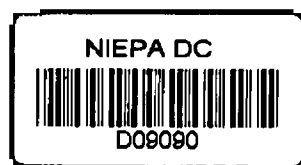
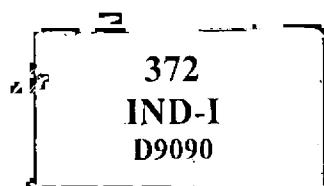


Synergy Sub-Group on Primary Education and Literacy

A DRAFT REPORT



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**Ministry of Human Resource Development
(Department of Education)**

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PRIMARY EDUCATION

In order to make an assessment of the existing situation and make recommendations for achieving the goals of education, an apex synergy group was appointed by the MHRD in four thrust areas of education, one of them being on primary education and literacy. The group consisting of educators, planners, administrators and users of the educational system met a number of times and deliberated on the historical developments, outstanding issues, constraints, regional, social and economic factors affecting the achievement of universal primary education. The deliberations on primary education were guided by three major presentations : *Primary Education in India* by Dr. R. V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar, JS (DPEP); *Primary Education in India: Status and Issues* by Prof. A. K. Sharma, Director, NCERT ; and *Primary Education in India : Planning and Management Issues* by Prof. Kuldeep Mathur, Director, NIEPA.

A number of recommendations have emerged for accelerating the educational reforms with a sharp focus on implementation strategies and sustainable and innovative approaches to planning and management of primary education in India. While many of the suggestions and recommendations are reiteration of the earlier strategies thus underlining their urgency and importance, a number of new proposals are made which are expected to contribute to the efforts for sustainable educational reforms to achieve the national goals.

A. Issues and concerns

While the higher education system in India is still among the best in the developing world, the same cannot be said for primary education. To date efforts are being continuously made to universalise primary education and to reform that system but not with much success. There can be no social and economic renaissance without providing a sound primary education. Few reforms could do more to help the poor and the disadvantaged in the society than primary education. For the more you learn the more you earn. The country's future is going to be determined in the

primary schools.

A review of policies, programmes and outcomes in primary education showed that a number of issues have persisted over the last four decades of development planning. The group also recognised that while serious efforts were made to overcome the constraints affecting the universalisation of primary education, there are many unfinished tasks. Some important issues requiring immediate attention are discussed below :

A.1 Access and equity

While 94% children have access to primary school facility within 1 km walking distance, a situation has arisen where smaller habitations and certain vulnerable and hardcore sections of the society are not adequately covered. The position with respect to infrastructure, teaching staff, teaching-learning materials, equipment and supplies has improved considerably after Operation Blackboard was launched. While the coverage of originally targeted schools is almost complete in terms of central assistance for teaching-learning materials and additional teachers, the condition of school buildings is still far from satisfactory in many rural schools located in isolated and difficult to reach areas. Far too many schools have become educational ghettos. We will have to invest in our schools.

The contribution of strategies to provide education to out-of-school children (drop-outs and never enrolled) through non-formal and alternative modes of education is not sufficient to cover all eligible children. More than a quarter million NFE centres are operating in various parts of the country. However, there is a need to accelerate it so that all the eligible children are covered in a time bound framework. Efforts to educate the working children in areas of their concentration have also to be accelerated.

A.2 Retention and transition rates

At the time of inception of development planning in India, low retention and transition rates were identified as important issues affecting the efficiency of primary education (First Five Year Plan, 1951/56). Despite this, the reforms/programmes of educational development made little impact. Latest statistics indicate a positive impact of recent reforms on checking large drop-outs from the school system. The drop-out rate in 1993-94 was 36.32% in Classes I-V and 52.8% in Classes I-VIII. The transition from primary to upper primary stage was 33.91% in

1991-92 as compared to 16.28% in 1950-51. And even this increase is not sufficient for universalisation of elementary education.

A.3 Learning and achievement levels

While there is not enough data to establish and monitor the variations in achievement levels, recent studies conducted under DPEP have highlighted that learners' achievement levels are low even in educationally better-off states like Kerala and Maharashtra.

