continuously increased from the First Five Year plan to 1968-69. To some extent, the perception that elementary education was a 'public good' and a welfare activity to be provided by the government

PLAN EXPENDITURE ON DIFFERENT SECTORS OF EDUCATION (Percentage)



Source: Spreading the Light of Education, Dept. of Education, MHRD, 1997

and that higher and technical education was a crucial factor for economic development, tilted the balance in favour of the latter. Thus, the share of higher education continued to remain high even during the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Five Year Plans.

In the case of adult education, on the other hand, there was an official recognition of the link between primary and adult education. The First Five Year Plan, for instance, had observed that 'the programme of primary education is considerably handicapped without a corresponding programme of the education of adults'. But the emphasis was laid on the rapid expansion of the formal school system, and adult education was relegated to a relatively unimportant position in the general scheme of education. As a result, the financial allocations were meagre in the First, Second and Third Five Year Plans. Throughout the 1960s, various government committees drew attention to the urgent need to tackle the problem of adult illiteracy. By far the most comprehensive of these was the Report of the Education Commission (1964-66). The Commission urged that it was the failure of the formal system of education that had necessitated a two-pronged strategy of educating the children as well as the adults. Also, it was realised that the demand for the education of children could be generated only if the adults were made literate.

Even with regard to education of girls and women, while there was an awareness of persistent illiteracy and wide male-female gaps, there was a general feeling that increasing and expanding infrastructure and supply would automatically enhance access.

This was true up to a point— female enrolment increased phenomenally in the first three decades. But one of the serious omissions was the inability to address persistent gender, caste and community based disparities in access. As a result, women belonging to some socio-economic groups, especially in backward regions of the country, were left out of the formal stream of education. Declining resource allocation for adult education notwithstanding, the government appointed numerous commissions and committees since 1950 to consider and study the problem of women's education and innumerable reports were tabled in Parliament and discussed in the Planning Commission. These documents recognised that the major stumbling block for the participation of women was their poverty and that women from poor communities, especially in rural areas, needed special attention. Various strategies, starting from flexible school timings to decentralised planning and administration were recommended time and again in these reports.

The rapid and unplanned expansion of higher education resulted in deterioration of standards and creation of problems of educated unemployed youth. In elementary education, on the other hand, problems of wastage and stagnation continued as no major structural changes were made in the existing educational system. It was at this juncture that the National Policy on Education (1986), along with its Programme of Action, was enunciated. Based on an in-depth review of educational performance in the country and formulated through an intensive process of nation-wide consultation, the NPE 1986 (later revised in 1992), redefined

educational priorities and made a new attempt to cope with three strands that have influenced educational policy in India viz. those relating to issues of quantity, quality and equity.

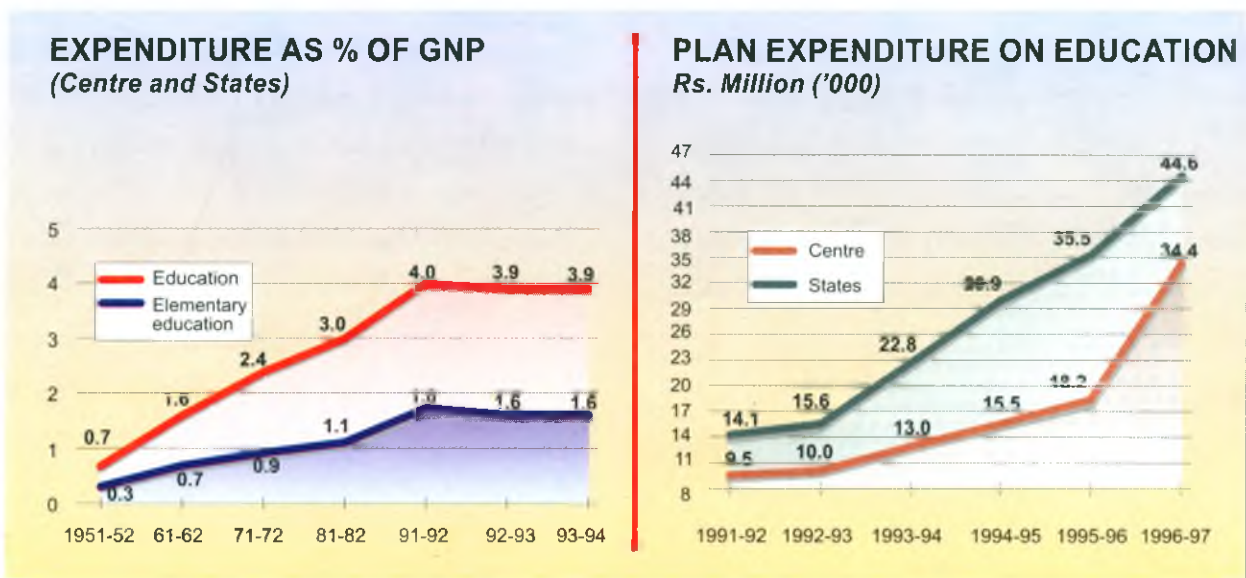
The National Policy on Education (1986, 1992) gave the highest priority to universalisation of elementary education and adult education. While this was reflected in the higher allocation of resources, other measures were also included to improve the overall quality of the educational system such as giving as much importance to retention and levels of achievement as enrolment, and focusing on the more difficult aspects of access—such as ensuring access to girls and the disadvantaged groups. There was also the realisation of the need for people’s involvement

The National Policy on Education (1986, 1992) gave the highest priority to universalisation of elementary education and adult education. There was also the realisation of the need for people’s involvement through the setting up of the village education committees. The Policy reiterated the need for decentralisation in education, keeping the district as the basic unit for planning and management.

through the setting up of the village education committee. The Policy reiterated the need for decentralisation in education, keeping the district as the basic unit for planning and management. It was also during this period that World Bank and other international donor agencies started emphasising the need to invest in education of girls as the only way to address issues of population growth, maternal and child health, and mortality

and morbidity-related issues.

The educational priorities enunciated by NPE, 1986, have continued through the 90s. This is reflected in the higher financial allocations that have been made to elementary and adult education in recent years. The graphs below show how the priorities in



Source: Spreading the Light of Education, Dept. of Education, MHRD, 1997; Selected Educational Statistics, MHRD 1995; Annual Report 1996-96, Dept. of Education, MHRD.

financial allocations have changed over the years.

Political commitment to EFA found an expression in the manifestos of the political parties in the last general elections. Thus, the manifestos of most political parties expressed a strong commitment to promote the education of children as well as of adults.

Reaffirmation of the political commitment is also reflected in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the present government which resolved to make right to free and compulsory education a fundamental right and to enforce it through suitable statutory measures.

The Committee of State Education Ministers which was set up to examine the implications of the aforesaid resolution recommended that the Constitution be amended to make the right to free and compulsory education from six to fourteen years of age a fundamental right and to make it a fundamental duty of the parents to provide opportunities for education to children of this age group. A Constitutional Amendment Bill has been tabled in the Parliament, in July 1997, to give effect to these recommendations. When passed, states and Union Territories would be required to enact laws for the enforcement of free and compulsory education within one year from the commencement of the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Act, 1997.

Status of Elementary and Adult Education in India

Elementary Education

The elementary education system in India has become one of the largest in the world with 150.74 million children enrolled in 1995-96 in the age-group of 6-14 years covering about 91 per cent of the children in this age group. Of these, 109.73 million children were enrolled in 5,90,421 primary schools and 41.01 million in 1,71,216 upper primary schools. There are 2.90 million teachers—1.74 million employed in primary schools and 1.16 million in upper primary schools. 95 per cent of rural population living in 8.26 lakh habitations have a school within a walking distance of 1 km. and 84 per cent have upper primary schooling facility within a walking distance of 3 kms.

While these could be regarded as impressive achievements, what is disquieting are the low retention as well as low achievement levels. According to the government statistics, the drop-out rate at the primary level is decreasing. Yet, it is still as high as 36.3 per cent for primary schools and 52.7 per cent for

upper primary level for 1994-95. On the other hand, various studies have shown that the levels of learner achievement are rather low.

