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EFA Processes in India

The introduction to the Working Group Report on Elementary and Adult Education for the Tenth Plan reiterates the Government's commitment to the goals of EFA. The Report addresses the concerns as suggested by the Dakar Framework. The government acknowledges that the Framework is useful in looking at all the multiple interlinked facets within education. There is a director level officer in charge of EFA within the Department.

Though a significant amount of work on various elements is going on within the government as well as civil society, it is not consciously related to 'EFA' and the Dakar Framework, but to UEE - Universalizing Elementary Education. Currently, EFA is increasingly being associated with SSA. This is true for agencies that have been participating in the consultations for development of the national action plan. Within the government and civil society, the Dakar Framework or EFA processes are not deliberately promoted.

National Action Plans

The draft National Action Plan was presented at the Ministerial Meeting of the South Asia Forum of Education Ministers of member countries that was held in Kathmandu, Nepal in April 2001. The plan was focused on SSA and lacked the states' perspectives. With the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi (NIEPA), being the lead agency, a more decentralised process seeking involvement of the states and civil society was started. It was felt that the States' perspectives, specific problems and needs will make the NAP more meaningful.

Four regional level consultations were held with the states to build their perspective, understanding and application of the framework. For them EFA is equivalent to UEE which is equivalent to SSA. 'EFA' was viewed as a purely government agenda at the national level. For states to look at the entire spectrum of education called for an interaction among the various divisions within the Department of Education as well as with other departments specially the Department of Woman and Child Development.

Guidelines were given to the States to help them address the critical elements including monitoring and financial resources (see Annexure 1). Even the guidelines/core questions to help the State develop action plans that will lead to the formulation of the national action plan for EFA do not include integration of elementary education and literacy.

Though the States were asked to invite the NGOs from their States for the consultations, the participation of CSOs was minimal (short notice is one reason attributed for this) and the participants were primarily government representatives.

The first consultation for the Southern Region in Bangalore was held in November, 2001; the second for the Eastern and the North Eastern Region was held in January, 2002 after some gap, the Western and Northern Region consultations were held in Delhi in May, 2002. The first two consultations had a higher number of NGOs represented. In the four consultations, about 13 CSOs participated - 8 from Bangalore in the Southern Region, 3 in the Eastern and 2 in the Western Region consultations.

National EFA Forums

"The heart of EFA activity lies at the country level. National EFA Forums will be strengthened or established to support the achievement of EFA. All relevant Ministries and national civil society organisations will be systematically represented in these Forums. They should be transparent and democratic and should constitute a framework for implementation at sub-national levels" (Dakar Framework, May 2000).

No task force has been set up for EFA. There is a Technical Core Group for the Education Department, which meets very sporadically. The members of this group include the Joint Secretary (JS) of EE, AE and Planning; JS, Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD); and the Directors of NIEPA and NCERT. Dr. Govinda from NIEPA is the only non-government person nominated by name on the group. The SSA National Mission, not constituted as yet, will also work for EFA. NLM Authority continues to exist but it is more of an official body and has no CS representation.

Integration with other departments is very limited. No one from DWCD, either from the central or the state government, was present for any of the regional consultations, except for the Secretary-cum-Commissioner (Education), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Mizoram. If ICDS is addressing two of the goals namely early childhood care and education and life skills for adolescents, and exploring opportunities for women, their involvement is necessary.

In the absence of any focal point/core group at the national level and consequently at the state level with

sufficient responsibilities, there is no pressure and no compulsion to popularise as well as use the EFA framework.

The EFA Framework provides a grid to review the entire realm of education. Such an understanding of the interlinked stages of education needs to be built at the grassroots level for EFA to be successful, or else it will remain yet another indulgence of 'intellectuals'.