Children learn for the same reason that birds fly. If a child is reluctant one should ask the question - What is turning him off learning?

Old habits, ideas, prejudices still guide us. Education has long been infected by a covert form of elitism.

A.4 Pedagogy and role of teachers

The National Policy on Education 1986 and its revised formulation (NPE, 1992) underlined the centrality of the relationship between teacher and the learner in teaching-learning process. While it is easier said than done, there are no two opinions about its desirability. Therefore, centrality must be re-emphasised and pedagogy at the primary level in particular must be made more and more child centred. Emphasis of teacher-training must shift to teaching-learning strategies for the children belonging to Classes I and II. It is at these levels that most drop-outs take place. Yet the teacher-training curriculum overlooks this important aspect of pedagogy.

Teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation are factors adversely affecting the quality of education. The existing system does not provide incentives for the dedicated and well-performing teachers. The teachers spend considerable time in performing duties other than teaching which also affects the quality of school education. Similarly the problems of accountability at all levels, including the teachers, is a serious issue that needs immediate attention.

A.5 Moving to sustainable scale

A number of promising innovations and experiments in the management of change in primary education have taken place in the past. But these were limited to small scale action research projects, experiments and pilot efforts of NGOs, activists

and voluntary agencies. Large scale replication of even the most promising innovations did not take place largely due to inadequate dissemination and documentation and the inherent constraints in the system. As a result, large intra and inter-district variations in the quantitative coverage and qualitative outcome of education prevailed.

A.6 Systems management

Management of primary education in the states has undergone various phases of centralisation and decentralisation. The enabling legislations authorising the local bodies to prepare schemes for compulsory primary education within their areas were in place during the 1920s but could not be implemented. Recent efforts at decentralisation of educational management through Panchayati Raj institutions will provide another opportunity in this direction.

Although the state departments of education were re-organised many times after the attainment of independence, the techniques and procedures for planning and management remain ambiguous, rudimentary and poorly developed to meet the growing challenge and complexity of educational planning in a decentralised frame. A number of parallel structures exist without much co-ordination in planning and management of their activities at the grassroots.

Lack of modernisation of inspection, supervision, data collection and analysis activities create undue delays and ad-hocism in decision making.

Training in institutional planning methodology is vitally needed to promote decentralisation. With increased availability of teachers, physical and financial resources, institutional planning will become a necessity.

A.7 Monitoring and information systems

In the absence of adequate and timely availability of data, it is not possible for the districts and states to develop long term plans which adequately reflected changing perception and role of education, economic and social system. Efforts to establish information systems and decision support services have not been upto the expectations. The system of data collection, compilation, storage, retrieval and its sharing among various users is still organised along traditional lines which does not fully meet the requirements of a diversified and expanded system of education.

A.8 Decentralised management of primary education

After the Panchayats are constituted in states following the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, the role of VECs in planning and management of primary education will become vitally important. Appropriate reservations for the women, SC and ST communities have also been made to ensure that interests of all segments of society are duly represented in these bodies. In order that these bodies discharge their functions with greater efficiency, a massive effort in mobilisation and capacity building will be required.

A.9 Resources for primary education

While the increase in budgetary resources for education in general, and that of primary education in particular, is significant but may be inadequate to transform the inherited system of primary education to an acceptable level of quality and efficiency.

= The states are spending on an average about 20% of their budgetary resources to upgrade and maintain the education services but the inter-state variations are large. Over the years, a major shift is perceptible in the funding pattern of education and it relates to the contribution of non-government sources which declined from about 32% in 1950/51 to 11.27% in 1982/83.

--- Supplementing the government resources through various mobilising efforts will be necessary for strengthening of resource base for primary education.

B. Recommendations

After a review of developments, issues and concerns in primary education, the sub-group identified a number of recommendations for the consideration of the MHRD. Some of these recommendations are a mere reiteration of the earlier strategies. However, the reiteration shows their importance and significance in reforming the system of school education in India. The group has also made a number of new recommendations, taking into account the changing social and economic scene in the country, which will contribute positively to the achievement of states' targets. It is considered that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on the development of a time bound action plan for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of various recommendations made by the sub-group.