Also, national averages tend to mask wide regional disparities. While the proportion of never-enrolled children has declined in all states, the proportion is still quite high in the states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. A significant gap between male and female literacy rates continues to remain despite intensive efforts to bridge it. In 1995-96, girls accounted for only 43.2 per cent of the total enrolment at the primary stage and 39 per cent at the upper primary stage. The

drop out rate of girls is much higher than that of boys at the primary and upper primary stages. Similarly, there is a need to improve the overall enrolment and retention rates among the children of the socially and economically disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The proportion of out-of-school and working children is extremely high.

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In order to achieve Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) by the year 2000, the following strategies have been worked out in consultation with the States and the Union Territories :-

- a) overcome the problem of school dropouts and lay emphasis on retention and achievement rather than on merely enrolment;
- b) strengthen the alternatives of schooling, particularly the Non-Formal Education system for working children, girls and children from other disadvantaged and marginalised sections of the society;
- c) shift focus from educationally backward States to educationally backward districts;
- d) population specific plans;
- e) provide universal access to schooling facilities, particularly to girls disadvantaged groups and out-of-school children;
- f) improve school effectiveness, teacher

- competence, training and motivation;
- g) introduce Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) for enhancement of learners' achievement;
- h) adopt micro planning strategies through the use of participatory processes; and
- i) . bring about a convergence of different schemes of elementary education and related services such as early childhood care and education and school health and nutrition programmes.

Adult Education

In the post-independence period, the literacy rate has shown a substantial increase from about 16.7 per cent in 1951 to 52.2 per cent in 1991 for the 7+ population. As with elementary education, here too, there are sharp gender and regional disparities. There are wide regional variations from near-universal literacy in Kerala to 38.4 per cent in Bihar. There are also intra-state variations. The female literacy rate is 39.2 per cent as against 64.1 per cent

for males. Furthermore, the literacy rates among the socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) are distinctly lower than that of the population as a whole. The gender disparity is also conspicuous among these groups.

The Total Literacy Campaigns were launched in 1990 with the goal of making literate 100 million non-literates by 1999. After the successful experience of Ernakulum, the TLCs have now covered 429 districts to reach out to 127 million people. Out of 88.48 million learners who were enrolled, 63.64 million have been made literate. Of these, 61 per cent were female and 39 per cent were male learners.

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As a follow-up to the TLCs, post literacy campaigns have been taken up in 193 districts. They are aimed at taking the neo-literates from a dependent to self-guided learning stage as well as promoting the development of income-generating skills. Continuing Education Programme has been initiated in 36 districts to provide access to all adults for life-long

learning. These centres provide facilities such as a reading room and a library, skills improvement programme, a window for information dissemination, a centre for recreation and a place for organising cultural activities.

The substantial achievements since independence notwithstanding, India has the largest number of illiterates and out-of-school children in the world—37 per cent of the world's illiterates



(in 1991) and 21.8 per cent of out-of-school children. In terms of actual numbers, 110.90 million adults in the 15-35 age group were illiterate in 1991, of whom 61 per cent were women. In 1995-96, at least 63 million children in the 6-14 age group were out of school, of whom about 60 per cent were girls. Given the increasing demographic pressures, these numbers are likely to increase further. Also, the high infant mortality and maternal mortality rates, adverse sex ratio, and conservatism of social attitudes towards education of girls, have further exacerbated the problem of universalisation of education.

Due to the enormity of the problem, there has been a growing realisation of the need to make education

a societal responsibility whereby all sections take the responsibility for dealing with this educational challenge. Alongside, there has been a realisation that the existing organisational structures and institutions that are rigid and hierarchical, have not been effective and that alternate structures need to be created that are more facilitative and enabling so that the participation of various sections can become possible.

The section below tries to capture various trends that have surfaced in recent years, both within the country as well as internationally, that have influenced educational thinking in this decade. Prominent among this development is the focus on political and social mobilisation for EFA.

Political and Social Mobilisation for EFA— A Convergence of Efforts

In 1959, Gram Shikshan Mohim (Village Literacy Movement) was initiated in Maharashtra, first on an experimental basis in Satara district, and extended to all the districts of the state. With the Chief Minister taking a personal interest, the involvement of the entire government machinery and coordination between various departments at various levels—district, block and village—was ensured. But the crucial element in the programme was the manner in which the entire village community was successfully encouraged to

participate in the campaign. Mass meetings were held in village after village, participation of the educated people of the village was elicited, and various strategies were used for the successful implementation of the campaign. In many ways, the Gram Shikshan Mohim anticipated some of the basic elements of the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which was first taken up in Ernakulum district of Kerala in 1989. The success of the literacy campaign in Ernakulum led to a considerable revision in the strategy of the National Literacy Mission. Also,





some of the earlier adult education programmes such as the Farmers' Functional Literacy Programme (in late 60s) and the National Adult Education Programme (in late 70s) had shown that community support was critical for the success of any adult education programme. Thus, it was realised that the mass campaign had to be based on mass mobilisation and support of the government (both central and state), district administration, non-government and voluntary organisations, people from all sections of society and from all walks of life and that a spirit of voluntarism had to be the hallmark of the campaign.

Interestingly, the experience of the Total Literacy Campaign, based on the experience of the Kerala Sashtira Sahitya Parishad, an NGO working on popularisation of science among the villagers, coincided with the experience of countries that had

undertaken literacy campaigns to deal with the problem of mass illiteracy. A study commissioned by UNESCO in the early 1980s—the findings of which were shared at an international meeting in Udaipur in 1982, highlighted some of the basic ingredients that were responsible for the success of the literacy campaigns. One of the major findings related to the importance of political will for the success of the literacy campaigns. The study showed that without its clear expression by a society's leaders, a successful campaign was most unlikely. While emphasising the ideological underpinnings of political will, the study also highlighted how all societies are capable of ideological commitment and can draw upon the cultural, moral, and spiritual resources of the people by challenging them to action and mobilising them around nationally defined issues.



Alongside, mobilisation of the masses and of the state also needed to take place to ensure the success of the mass literacy campaign. This was seen as a popular expression of the leadership's political will. No mass literacy campaign had succeeded without mass mobilisation, including that of personnel and resources within the government and in the political system.

The need to make education a societal responsibility, came out of a growing realisation that the sheer scale of achieving education for all entailed an entirely different way of conceiving and managing learning, away from a top-heavy, centralised model toward a more decentralised, democratic one.

Delhi in December 1993 and reaffirmed their commitment to pursue the goals set in Jomtien and at the World Summit for Children. One of the philosophical underpinnings of the EFA movement that received endorsement from these leaders was that of the need to forge alliances between different sectors of society, including students, parents, teachers and the community, along with the media, industry and different levels of government.

The experience of the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) in the late 80s-early 90s validated the importance of political and social mobilisation for initiating a process of social churning whereby a favourable environment for literacy could get created and literacy could find a place on the national agenda.

In 1990, UNESCO took the initiative, together with the World Bank, UNICEF, and UNDP, to organise at Jomtien, Thailand, the World Conference on Education for All. This marked the starting point for an unprecedented mobilisation of the international community on behalf of education. This cooperation has continued at the major conferences organised by the United Nations in recent years.

The Jomtien conference injected an urgent challenge into the educational landscape, and spelt out the movement's principles and strategies. Born out of the Jomtien conference, the leaders of the nine most populous countries of the world came together in

The need to make education a societal responsibility, came out of a growing realisation that the sheer scale of achieving education for all entailed an entirely different way of conceiving and managing learning, away from a top-heavy, centralised model toward a more decentralised, democratic one. There was also a realisation that beyond high-level political commitment, the goals for EFA would not be achieved without a strong degree of social mobilisation, meaning people's participation through organised and systematic actions. But for people to participate, structures of governance had to become more flexible and responsive to local needs. Also, the trend towards democratisation had to be accompanied by a gradual decentralisation of power from the central government to the states, districts and villages.