EFA and Civil Society

NGOs — whether field based or support centres or advocacy networks — are important stakeholders. NGOs in India have addressed both the demand and supply aspects of education. NGO experiences have demonstrated successful interventions to enhance the quality of education and more importantly given valuable insights to the complex problems whether it is child labour, the urban child, or issues of equality. The last decade in particular, has witnessed sustained action especially in basic education. These interventions, be it of Pratham or MV Foundation or the Shiksha Karmi Scheme that was inspired by the night schools of the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Tilonia, have influenced the mainstream and established the possibility of replication of their models.

Despite a large number of successful NGO interventions, the education debate has never become part of larger movements, whether it is the women's movement, agrarian reforms, the dalit movement, the labour unions or the right to information movement. The agencies and individuals engaged in education did not learn from the processes of other movements nor could they use them to build awareness among a larger audience.

Even within the education sector, there is very limited interaction among NGOs and hardly any between those engaged in adult literacy and elementary education, which can be seen as the two aspects of basic education. Social development programmes often do perceive education to be integral to people's empowerment but do not integrate it into their programmes.

While it is important to mainstream initiatives and interventions within the government systems, it is equally critical to review and analyse policies and programmes from an objective and long-term perspective. In the absence of a collective voice, and close monitoring of all aspects and stages of education, NGOs may fail in their role as watchdogs to challenge policy perspectives and institutional arrangements.

The Dakar Framework could have been used as an effective advocacy tool by civil society but it was neither sufficiently simplified nor promoted by the government, the international agencies or even civil society organisations. There was no public debate, no deconstruction of the goals and strategies. Just as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women) is used effectively by NGOs, the Dakar Framework is a commitment that the government has to uphold and which can be used by NGOs to make the government more accountable. However, the Dakar Framework is not a convention and thus not as stringent a prescription.

Government perception of NGOs

The two paragraphs on 'Increased role of NGOs' in the Working Group Report do not elaborate on how this role will be enhanced. It states that 'As a broad policy, the Tenth Five Year Plan stresses on greater involvement of NGOs... and unburdening the administration unduly loaded with and inadequately equipped for implementation of development programmes.' The NGOs are largely engaged in the running of formal centres and literacy programmes and implementing small-scale innovative experiments in education. The report advocates for a 'larger role for NGOs by functioning alongside the governmental sector in a significant manner,' but does not explain how this is to be done.

For Convergence of Management and Delivery of Programmes, the Report suggests that national and state level institutions should experiment with possible alternatives for field level integration. Such area specific explorations could also look at involving NGOs and private initiatives.

Within the Government, views about NGO involvement are not very varied. Seen either as implementing agencies for the hardest to reach or for mobilising communities, their role is restricted to the framework of the various schemes — be it running creches, AE centres or Jana Shikshan Sansthan. One lament commonly heard in the corridors of NLM blames the poor performance of NLM in educationally backward states on the absence of NGOs.

While NLM's interaction with civil society agencies, their representation in the various national committees, debates and discussions on modalities in the early days of NLM, had truly 'opened' the education sector to civil society, as of now there are no CS representatives on the NLMA. While NLM waits for NGOs to come

forward and work in the educationally backward areas, it does not attach significance to CS initiatives or participation in the policy debates and discussions at the national and state level. Clearly the role of civil society for NGOs is earmarked for implementation and undermines their potential to contribute to the larger debates and programme design.

Even within the Department of Education, administrative mechanisms differ for basic education and adult literacy, with the procedures being more rigid for the latter. Difference in vibrancy and relationship vis-a-vis NGOs within EE and AE can also be sensed. While within elementary education there is an acknowledgement, trust and an understanding of the role of NGOs, within adult education the relationship with NGOs is purely for implementation of schemes. The Government often misconstrues advocacy initiatives as confrontation and for NGOs dependent on government programmes, it is not a very comfortable situation.

The NPE emphasised the infusion of creative ideas into the formal system by promoting linkages with innovative ideas of other agencies. Though agencies have been invited to participate in state projects, they have seldom influenced the system as a whole. Recent events in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, discussed in the next section demonstrate that relationships of 'innovative projects' with the formal system are at best fragile and extremely tenuous.