While considerable progress is recorded in the last few years, much remains to be done in terms of improving real access, ensuring retention and achievement of MLLs. The focus in the coming years will be to accelerate and strengthen the processes which have already been set in motion and have demonstrated their success. New strategies will have to be evolved for the unresolved issues particularly those related to the quality improvement programmes and the education of the needy children in difficult circumstances.

That the private schools are intrinsically and uniformly better is a myth that deserves to be laid to rest. Some are among the best in the country, others are mediocre and sub-standard. The distance between the best and the average, be they Government or private schools, is too big to one's comfort. The State should or would continue to play a predominant role but the Government's role would be a departure from the past tradition of regulation and control. Government should be more open and receptive to the participation of other actors in civil society like NGOs and industry in the opening of schools, management of existing schools and teacher training institutions and in experimenting with a variety of alternatives in the teaching-learning process. We would recommend a review of the existing regulations in the country.

Educational discourse in the country has too often been exclusively devoted to pedagogic issues; while these are vital, the locus of discussions should shift to the logic of how to ensure the management of change.

B.1 Community awareness and mobilisation

- We cannot have islands of school excellence in a sea of community indifference. Parents, teachers and students constitute what may be called the Golden Triangle, the civic foundations of education reform. Students should learn, teachers should teach and parents take on the responsibilities of sending children to school and facilitating the teaching-learning process in the school. While we do not favour a legalistic approach to compulsory primary education we would strongly urge societal and peer pressure being exerted by the community so that all children go to school.

The three R's, while perhaps outdated elsewhere, are still accepted by a vast majority as accepted learning goals.

We only add that while three R's are for a teacher, the fourth R is for parents. It is to emphasise their responsibility. Though family life is hectic and harassing, diminishing guidance from parents to children, yet it has to be emphasised that solution to students' unsatisfactory motivation and performance lies at home. Structuring of extra help at school would not suffice. A co-ordination between home and school is required. We need a forum and process for this. Caring and knowledgeable adults/parents are indispensable.

- The shared vision of educational responsibility must emphasise not only goals for learning but also the responsibility that parents must accept for developing children's future. Community must start talking of "our children", instead of talking about "those children" and "my children".
- There is a need to adopt a more flexible approach for involvement of community leaders and should not be limited to merely PR bodies. The model could vary from one state to another. The VECs must have representation of parents of children attending primary schools alongwith other representatives.
- The enthusiasm and awareness generated by the total literacy campaigns need to be sustained through systematic environmental building efforts and effective management of the demand which is largely emerging from the hitherto uncovered segments of the society. The role of NGOs in this context needs to be further encouraged.
- An analysis of the reasons for the large number of children being out-of-school needs to be made and its correlation with the economic development studied in the village specific situation. The evidence should be used for micro-planning.
- Women empowerment programmes should be accorded high priority and implemented through an integrated rather than compartmentalised approach. Lessons learnt from successful programmes like *Mahila Samakhya* should be disseminated widely.
- Comprehensive and need based programmes for the development of community leadership should be undertaken by the resource institutions like DIETs/SCERTs/SRCs. etc.

B.2 Role of industry

- The industry should be willing to share the social responsibility for educating their workers and children in the school going age-group. The industry should arrange classes for illiterate workers and open and fund primary schools in the large residential colonies/complexes used for residential purposes for their workers. Other possibilities to share this responsibility should be explored.
- The industrial houses should be encouraged to financially support the strengthening of primary schools, DIETs and other resource institutions particularly those located in educationally backward areas.
- The financial contributions made by the industrial houses and individuals to the cause of primary education should be eligible for tax relief.