Independent India's attempt to bring about democratic decentralisation dates back to the days of the community development programme that

of the community development programme that was launched in 1952. Thereafter in the early 1960s, most of the states passed the Panchayati Raj Acts. However, after the initial enthusiasm, interest of the states in democratic decentralisation waned. It was only in 1992 that the 73rd and 74th amendment of the Indian Constitution opened a new chapter in the process of democratic decentralisation by making it mandatory for all states to establish regular democratically elected bodies for local self-government. The National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action which were revised in 1992, while noting the constitutional amendments, suggested, among other things, the constitution of a village education committee :

“...which would be responsible for administration of delegated powers in the field of education at the village level.”

Its major responsibility being the :

“... operationalisation of micro-level planning and school mapping in the village through systematic house-to-house survey and periodic discussions with the parents.”

For these and other functions it would be necessary to vest village education committees with appropriate statutory and necessary financial and administrative authority. The Programme of Action suggested that the state government would consider entrusting these committees with the following functions :

“...generating and sustaining awareness among the village community, ensuring participation of all segments of population; and developing teacher/instructor and community partnership to oversee and manage the effective and regular functioning of the schools and centres.”

Reflection of Political and Social Mobilisation Strategies in Some EFA Initiatives

The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien in 1990, is a landmark in that it unfolded the possibility of donor assistance for basic education. Donors recognised that investing in human resources paid rich economic dividends. Education of the girl child was particularly seen as a positive contributing factor in controlling population growth. Policy makers and planners who had earlier been arguing for greater allocations for elementary education realised that they could mobilise additional resources through foreign aid. As a result, a wide range of education programmes and projects were introduced with bilateral assistance. By 1992, the World Bank emerged as a major player in the education scenario. Prior to 1990, a few pilot projects had been designed to address certain facets of basic education. Among these were:-

- Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project for improving classroom transaction by training teachers to adopt more child-centre and activity oriented approaches. The project also undertook construction of 3,255 classrooms and 1,070 teacher centres (with British ODA assistance).
- Mahila Samakhya—an education programme for women’s empowerment (with the assistance

from the Government of Netherlands)

- Shiksha Karmi Project which aimed at providing learning opportunities by recruiting local volunteers in remote villages where teacher absenteeism was high (with SIDA assistance)

The UNICEF-assisted Bihar Education Project (BEP) set the pace for comprehensive projects aimed at restructuring of primary education as a whole in selected districts. BEP was followed by Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan also with SIDA assistance. The concept of comprehensive district-based projects came of age with the launching of the District Primary Education Project (DPEP)- the primary education project that has received financial support from IDA. Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) that have been launched by the National Literacy Mission, however, have not received any foreign funding.

An attempt is made below to describe some of these initiatives that have focussed on political and social mobilisation for achieving the goal of education for all.

National Literacy Mission

The establishment of the National Literacy Mission

in 1988 gave to literacy and adult education, primacy of place on the national agenda. Then in 1990, came the unique experiment in Ernakulum district of Kerala where a campaign approach was adopted. This was characterised by large scale mobilisation of people from all walks of life through a multifaceted communication strategy that highlighted the vital link between literacy and living. The essence of the campaign was to generate a positive demand for learning as a tool for social change. The campaign for total literacy that was spearheaded by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad— an NGO working for popularising science among villagers— demonstrated how an alliance and a partnership could be established between the bureaucracy at the district level on the one hand, and the social activists and volunteer groups on the other. The successful experience of Ernakulum gave birth to the concept of Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) in the 90s. Total Literacy Campaign is a planned, coordinated and

comprehensive district level drive, with identified time-bound objectives. It has a target of making 100 million people in the 15-35 age group literate by 1999.

The National Literacy Mission has a three-tiered structure. At the national and state level are the National and State Literacy Mission Authority that support and provide direction to the programme. At the district level, an autonomous organisation called the Zilla Saksharta Samiti, is registered to provide a forum for individuals and organisations to work together. This samiti often constitutes a mix of government officials, elected political leaders, NGOs, representatives of mass organisations, including women's organisations. In most districts, the Collector becomes the chairperson of the Zilla Saksharta Samiti (ZSS) as he/she is then able to galvanise the support of different development departments in the implementation of the TLC. The





Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) a national NGO with state level groups, has been providing on-going support to TLCs.

The initiation of the TLC begins with a process of consultation and consensus-building between government officials, political leaders, teachers and students, activist groups, cultural troupes. After the setting up of the Zilla Saksharta Samiti, a detailed survey is conducted in the district to enumerate and identify the non-literate people. The process of conducting the survey also provides opportunities for person to person contact and interaction, as well as for identifying the literacy volunteers and master trainers. The innovative aspect of the TLC model is the emphasis that is put on the creation of a favourable environment for literacy. This environment building phase consists of the use of traditional folk media forms and of 'kala jathas' that

consist of cultural troupes that perform street corner plays. Conventional media like the electronic media, press, posters, banners, hoardings and other non-traditional forms such as padayatras, prabhat pheris, are all used with great effect. The basic objective of the environment building phase is to mobilise public opinion, sensitise the educated sections of the community so that they come forward as literacy volunteers and mobilise and motivate the non-literate adults to participate as learners in the literacy campaign.

Political support from all political parties is ensured by involving the political leaders in organisational structures that are set up and in the events that are specially organised to sustain the momentum that is generated for the literacy campaign. Social mobilisation is attempted by garnering support for the campaign from different sections of the society



by setting up support structures that provide technical resource support to the campaign.

After the success of the Ernakulum experiment in Kerala, the TLC model has now been used to cover 429 out of India's 520 districts. Adult literacy programmes were earlier considered a welfare activity to be performed by the adult education department. This mindset has undergone a change for there is a growing realisation that the problem of illiteracy is a societal responsibility and that partnerships have to be forged between the bureaucracy, different sections of the society and the community. Experience has generally shown that women have participated in TLCs in large numbers. With the emphasis on mobilisation, women have received a social sanction to participate in the literacy campaign without the hindrance of their husbands and their parents-in-law. The experience of the anti-arrack agitation that was spearheaded by the village women of the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh has shown how the literacy campaign provided the impetus to women to organise against a social evil that plagued their lives and affected the well-being of their families. In Puddukotai district of Tamil Nadu, as the village women started to participate in the literacy campaign, they learnt how to ride a bicycle and thereby felt empowered as they became physically mobile. In a large number of districts, the TLCs reduced the distance between the Collector and other district level officials, and the poor and the

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disadvantaged groups. For vast sections of poor people, TLCs provided an opportunity to make their voices heard before the district administration. Another positive impact has been the impetus they have provided to primary education. It has been reported that enrolment and retention levels have increased

after a TLC.

NLM has visualised the post literacy programme as an extension of the TLC in the continuum of life-long learning. Each TLC is followed by a two-year post literacy programme, to be implemented in a mission mode. After the completion of this phase, an institutionalised mechanism for continuing education through continuing education centres is provided to enable the neo-literate adults to retain, improve and apply their basic knowledge and skills in fulfilling their needs and aspirations.

The TLCs have brought about a tremendous social awakening in some districts. But sustaining the momentum of the campaign is proving to be difficult. This calls for creative responses for ensuring that the community is involved in different ways so that the community gradually begins to take charge of the programme. If this does not happen, then there is the danger of routinisation and ritualising of the processes that would rob community participation of its essential vitality and spontaneity. In the Hindi belt (comprising the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), on the other



Community's Commitment to Continuing Education

The literacy campaign was launched in Birbhum in 1990 and was implemented with full involvement of the people and the district administration working together in a spirit of cooperation. The literacy campaign has brought the officials closer to the people and to their problems. Community members are no longer hesitant to contribute to the development plans of their region. They have welcomed the plans for opening continuing education centres in every village. These multi-service centres would provide library facilities, literacy instruction, quality of life improvement programmes, skill development schemes and would also function as information windows disseminating useful, life-related information.

Birbhum has a high percentage of forest cover. For the women of the district, this provides economic opportunity. They collect leaves from the forest, stitching them together to make disposable plates. The demand for these plates is considerable and gives to the women a small but continuous

source of income. The literacy programme has taught them to put part of their earnings in banks. Thus in times of need they now have access to micro-credit.

Due to an effective literacy campaign, enrolment in primary schools showed a marked improvement. People are more interested in education now. The impact has also been felt in health programmes, immunization and the adoption of family planning measures. In recent times, the community stood together and combated what was threatening to become an epidemic of gastroenteritis.

The campaign also spread awareness and promoted more access to information about development schemes. New opportunities to augment income through pisciculture have come up. The community, through voluntary labour, has dug fishery tanks in this region which provides people of this largely fish eating area with a nutritious diet as well as additional income.

hand, the TLC model has shown how in a deeply entrenched feudal and patriarchal society, factors such as caste, class and gender divide, can militate against meaningful community participation. As a result, it is difficult to elicit community support and participation and there has been over-reliance on the initiative and drive shown by the bureaucracy.

These experiences have highlighted the need for decentralisation and delegation of power and authority. The new strategies envisage devolution of power for approval/implementation of literacy programmes to State Literacy Mission Authorities, establishing strong linkages between literacy campaigns and Panchayati Raj institutions, involvement of the Panchayati Raj functionaries in

the literacy movement and establishment of strong linkages between the literacy programme and other development programmes.

Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish Projects in Rajasthan

The Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi Projects are integral and strategic components of renewed and intensified efforts of the Government of Rajasthan for achieving the goal of basic education for all.

Shiksha Karmi Project

To overcome the problem of teacher absenteeism, the concept of 'barefoot teachers' was introduced by the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) which is being implemented in Rajasthan since 1987 with financial assistance from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The idea was to substitute the absent primary school teacher by a female and male 'local educational worker' who would have a certain level of education, but no prior teaching experience. The project aims at universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in remote and socio-economically backward villages in Rajasthan, with primary attention being given to girls. The project is being implemented by the Government of Rajasthan through Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Board, with assistance of voluntary agencies. SKP works on the following assumptions:-

- that a 'barefoot teacher' belonging to a local community can work effectively to reach every child in the locality;
- that if a person is willing to work as a social

worker, the lack of formal educational qualifications can be made up by intensive in-service education and training; and

- that education must have community support and local ownership in order to meet the needs of the deprived sections of the rural areas.

An important role has been given to voluntary organisations and the community in providing continuous support and encouragement to the Shiksha Karmis. SKP has constituted Village Education Committees (VECs) to promote community involvement in primary education and encourage village level planning.

The role of the VEC is to mobilise resources for maintenance, repair and construction of school infrastructure. The committee assists Shiksha Karmis in getting all the boys and girls to enrol in

Lending a helping hand

In many villages, SKs have been able to mobilise local support for the school buildings. In village Raymalvada of Osian panchayat samiti, a very good piece of land has been donated for SK school by a community member. In village Bharla of Arain panchayat samiti also, a villager has donated a substantial piece of land for the SK school. In Lunkaransar panchayat samiti, some people have made financial contributions as well as given major support for the construction of the school building.

the Day Schools and Prehar Pathshalas (schools of convenient timing). The VEC helps in determining the school calendar and school timings in consultation with the local community and the Shiksha Karmis. They also identify local talent i.e. story tellers, musicians and artists who can be associated with enrichment of teaching process in the Day Schools and Prehar Pathshalas. The VEC assists Shiksha Karmis in running the village/school library. The SKP places funds at the disposal of the VEC to be utilised for minor repairs of the school buildings. The funds are released by Shiksha Karmi Board in proportion to the money raised by VECs.

Apart from the VEC, NGOs also assist the Shiksha Karmi Board in implementation of the project. They are the local resource base for SKP and have the following functions :

- (i) assist in identification and selection of villages and Shiksha Karmis;
- (ii) facilitate formation of VECs
- (iii) assist in training and evaluation
- (iv) assist Resource Units in the modification of curriculum for local relevance
- (v) provide training in local communication skills to Shiksha Karmis
- (vi) establish and run Resource Units on the basis of their capabilities, past experience, presence of physical infrastructure and availability of human resources
- (vii) run Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (residential schools for women)
- (viii) run Aangan Pathshalas (courtyard schools) for girls in their neighbourhood
- (ix) review and participate in evaluation activities on a continuing basis.

It is the community support and the participation of the NGOs that has helped in improving the physical conditions and the environment of the primary schools, as well as in promoting the education of the girls. Different strategies have been used to improve the status of girls' education, as enrolment, attendance and retention of girls is the major challenge in the project. Some of the strategies include :

- increasing the number of female SKs and to have one female SK (Mahila Shiksha Karmi) in each school; and
- starting special residential schools for women, Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (MPKs) as there are not enough women with sufficient education. In these schools women go through intensive training for two years in order to reach the level of five years of education;
- starting special night schools, or rather schools of convenient timings, Prehar Pathshalas (PPs);
- introducing female escorts, Mahila Sahyogis (MSs) to accompany girls in remote places between home and school, and to take care of the girls' siblings during school hours; and
- starting courtyard schools adapted to girls, Aangan Pathshalas (APs) in remote villages. The school is run by a female SK.

SKP is now operational in 2,000 villages in 127 blocks of 29 districts of Rajasthan. There has been a 300 per cent increase in enrolment of children in the 6-14 age group in Shiksha Karmi schools and Prehar Pathshalas (PPs) from 30,000 at the time of taking over under SKP to 1,58,568 at present. One of the outstanding achievements of SKP is 100 per cent enrolment of

children in the 6-14 age group in 469 villages.

Lately, SKP is in the process of reducing its direct involvement. The strategy is to achieve maximum decentralisation by providing a regional support structure for better management. For this purpose, resource units are now functioning as core management groups comprising of SKs, master trainers and mahila sahayogis. This resource unit enjoys the autonomy to implement the programme within the framework of the established norms.

Lok Jumbish

Lok Jumbish translates as a movement of the people. It has a holistic understanding about the problem of universalising primary education and is implemented by establishing an interface between the local community, the teaching profession, the educational administration and the learners.

This project was initiated in 1992 and is now operational in 75 blocks of 27 districts of Rajasthan. It is funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Government of India and the state government in the ratio of 3:2:1. An independent autonomous body, the Lok Jumbish Parishad has been set up for the management of this programme. The general council and the executive committee have representatives from the Ministry of Human Resource Development,

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Government of Rajasthan, Teachers' Associations and NGOs. Block level management committees have been set up for decentralised decision-making and implementation. Review and planning meetings are held once in every two months and selected clusters in blocks have been entrusted to NGOs. Lok Jumbish works closely with the teachers

and their associations. The teachers are given a 10-day training initially, followed by monthly workshops and a 3-week specialised training every year.

The goals of Lok Jumbish are the following :

- providing access to primary education to all children upto 14 years of age;
- ensuring that all enrolled children regularly attend school/sahaj shiksha (Non-Formal Education) centres and complete primary education;
- ensuring that the quality of education is improved and that all children achieve at least the minimum levels of learning;
- creating necessary structures and setting in motion processes that would empower women and make education an instrument of women's equality;
- pursuing the goal of equity in education;
- making necessary modifications in the content and process of education in order that they relate better to the environment, people's culture and to their living and working conditions; and



- effectively involve people in the planning and management of education.

- flexibility of management; and
- creation of multiple levels of leadership committed to quality and mission mode.

In order to reach the above goals, the following guiding principles have been enunciated:

- emphasis on the process of learning and not just the output;
- building partnerships;
- decentralised functioning;
- participatory learning;
- integration with the mainstream education system;

Community participation not only involves the villagers, teachers and the field staff and students but also NGOs. Apart from community involvement at the local level, at the macro level, it involves consultants in the fields of basic education, pedagogy, gender, community development, management, educational planning and architecture. This is indicative of the growing need

A VEC at Work in LJ

The VEC has its roots in the core group (Prerak Dal) of concerned villagers that is formed as an “activating agency” to mobilise the community. The teacher forms the centre of the core team. It also includes functionaries of development programmes at the village level. the core team expands into the VEC, taking into its wings elected ward members and the head of the Gram Panchayat (the Sarpanch). A part of the VEC is the Mahila Samooh, a collective of village women.

The Mahila Samoohs focus on girls’ enrolment and retention in school and also act as a focal point for women’s access to development projects. It comprises of respected women in the village representing all castes.