B.3 Education of the girl child and special groups

- The education of the girl child must be given high priority and concerted efforts must be made to ensure that the enrolment, retention and achievement of girls in primary education are improved. Incentive schemes like free textbooks, free uniforms, mid-day meals should be pursued and implemented more vigorously.
 - Necessary support in terms of basic facilities and security arrangements needs to be provided to encourage women teachers to work in rural and backward areas.
 - Extensive use of the media should be made to educate the community, create necessary awareness and provide appropriate role models to encourage the girls to join the mainstream of education.
 - As progress towards Education for All is attained, it will be necessary to reach marginal groups of population through local specific approach. Specific disadvantaged groups like pavement dwellers and communities in violence prone areas, should be given special attention through identification of their educational needs. Research should be initiated and action plans drawn accordingly.
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- ICDS scheme should be expanded to include creches for younger children to prevent drop-out of older children, particularly girls.

B.4 Curriculum development

- To develop a child into a creative and contributing member of society, the school should link the quest for knowledge through instruction with a quest for improving life around the child through well thought out activities. How tedious and time consuming tasks done in dull surroundings could be easily done in much more delightful fora should be the dictum of the new approach. This would equip her/him with an inner confidence to be creative and useful in later life. Skills are liberating and can only be acquired by learning through work. Similarly, the effort to familiarise students with their past should not be at the expense of dwelling on elements of modern scientific life located in time and place familiar to the child.
 - The learning process should also instil in the child an inquisitive mind, a joy and zest for discovery, a love and respect for nature. The school calendar should adequately provide for extra-curricular and after school activities including games and sports.
 - To encourage fuller participation and utilisation of primary education facilities at the field level, the school programme should be adapted to a more flexible mode which can attract children and is convenient in terms of timings, curriculum, school climate, etc.
 - The school climate must be made joyful and interesting for children through an attractive school environment, activity based child centred pedagogy and a nurturant rather than intimidating school ethos for which the basic resources and appropriate staff preparation are critical inputs.
 - The curriculum for Grades I and II should be reviewed to ensure that it matches with the developmental status of the children and is able to provide a proper foundation for later learning.
 - The relationship between higher education and primary education should not become so close as to let the primary school lose its identity and its purpose. In the name of good relationship and partnership
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there is a temptation to lose the critical place of primary education and reduce the latter to a preparatory stage of higher stages of education.

- While the national statement of MLLs provides the necessary framework, the content of the curriculum should be adapted to suit district/state specific context. Children should be emancipated from the back breaking load of books; the curricular and textual overload should be realistically assessed.
- We will have to drive out fear of education from the children, instead put confidence in them to achieve a drive towards meeting further learning challenges. The present system of examination, wherever it exists, derails the process. As a tool of assessment it measures neither the breadth of understanding nor the sharpness of skills of small kids and should therefore go. Assessment is not an end in itself but a means of enhancing student achievement. "Assessment is an advocacy process". Teachers should find less fearsome, more reliable and loving ways of diagnosing impediments to learning. We must not threaten (burden) the child with assessments that frustrate rather than facilitate learning.
- The system of continuous and comprehensive evaluation must be implemented in schools to ensure reasonable learning outcomes in the primary grades with greater accountability.
- The issue of mother tongue being different from the medium of instruction for a large percentage of children has serious implications for learning and achievement. Bridge materials should be developed to facilitate transition to the standard language for the initial grades.
- Classroom is not an oasis but part of the world, closely intertwined and intimately interdependent on surrounding socio-economic conditions that do not offer a means of escape from the spiral of despair. Our students inhabit a world that extends beyond classroom. They will perform better when we will perform better as architects of a just and compassionate social order. We will have to rediscover some aspects of erstwhile schools which prided in imparting moral (religious) teaching. Education has a role in developing well adjusted and creative adults with right moral values.