Mapping exercises, door-to-door surveys and regular, periodic discussions with all villagers,

especially parents and adult illiterates, mark the beginning of the VEC’s work.

Mapping exercises have raised the awareness of marginalised and disadvantaged communities. They have also highlighted the improvement in the quality of life of families whose children are school-goers. At one level, it has managed to being a long-overdue process of social integration. At another level, it has encouraged individual families to break with tradition and send children to school.

The insistence of surveying all homes has brought the underprivileged sections within the ambit of education. It also begins a process of breaking down age-old barriers, which, in many cases, socially ostracised some segments of the community.

Each VEC sets up a village education fund.



for specialists in various aspects of education for making interventions at the grass-root level.

Community involvement is the key factor for the success of the project. The Village Education Committees (VECs)/Core Teams and Women's Groups, carefully formed and trained through environment building activities in the LJ programme, are actively involved in school-mapping and micro-planning. School Building committees (Bhawan Nirman Samitis) plan and organise repair, maintenance and design of school buildings. These committees consist of at least two women members, the school teacher, members of the VEC, the mason and the architect. The aim is to train local people to take the responsibility for the design, management and execution of the building development programme. This culture of participation would in the long run, help in taking up the maintenance of school infrastructure at the village level. Villagers have already started devising innovative ways of making a contribution in cash and in kind.

Mobilising the village community to take responsibility to ensure quality education for every child, is the core strategy of LJ. In the first phase, mobilisation efforts are focused on identification of cultural groups, making door-to-door contact and creating an atmosphere for discussing educational issues. Regular visits to the selected villages are made over a long period of time by the LJ staff. Through this interaction, the confidence of the villagers is gained and potential volunteers who will work towards improving education, are identified. These individuals, men and women, gradually assume the

responsibility of becoming the Core Team.

Women's groups have been mobilised in the villages where environment building activities have taken place. The gathering of women to discuss social and economic problems has created an entry point for discussions on the need for girls' education. Articulate women are hand-picked to participate in a five-day training programme. After completion of the training, these women form a women's group, mahila samooch, which assumes the role of a catalyst in the village.

Members of women's groups and core teams receive training focused on analysing the problems of education at the village level within the context of overall development, e.g. lack of drinking water might be identified as a problem along with the lack of school building. The training and environment building activities prepare the community to carry out school mapping and micro-planning.

Core team members learn how to carry out school mapping and involve a large section of the village in this process. All children in the 5-14 age group are identified, their educational status noted and the nature of work done by out-of-school children is recorded. Simple symbols are used to record all aspects so that non-literate villagers can participate in the exercise. The information gathered through school mapping is shared at the village meetings. At the end of the process, a Village Education Plan is prepared. The plans are forwarded to the Block Management Committee for approval.

In the formation of the core teams, adequate representation of women is insisted upon; similarly, it is generally ensured that persons from the deprived communities become members of the core team. Forming a separate forum for women through mahila samooch (women's group) is a prerequisite for ensuring that in the tradition-bound rural milieu of Rajasthan, participation of girls in primary education becomes possible.

The main distinguishing feature of LJ is the bottom-up approach and the intensive mobilisation and support strategy at the village level. Through community involvement, with VEC playing a key role, the education system is made accountable to the community so that the community takes the responsibility for ensuring quality education for all school-going children. However, the development of VEC has been slow due to the fact that it needs total community participation and this needs time. In the context of the current move to transfer the responsibility for primary education to the panchayati raj bodies, LJ is now in the process of evolving norms for setting up VECs and formulating their responsibilities as education committees of Gram Panchayats.

Some significant outcomes of Lok Jumbish during the last five years of its operation are as follows:

- there has been an impressive increase in enrolment—10 per cent per year for girls and 7 per cent for boys.
- an effective programme of NFE (called Sahaj Shiksha) has been implemented—as many as 95 per cent of these centres are running efficiently

and achieving equivalence with formal education.

- there is a tremendous gain in learning achievement—7 per cent annually in language and 9 per cent in Mathematics.

Mobilising Women for Education: The Mahila Samakhya Experience

The National Policy on Education, 1986, was a landmark in the field of women's education, for it saw, empowerment of women as a critical precondition for their participation in the education process. To concretise this policy objective into an implementable strategy, the Mahila Samakhya Programme was designed to mobilise and organise women for education through creating an environment for learning.

The Mahila Samakhya programme, which is currently being implemented in seven states in the country (UP, AP, Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh & Assam) and covers over 5000 villages, has been recognised as an effective and successful mobilisation strategy. The key elements of this programme relate both to a wider understanding and definition of education, as well as to strategies which emphasise processes rather than the mechanical fulfillment of set targets.

Mahila Samakhya understands "education" in the broadest sense of the term. Education is a continuous process to critically engage with one's environment and society, and to acquire the knowledge and skills to negotiate change from a position of strength. The principal strategy is to



mobilise and organise women into collectives called 'mahila sanghas', providing them the space and gender sensitive inputs to reflect on their lives, to identify their needs and evolve collective ways of dealing with their problems. It is in this process, as women begin to question, analyse, learn new ways of thinking and doing, set their agendas for change, and make informed choices, that terms such as 'participation' and 'mobilising for education' gain new meaning. The experience of the programme over the past seven years has shown that the learning cycle invariably generates a demand for literacy, a demand which it must be emphasised is articulated by the women as a felt need.

The multi-dimensional aspects of education as life-skills, information, knowledge, and literacy, are all evident in the programme. Education as life skills connotes confidence and self esteem, at individual and collective levels, to affirm existence as an equal

partner in society, a loss of fear, gaining recognition and respect within the family and the community, and ability to take decisions and act for change. This spiral of confidence and self esteem has enabled the women and 'sanghas' to effectively apply information and knowledge and competently chart and map new horizons for themselves in a variety of ways.

The diverse impact of this learning process is discernible in all the MS states. Women are addressing issues of access and improvement of civic amenities, problems of drinking water, wages, housing, ensuring education for girls, making schools and the health system more accountable, bravely confronting violence against women and social practices like child marriage and the *devadasi* system, confidently interacting and negotiating with power structures and are effectively participating in Panchayati Raj institutions. In all this, women are learning why problems exist, what are the

obstacles- social and structural which obstruct resolution of problems, from whom help can be sought and above all, the need for their own initiative to begin the process of initiating change. 'Sanghas' are now gradually moving from addressing livelihood issues to articulating their concerns on social practices which subordinate women.

While traversing the difficult path of addressing several of the above concerns, in several instances women have articulated a desire to acquire reading and writing skills. In most instances, feeling empowered, gaining knowledge, getting things done, have all been experienced without becoming literate. In some cases, the recognition of the need for literacy skills has come the hard way.

An innovative initiative in the area of girls/women's education has been the Mahila Shikshan Kendras. These are residential courses, aimed at developing a pool of aware, trained and literate women at the village level. As of date, there are 10 Mahila Shikshan Kendras in operation. While the direct impact of the MS educational strategy is yet to be fully felt, its impact is most visible in the confidence with which 'sanghas' are taking an active role in village education committees, making schools work, ensuring that the teachers come regularly and in many instances, ensuring that in their villages, children, particularly girl children, have access to formal education.

The efficacy of the Mahila Samakhya strategy of a long process of conscientisation was put to test with the announcement of statutory reservations for

Nurturing creative initiatives

In Banda UP women trained as handpump mechanics became literate via the language of handpump maintenance. Region specific curricula have been developed around the concerns of women like violence, health and herbal medicine, wages, environment, forests among many others. Women have begun to effectively address the issues of the girl child education in addition to their own education. Sanghas are active partners in the diverse educational initiatives of the programme. The ECCE centres in Gujarat, the Bala Mitra Kendras/Jagjagi centres(NFE) for girls in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, the Udan Khatolas in UP all provide a creative learning opportunity. Sanghas assist in selecting teachers, monitoring the centres, mobilising the community for education and in some cases (as in Andhra Pradesh) make some financial contribution as well.

women in elections to Panchayat Raj institutions. Training and workshops were organised, information in an accessible manner was prepared and the interactive environment of the programme enabled a quick and wide dissemination of the new PR Act. Women in the sanghas were quick to respond. Having learnt about the new bill, and of the expanded role for women envisaged in PR institutions, Sangha women in all the states put up candidates for election at different levels, made critical political choices in casting votes and

began to formalise their identity at the village level.