B.5 Teacher preparedness and motivation

- We must empower teachers to evolve ways of working appropriate, with State continuing to provide "Scaffolds" of support. Standardised teaching tasks and greater routinisation of teaching work with less reliance on innovative methods of communication reduce teaching to the status of 'semi-skilled' labour. Changing educational demands would require more flexible teaching forms and problem solving responses more contextual to the needs of the students and realities of local situation/surroundings, more freedom than what current educational bureaucracies allow.
 - For years to come we have no option but to live with schools of sub-optimal size; a teacher in a typical rural primary school would have to simultaneously teach more than one class. The issue of multi-grade teaching has not been adequately addressed. The achievement of satisfactory levels of learning in disadvantaged schools depends on ability to master the challenge of multi-grade teaching.
 - Recruitment of women teachers for primary schools is necessary to facilitate the girls enrolment and retention. Teachers are overwhelmingly male. Major efforts to recruit and train women teachers ought to be initiated. Teaching will be substantially transformed by infusion of women teachers. A leaf can be taken from the new Tamil Nadu policy of appointing only women as primary school teachers.
 - There is a continuing under-investment in teacher training. We will never have better schools until we have better teachers. Teacher training, accountability and reward system is critical for improving the quality of education. This should be accompanied by confidence building and motivation enhancement.
 - Schools require support and pressure. Both are needed in ample proportion. Without close supervision, education could become peripheral. There must be rigorous appraisal of school and teachers' performance. Failing schools and incompetent teachers should be weeded out. Indeed there should be zero tolerance of half baked and ineffective teaching. Simultaneously there should be a battery of
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measures to encourage more effective schooling. Local authorities should also have the authority of supervision and providing local support. Dual control by local authority and school inspectorate should not be an exercise in teacher bashing. Infact community must give them esteem and respect.

- Teachers' guilds, forums and associations have a role since they exercise a mix of support and pressure which should be listened to. While teachers and parents are targeted, "Teachers' trade unions" are sometimes shunned.
- Machinery for the redressal of teachers' grievances should be created in a manner that quick decisions in matters of pensions, allowances and service conditions are taken.
- Local teachers should be involved in the development of school curriculum and teacher training materials so that the content of the educational programme emanates from the living conditions of the target group and make it relevant and need based. This will also enhance motivation of teachers.
- Special problems like large class sizes, multi-grade teaching, inadequate facilities, etc., being faced by teachers in the school situation should be examined and solutions provided to facilitate the classroom teaching and learning.
- Teacher competency in use of materials and equipment supplied under various schemes like Operation Blackboard, should be fully developed through in-service training programmes.
- Primary school teachers have little chances of promotion and vertical mobility. New avenues for their professional advancement for horizontal and vertical mobility should be explored through distance education. Professionally qualified and competent primary school teachers could be recruited/inducted as DIET faculty.
- Training institutions should be adequately strengthened and they should be able to adopt a group of schools and develop them into model institutions in their area of operation. The NGOs which have established themselves should be involved as resource institutions.

B.6 Planning and management of primary education

- Block should become the unit of educational planning. All programmes like teacher training, curriculum development and evaluation should be attempted at the block level instead of at the district level.
- The SCERTs and DIETs should provide necessary support for block level planning.
- The DIETs and SCERTs should be strengthened as resource institutions so that these become outward looking and should work in close co-operation with NGOs and the community.
- A long term development plan based on micro-planning should be evolved for each block/district. The plans should be such that these take into account the social, economic and other considerations while suggesting strategies to achieve the national goals.
- The quality of educational statistics, particularly on enrolment needs is to be improved and if necessary should be revalidated by independent surveys.
- The states should ensure that devolution of powers to VECs takes place as recommended by the CAGE committee.
- Particular emphasis should be given to those efforts which develop methodologies of micro-level planning and aim at capacity building at the district and lower levels for undertaking micro-planning experiments.
- The inter-linkages between ECE, NFE and primary school programmes need to be viewed and strengthened in a holistic perspective in terms of mid-day meals, timings, location, infrastructural facilities, etc.
- While there is no optimum size of a school, we should advance towards the ideal of having atleast one separate section for each class with a headmaster who can provide the much needed administrative and academic leadership. Small schools tend to be children-friendly and particularly in urban areas, large schools may need to be reorganised as a cluster of children-friendly and viable schools.