Yet another significant outcome of the programme has been the alternative streams that have emerged to address women's issues. A unique initiative has been the formation of Nari Adalats in Gujarat as an alternative forum of justice not only for women but for the community as well. Armed with a good knowledge of laws and procedures, women in Baroda began these as forums to address the cases of poor rural women who have been subjected to personal violence. As the Nari Adalats have gained in credibility and respect, a variety of cases ranging from abuse to land disputes are being brought for adjudication. In a completely different manner, the skilled women handpump mechanics and masons of Banda in UP have formed a cooperative, Vanangana, which not only imparts training to other women, but also takes over the maintenance of all handpumps in one block as well as several civil works in the area.

This has not been a linear process of learning and empowerment. There have been many crests and troughs, several steps backwards before a step could be taken forward. The zest and drive of the women has kept the programme vibrant. How will these learning processes be sustained in the long run? This is the challenge. Recognising that sanghas in isolation will not be able to survive, attempts are being made to build lateral solidarities among sanghas, and strengthening linkages with other groups and organisations, to enable women to consolidate their gains, continue to expand their

universe of learning and work towards fashioning a gender-just society.

Bihar Education Project (BEP)

BEP was launched as a 'mission' programme in 1991 with the aid of UNICEF, Government of India and Government of Bihar. It is now in operation in 7 districts of Bihar.

The main focus of BEP is universalisation of elementary education, particularly children in the 6-11 age group, with special emphasis on the girl child. Several new interventions have been made at the pre-primary, formal and non-formal education systems. Universal access, universal participation and universal achievement are the three-pronged thrust areas of BEP. In order to make primary education accessible, residential institutions like Aashram Shalas and low cost hostels have been set up in the remote areas. Shiksha Karmi centres have also been established so that the problem of teacher absenteeism does not arise. Local educated youth with no prior teaching experience are being trained to function as Shiksha Karmis. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of school enrolment so much so that new schools have a double shift to accommodate all the students.

The other objectives of BEP have been :

- drastic reduction in illiteracy, particularly in the 15-35 age group, bringing the literacy level in this age group at least to 80 per cent;
- modification in the educational system to serve the goal of equality of women and their empowerment;

making necessary intervention to provide equal educational opportunities to adults and children belonging to the 'lower caste', ethnic minorities and the poorest sections of society; relating education to the working and living conditions of the people, improving thereby their ability to cope with the problems of livelihood, environment etc.; and laying special emphasis in all educational activities on science and environment and inculcation of a sense of social justice.

The critical aspect of BEP strategy is the active involvement of the community, the parents of the children attending the primary schools or NFE centres and adults who are expected to benefit from literacy programmes. In order to facilitate the participation of people at the grassroots level, the BEP has two people-based structures—the Village Education Committees (VECs) and the Mahila Samoohs.

The BEP conceptualises the VEC as a people's body, constituted by the villagers themselves and evolved through a process of self-determination. The VEC plays a critical role in the environment creation phase. The process of constituting VEC begins with the convening of the 'Aam Sabha' of the villagers. In this meeting of the villagers, detailed information about the BEP and its functions is given to the villagers. The members of the VEC are then chosen in the 'Aam Sabha'. VEC takes the full responsibility for the village school and its functioning. It is entrusted with the tasks of constructing and repairing the school building, and ensuring the

enrolment and retention of children in the school, and attendance of teachers. It undertakes school mapping and micro-planning, providing an alternative to the top-down authoritarian management system. It also brings people together and creates a positive environment for education through prabhat-pheris, organisation of cultural and sports events. Hence the VEC is the cornerstone of BEP. Due representation is given to women and socially disadvantaged groups.

Teachers have been identified as the most important group who are instrumental in the development of a community network. A new teacher training strategy has emerged as a result of intensive participatory processes. The training is residential in nature, aims at renewal of teacher training practices and has a strong input of teacher motivation. The teachers are usually given total freedom to function. For instance, in Chaupatia block of West Champaran district, there has been a changed village environment, where the school and the community have come closer. The sole credit for all this goes to the teachers who enthusiastically participated in all the programmes of the BEP.

Women's empowerment and the equality of opportunities to the disadvantaged groups have been the mainstay of BEP. Efforts are made not only to provide opportunities, but also to create conditions whereby women can avail of them and articulate their demands. An extremely vibrant Mahila Samakhya programme is an integral component of the BEP which has been initiated in over 1,680 villages, spread over 26 blocks.

The core objective of MS is to form strong, aware, active and responsible women's groups in the project villages called Mahila Samoochs. The entire 'Jag jagi' or the educational programme of the MS is an attempt to create an awareness amongst women and girls about the importance of education. Bal jag jagi centres have been formed for pre-primary or school preparedness programmes for pre-school children. The centres have a very positive impact on the village and their demand is increasing. Despite the fact that women find it difficult to acquire the necessary piece of land for the construction of 'kutir' where women's groups can hold their meetings, women's samoochs are determined to have a place of their own. 26 'kutirs' have been constructed so far by the samoochs. In the process of 'kutir' construction, the samoochs become stronger.

Besides the VECs and MS programme, village men and women also contribute in the mobilisation process as BEP functionaries. Shiksha Sathins go from village to village to encourage the villagers, particularly women and girls to participate in the educational programmes. Institutes of basic education like the primary schools, NFE centres, adult literacy centres, Jana Shikshan Nilayams (continuing education centres) are being made accountable to the village community. This mobilisation has been tremendous as many people have donated land for schools.

There are, however, some areas that need further strengthening. One of the problems in the composition of the VEC has been that at times VEC is constituted without a proper 'Aam Sabha' of the

Power of unity

In the Jaipur village of Ranchi, Mahila Samooh constructed a Kutir for organising educational activities. A wealthy villager occupied their site and started building a house. The women protested along with a few concerned men of the village. But the men were arrested. The women got together and went to the police station and after much opposition and argument, prevailed upon the officer-in-charge. The officer-in-charge realised what the problem was. The men were then released and the wealthy landlord had to evacuate the site. This success of Mahila Samooh against stiff opposition increased their credibility and more women are now eager to join their group.

villagers. In such cases, it is not the villagers but the headmaster who chooses the members of the VEC. Obviously, a VEC constituted in this manner does not represent the villagers and is not likely to function effectively. Besides, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity of the VEC members and develop their skills in qualitative monitoring.

It has also been observed that some of the mobilising strategies like rallies, bal melas, use of mass media (electronic as well as print) are mostly operational at the block level and their penetration at the village level has not been adequate.

Considering the difficult socio-economic conditions

that prevail in Bihar, BEP has been working successfully and consistently to create a favourable environment for education of children and adults. A great deal still has to be achieved to ensure community mobilisation whereby women and the disadvantaged groups can participate without any social inhibitions.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

DPEP is India's most ambitious internationally assisted primary education programme. Launched in 1994 in 42 districts in 7 states, it now covers a total of 122 districts in 13 states. DPEP was built upon the accumulated national experiences from such projects as Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme (APPEP), Bihar Education Project (BEP), Uttar Pradesh Primary Education Project (UPBEP), and Lok Jumbish. DPEP aims at restructuring primary education so as to enhance enrolment, retention, achievement and school effectiveness.

DPEP districts are identified on the basis of two criteria :

- i) districts with a female literacy rate below the national average,
- ii) districts which have successfully completed the TLC as a result of which a demand for primary education exists.

DPEP is an attempt to initiate a process of planning from the grassroots which aims at involving and promoting local initiatives in primary education with adequate resource support and improved management mechanisms. DPEP emphasises on :

- contextuality i.e. giving primacy to local needs;
- reduction of existing gender and social disparities in educational access;
- provision of alternative schooling of comparable standards to the disadvantaged groups;
- obtaining genuine community involvement in the running of schools;



- empowerment and capacity building at the local level;
- addressing access, retention and quality issues; and
- devising an appropriate fund flow mechanism from Centre to the States.