- Since most of the primary schools have now two teachers, the staff provision in primary schools must, therefore, include a head teacher for whom necessary training in institution building could be organised by the resource institutions.
- The officers of the education department require a comprehensive training in educational planning, monitoring, evaluation, supervision and developing linkages with the community.
- Minimum specifications for primary education in terms of staffing, resources, infrastructure must be worked out and provision for primary education made in conformity with these.

B.7 Resources for education

- The Prime Minister has made a commitment to raise the resource allocation to 6% of GNP during the Ninth Five Year Plan. A greater share of GNP is welcome but usually additional funds lead to proliferation of bureaucracy and expansion of administrative and supervisory cadres. It should be ensured that the additional resources flow for improvement of the teaching-learning process; it should also be ensured that disparities among states of per capita education expenditure are reduced.
- While there is a need to have increased allocations for education as a whole, the intra-sectoral allocations could be re-examined and pre-primary and primary education should be accorded highest priority.
- The early childhood years are crucial as foundation for human development and as feeder programmes for primary education. We must develop a national children policy. A connection has to be built between provision of minimal base of support for health care, nutrition and support for development of cognitive skills through primary education. It is time that we invest in the future of our children. We have the examples of a few states where such investments has paid rich dividends.
- A trust fund be setup at the block level to extend support to the extra-curricular activities of the school going children.

ADULT LITERACY

Issues

- Need to differentiate between the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) and the Post-Literacy Campaigns (PLC) in terms of approach, funding and management.
- Question of voluntarism versus payment of cash incentives in literacy programmes.
- Need to ensure greater participation of local self-governing institutions in literacy campaigns.
- Need to involve industry in literacy campaigns.
- Need for strengthening the monitoring mechanisms.

Recommendations

Voluntarism

- The total literacy campaigns should be a purely voluntary effort. The motivation of volunteers should be sustained through refresher courses and providing recognition to their contribution. The volunteers involved in post-literacy could be paid volunteers. The feasibility and modalities for such payments need to be carefully examined.
- There is a need for conscientisation wherever the demand for literacy has not emerged from people. Particular attention should be paid to include vulnerable groups like mine workers, pavement dwellers and fishermen in the fold of adult literacy programmes.
- The curriculum of the literacy primers need second look to ensure that these are relevant for the adult illiterates and also of the special groups in the regional context. India's rich tradition of folklore could be used to improve the quality of primers. The emphasis should be on learners attaining life long literacy rather than giving importance to quantitative targets achieved.

Involvement of Panchayati Raj bodies

- There is a need to increase the participation of Panchayati Raj institutions, voluntary agencies and other community organisations in the planning and organisation of TLCs.

Role of industry

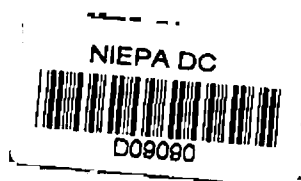
- The industry has a major role to play in literacy programmes. The industry must come forward to arrange literacy classes for their own workers.
- The industry should also provide skill development training in their establishments so that neo-literates benefit from the skill formation at the post-literacy campaign stage. The developments in Maharashtra are heartening where the industries are contributing by providing infrastructural facilities for TLC and PLC programmes.

Post-literacy campaigns

- There is a need to formulate a strategy for post-literacy efforts especially in view of its prolonged duration. The post-literacy campaigns have to be timed in a manner that these take off soon after the TLC work is completed. This is essential to prevent neo-literates again relapsing into illiteracy.
- The post-literacy campaigns should be inter-linked with the working and living conditions of the masses and involve income generation and skill orientation activities.
- In order to ensure that adequate literature is available to neo-literates, local and regional newspaper houses should be actively involved in TLCs and should be persuaded to devote space for neo-literate materials in their newspapers.

Monitoring of TLC/PLC

- While the TLC is making considerable progress, the monitoring of the programme is weak. Computerised flow of information and its sharing at various levels will facilitate the timely interventions. It is also necessary to monitor the fund flows in relation to the achievements. Steps should be initiated so that an integrated system of monitoring is established.



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