Community participation is the corner stone of DPEP. The programme intends to elicit active participation of the community in general and of the socially and economically disadvantaged groups in particular. In order to elicit and promote community participation DPEP has created structures at the community level for popular participation. These are VEC, MTA (Mother-Teacher Association), and PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) DPEP has also devised context specific community mobilisation strategies.

DPEP stresses participatory processes whereby the local community would play an active role in promoting enrolment, retention, achievement and school effectiveness.

All the DPEP states have formed VECs whose tenure varies from three to five years and whose membership must ensure a mix of the various disadvantaged groups, as well as women. VECs have been delegated specific powers, functions and resources under DPEP so that they can participate in planning, implementation and monitoring of local level educational initiatives. They are increasingly playing the role of mobilising the community, motivating the parents to send their children to schools, raising voluntary contribution from the people.

Towards convergence

In Assam, the active community involvement in planning and implementation of the activities in the DPEP has built greater capacities at the grassroots level which would eventually result in community ownership and long term sustainability of the programme. There is a growing realisation that all community-related activities have to converge with other programmes and link up with various institutions and NGOs, particularly the ones working in the areas of health, women and child development and supplementary income generation schemes. A concerted effort in this direction is being made.

Community mobilisation strategies devised in DPEP serve multiple purposes. They are directed towards ensuring that the community is empowered to own and run the programme. DPEP's experience has shown that when interventions are tailored to suit the resources and capacities of a village, the results are promising.

Mobilisation efforts have primarily used the local media, traditional idioms and folk forms. Learning from the experience of the literacy campaigns, districts have used traditional communication forms such as folk theatre, puppet shows, kala jathas, local festive gatherings and melas, to raise people's awareness. This is followed by regular interaction between parents, opinion leaders and district functionaries through door-to-door survey and public meetings.

A gender perspective has been incorporated in all aspects of planning and implementation and is an integral part of the programme. It also seeks to :

- encourage the involvement of local communities, particularly women, in all decision making processes;
- make the educational system more sensitive and responsive to the needs of girls and women;
- enable women to demand education for themselves and their daughters; and
- manage the process of bringing about change in the educational systems.

Building capacities in planning is a primary concern at the national level. The programme aims to develop and strengthen capabilities at state, district and local levels to effectively plan for efficient implementation and management of the primary education programme. The district plans are prepared through an intensive process of interaction with the local bodies, teachers and NGOs so that they are 'owned' by all those who are to be associated in its implementation. A major task that is being undertaken in the DPEP programme is capacity building for teachers, government functionaries and officials as well as community leaders. DPEP uses and strengthens existing structures and resource institutions and develops new ones where necessary.

DPEP is designed to improve quality of teaching and learning, increase retention and expand access. The areas of pedagogical intervention are :

- i) development of textbooks and materials;
- ii) teacher training with an emphasis on multi-grade and activity based teaching; and

- iii) institution building at various levels to extend training and academic support. The long held vision for decentralised academic resource support structures at block and cluster levels has been actualised through DPEP. All DPEP districts are engaged in setting up Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres for peer interaction, decentralised training and academic supervision and support.

NGO Initiatives

NGOs experiences in the field of basic education have significantly influenced the design and the content of some of the EFA initiatives. NGOs have subsequently played a very significant role in providing a strong support structure to programmes such as Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish, BEP, DPEP etc. On their own too, they have worked out alternative and innovative approaches for providing basic education. Some of the areas in which they have made significant contribution include girls' and women's access to education, decentralised and participatory processes in planning and management, training of teachers and improving the quality and relevance of education, pedagogic and curriculum reform etc. The work of some of the NGOs is briefly described below.

PROPEL

This is an action research project for universalisation of elementary education that is undertaken by the Indian Institute of Education, Pune, Maharashtra state. The project perceives social and educational change as an integrated process in which the latent human energy necessary for propelling change and



development is released through mutual understanding and collaboration between the government and the people. The project also affirms that essentially it is the people can bring about development and that the government and other agencies have to provide the necessary support and be facilitators. It has a three-fold approach to community mobilisation (i) increasing the community's access to necessary information (ii) building up its planning and action skills through participatory problem-solving (iii) ensuring that the community decisions regarding educational activities are respected and acted upon.

The basic assumption of the project is that in the final analysis, a community approach to educational development will have to be adopted and the local community will have to be made responsible for the proper education of all its members, that is children below six years of age (child care and pre-school

education); children between 6-14 age group (primary education); young men and women in the age group 15-35 (non-formal education of youth and adults), with stress on the empowerment of girls and women in every aspect of the programme. All these programmes will have to be integrated with those of rural development. Within the framework of EFA, the project includes such mutually supportive programmes as early childhood care and education, women's empowerment, development orientation of youth, adult literacy, continuing education and recreational activities.

What PROPEL has demonstrated is that in the matter of education for all, breaking the barrier of educational orthodoxy is a tough task, but that it can be tackled successfully if communities are mobilised and assisted to determine their own educational and development needs and priorities.



M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation

Child labour continues to be a major factor in depriving children access to education. The MV Foundation has been working in Shankarpally Mandal, Andhra Pradesh, on the issue of elimination of child labour and universalisation of elementary education.

Every year, the organisation has been conducting mobilisation camps for children of bonded labour in order to withdraw them from work and admit them to appropriate levels in the schools. MV Foundation does not accept the widely held premise that children in poorer families go to work essentially to provide sustenance to the family. Their experience has shown that with a little motivation, even the children engaged in the most exploitative form of work can be withdrawn from work and admitted to schools. This is what MV Foundation has been demonstrating through its annual camps.

Another conclusion which MVF has arrived at through its experience is that children in the older age group will almost invariably drop out unless they are admitted to the class corresponding to their age.

The task of withdrawing children from work and their subsequent enrolment into formal schools is implemented with the active involvement of the youth clubs and the youth organisations, the gram panchayats and the elected representatives to the local bodies, and the parent-teacher's association attached to every village level government schools. Reaching out to the parents, children and employers through the local and already existing institutions is seen as a viable method to create a sustainable programme.

Social Welfare Research Centre

Rural working children need an educational process which is innovative in nature, so that their interests are sustained in attending school. Obviously, the timing of the school need to be considered to suit the needs of such children who come from families which cannot afford to send them to school during the day. The concept of night schools therefore becomes crucial for ensuring that the educational programme would reach out to such children. The Social Welfare Research Centre (SWRC), Tilonia, began such an experiment as far back as 1975 and the night school experiment has now been replicated by 11 organisations spread over 8 states.

SWRC's approach to education, however, is different. The night schools are places of discovery for both the children and the teacher, the focus being on learning rather than on teaching. This project makes extensive use of creative visual media. The use of puppetry and street theatre to reach out to the masses has been a major means of communication employed by this project. The children are encouraged to conceptualise and perform street plays based on various issues. This has resulted in regular puppet show and street plays being staged in the villages, which have ensured a high level of people's participation and interest. In all the schools that have started functioning, VECs have been formed which look after the day to day running of these schools.

Butterflies is a programme of street and working children that has been operating in Delhi since 1988. It aims to empower street children with the

knowledge and necessary skills necessary to protect their rights as children and provide them the necessary support and assistance for reinstatement with their families, where possible, and help them develop as respected and productive citizens. Butterflies focuses on using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a major tool for ensuring government and public accountability towards the well-being of all vulnerable children. It organises support services in the fulfillment of the street children's basic needs such as non-formal education, health care and recreation. It also organises children for collective action and networks with like-minded organisations concerned with Social Development and Children's Rights.

The long-term goals of Butterflies are to sensitise parents and the community on the issue of street children, and to prevent the breakdown of families, which often forces children to leave home and to involve the street children actively in the quest for better living conditions for themselves.

Eklavya

Founded in 1982, Eklavya is operating in several districts of Madhya Pradesh. Education for Eklavya centres around the needs and thought process of the

child which involves joyful learning. Eklavya has evolved innovative curriculum, teaching methodology, and educational materials for teaching of science and social science to students of standards VI, VII and VIII. An innovative primary school programme (classes I to V) commenced from 1987. Science popularisation and environment activities are also undertaken.

Eklavya attempts to make a "significant change in the quality of teaching materials, teacher training and evaluation, creating awareness, motivation amongst administrators, teachers, parents and the public in general to change the quality of education available to children". The aim is to "create a situation in which children can be more active participative, intellectually stimulated and creative". Active participation of teachers, children and other resource person is always sought when the programmes are formulated. Eklavya also evolves subsidiary activities outside the school structures in order to create a suitable social and intellectual environment in which innovations can flourish. Educational innovation also involves the changing of administrative structure at the macro level so that it can be made more responsive to the growing needs.

Challenges for the future

The recent initiatives in social and political mobilisation and the move towards decentralisation have to be understood against the complexities that characterise the Indian polity. Despite its federal nature, the Constitution of India gave greater power and authority to the central government than to the state governments. The setting up of the Planning Commission at the national level further exacerbated the centralising nature of the planning process. Thus, the district and lower level units were assigned the responsibility of implementing the plans prepared and approved at the state and national levels. Education in the Constitution was made a state subject and remained so until 1976 when, with the 42nd Amendment, it was placed in the Concurrent List. The purpose of doing so was to bring about some degree of uniformity and comparability across the states in the field of education. The concept of concurrency was given an operational meaning by the National Policy on Education (1986). The Policy envisaged concurrency as a 'meaningful partnership between the centre and the states.' In reality, this has not necessarily happened. For India is a multi-party democracy and while for a long time after independence, the party in power at the centre was also in power at the state levels, this has changed in recent years so that in a large number of states the

political parties in power at the state level often reflect regional aspirations of the people. As a result, polarisation of political power has often crystallised in a different direction. Even with regard to the 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution which provide enough scope for involvement of local bodies in education, it needs to be mentioned that these amendments are in the nature of 'enabling legislation' for creating these bodies at the local levels and defining the extent of their authority. The states are obliged to set up these institutions and delegate to them powers and financial resources which they consider appropriate and necessary. However, in the prevalent system of political pluralism, doubts can be raised whether the state-level leadership would be willing to share powers with the local leadership.

It is important to take note of these complexities that characterise the Indian democratic system for the very same factors noted above could either slow down or provide a tremendous fillip to the mass education of children and adults. While the recent EFA initiatives show that the strategies of political and social mobilisation are beginning to show positive results, India still has a long way to go and there is certainly no room for complacency at this stage. Some of the unfinished tasks that need attention are the following.

Sustaining community interest, motivation, and participation

The biggest challenge before the EFA initiatives is how to sustain the motivation and the interest of the community so that their sense of control and ownership of the programme begins to increase. Participation in its various dimensions, has to be recognised as a basic principle of action, an overall development strategy. A participatory culture can only grow and sustain in an environment which genuinely recognises its value. If such an environment does not exist, then the danger of bureaucratisation of the programme is very real. Overzealous officials can often enforce participation through administrative fiat. As a result, a programme can very soon lose its vitality, vigour and its momentum. This is not to suggest that the bureaucracy has no role to play. Rather, the bureaucracy has to work by forging alliances with a

variety of institutions, organisations, groups and people so that their active involvement in promoting and supporting EFA initiatives, is ensured. Sustaining community involvement for primary education also has another dimension. Because of the longer time duration involved, it will have to be sustained through certain institutionalised structures such as Parent-Teacher Associations, VECs and PRIs.

Community ownership and 'phasing out' plan

A related issue is that of community ownership of the programme. This can happen if the community is involved in the programme from its very beginning, is actively involved in the decision-making process and has a certain degree of financial autonomy. Likewise, in the case of an educational intervention, phasing out of the outside group/agency has to be planned, worked out and suitably



implemented. The experience of some of the EFA initiatives is showing that the strategy for 'phasing out' should not be hastened but should also not be postponed indefinitely. There is also a great need for capacity-building at the local level and for local level organisations such as the VECs (village education committees) to evolve rather than to be constituted from above, in which case, they tend to be dysfunctional, ineffective and may exist only on paper.

Complex nature of rural communities

The contention that rural communities are cohesive, homogenous and that they work in the larger interest of their people, is erroneous. There are divisions not only on the basis of economic and political interests, but the divide on the basis of caste, class, religion, gender, is often very sharp. The areas of conflict heighten with the introduction of direct elections. Therefore, the implicit faith that the PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) would necessarily work in the interests of the community, needs to be tempered by regarding them from a more pragmatic viewpoint in which strife, conflict of interests, shifting loyalties and alignments, would be recognised. In such situations, the kinds of safeguards that need to be taken and the countervailing forces that would make the PRIs accountable to the interests of the community, need to be considered.

While the recent EFA initiatives show that the strategies of political and social mobilisation are beginning to show positive results, India still has a long way to go and there is, certainly no room for complacency at this stage.

Continuous orientation of personnel

The EFA initiatives have created new structures such as autonomous organisations at the state and district levels. Very often, these organisations are headed by individuals who were not actively involved with the programme at the planning stage.

Frequent change of personnel at the centre and state levels makes the programme routine at an early stage. Therefore, there is a need for continuous orientation and interaction with the personnel who are involved in programme planning and implementation at all levels. Even VEC members would need suitable orientation to enable them to play their role in a more meaningful and dynamic manner.

Imbibing new ethos, new management practices

The EFA initiatives have created new or alternate management structures because the existing structures were found to be ineffective, inflexible, hierarchical. The question that needs to be constantly asked is whether the alternate structures have imbibed the new ethos, the new management practices. Are efforts continuously made to infuse dynamism in the new system so as to prevent regression to the old habits and routines? These questions are important for the danger of reverting back to the old structures and to the earlier practices and work styles, is very real.

Strengthening decentralised planning processes

In the case of centrally-sponsored schemes, the role of the central and state governments in facilitating decentralised planning has to be clearly delineated. While the role of the central government might be active and direct in the initial stages, it would have to be facilitative and enabling thereafter so as to promote local initiatives and decentralisation. This could be done through strengthening planning capacities at the state and district levels. Micro-planning activities which have been initiated in many districts attempt to ensure critical and sustained involvement of the community in educational planning processes at the village level. It would be necessary to institutionalise local level planning competencies as a long-term strategy.

Giving centrality to gender issues

Some of the EFA initiatives have shown that concerted efforts are made to focus on gender issues. In a society in which patriarchal norms militate against participation of girls and women in the educational programmes, such a thrust is absolutely necessary. Or else the danger is that the gender issues can get marginalised or regarded only as a women's concern.

Nurturing and strengthening community-based innovations

Some of the EFA initiatives that have responded to community needs, have resulted in innovative responses such as setting up creches (Udan Khatōlas), non-formal education centres (Sahaj Shiksha centres), day-time/night-time non-formal



education centres (Angan Pathshalas, Prehar Pathshalas), residential hostels (Mahila Shikshan Kendras, WRITE) etc. These community-based innovations reflect plurality of educational initiatives that need to be nurtured, supported and further strengthened without compromising on their quality or depriving them of adequate resources.

Giving visibility to EFA on the national agenda

If different sections of the society have to be mobilised around EFA, it must be brought to the centre of national attention. National leaders, as well as political leaders at all levels would have to take the lead in the nationwide dialogue in order to build public awareness and understanding, leading to support and involvement of the whole society. Participation and mobilisation on an on-going basis can only be promoted on the foundation of a national consensus on the major goals and priorities, and the main strategies for achieving

them. A process of consensus-building that is an on-going process would need to be initiated. The mass media could play a very dynamic role in facilitating this process. Such a process of building a national consensus could be non-partisan so that it could survive change of government and of personalities in high places.

These are some of the unfinished tasks that have now become major challenges as India further strengthens, consolidates and expands EFA initiatives by launching the National Elementary Mission (NEEM) as well as initiates a new collaborative effort between the Government of India and the UN System Support for Community-Based Primary Education. This is a joint effort of the Government of India and five UN agencies namely UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNESCO and UNFPA to provide programme support in a coordinated manner to on-going efforts of Government of India towards the goal of universalisation of elementary education.

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