

PRESIDIUM MODEL UN CONFERENCE 2017

“Reforms in the education framework in the country with emphasis on education penetration and school retention.”



CITIZENS' DIALOGUE (CD)

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Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings Members

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you to this simulation of Citizen’s Dialogue at PMUN-2017. I hope you have a fruitful and engaging experience in the committee.

The Citizen’s Dialogue is a unique committee in ways more than one. It combines the constitutional arrangement of proper representation and establishes dual accountability. While governments on one hand make laws to make citizen’s accountable. Citizens on the other hand make sure that the government is keeping their best interests at heart during policy making. Also it gives the government a new realm to field test and find new ideas.

The debate in the committee will be a lot policy oriented than legal or technical. The delegates are responsible and influential citizens of the nation and presumed not be legal experts. What this means is emphasis should be on a structured, research- oriented and constructive debate.

Complex legal and constitutional terms have been explained wherever possible and government procedures have been explained to the best of my ability. Also certain procedures are left as-is as a deliberate attempt not to oversimplify the flow of debate and research.

This background guide is by no means the end of research, I would very much appreciate if the delegates are able to find new realms in the agenda and bring it forth in the committee. Such research combined with good argumentation and a solid representation of facts is what makes an excellent MUN performance.

Feel free to reach out for any doubts

Regards

Executive Board for Citizens Dialogue

Reforms in Education System with emphasis on School Penetration and Retention

Introduction:

Education imparts knowledge and skills and shapes values and attitudes. Education is vital for progress of a civil society. Education is universally recognised as an important investment in building human capital. Human capital affects growth in two ways. First, human capital levels act as a driver of technological innovation. Second, human capital stocks determine the speed of technology. It is now widely accepted that human capital, and not physical capital, holds the key to persistent high growth in per capita income.

Education is becoming even more vital in the new world of information knowledge is rapidly replacing raw materials and labour as the most critical input for survival and success. Knowledge has become the new asset. More than half of GDP in the major OECD countries is now knowledge based. About two thirds of the future growth of world GDP is expected to come from knowledge led businesses.

A study of the education systems in Sweden, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and China offers a number of insights for shaping India's education development. The emphasis from the government has to be on primary education. It is important that primary education be made universal, compulsory and free. The other important lesson is that there should be a mix of government and private initiatives, with direct participation from both.

More than forty five years ago, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen analysed the crisis in Indian education in his Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lectures on the 10th and 11th of March 1970 at Hyderabad. Rather than attributing the crisis in Indian education to the administrative neglect or to thoughtless action, he pointed out that the grave failures in policy making in the field of education require the analysis of the characteristics of the economic and social forces operating in India, and response of public policy to these forces (Sen, 1970). He emphasised that due to the Government's tendency to formulate educational policies based on public pressure, often wrong policies are pursued. Unfortunately, even today, the education policies (if any) - particularly on higher education, seek to achieve arbitrarily set goals that are either elusive or pursued half-heartedly.

In addition, the public policies on higher education are not based on long-term concerns. These policies do not carefully weigh the trade-off between seemingly contradictory goals and ignore the fact that the markets are now the main arbitrators of resource allocation. The role of the government is to create an open environment and more demanding standards of transparency and accountability so that the markets function efficiently¹. Also, the government has to strike a delicate balance between growth and an equitable and inclusive development.

India after Independence adopted a strategy of appointing Committees and Commissions to reform education. The very first Commission appointed in independent India was on higher education. There have been several Commissions/ Committees appointed to make recommendations on higher education development at different points of time. The reports of

¹ Extracted from the Civil Services Day Speech of the Prime Minister of India on April 21, 2006.

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these Commissions/Committees formed the basis for initiating many reforms in the higher education sector in India.

Even a cursory glance of the various Commissions and Committees on higher education cannot fail to notice the two extremely divergent views about higher education in India. One, it has been and continues to be viewed as the major instrument of national transformation, in terms of economic development, social progress and strengthening of political democracy, as seen from the various commissions and committees, right from Independence. The other view is that the system of higher education is in deep crisis, progressively deteriorating over the last six decades.

Current Policy Concerns:

India has had two national education policies preceding the one in the making — the National Policy on Education 1968 and the National Policy on Education 1986. The focal concerns of the NPE 1968, that were based on the Kothari Commission Report (1964-66), revolved around ensuring compulsory elementary education and equalising educational opportunities. The NPE 1986 continued many of the key foci of the 1968 policy and also brought-in quality concerns (critiqued for the limited way in which they were conceptualised and implemented) — through its recommendations of making elementary school education “child-centered”, creating provision for recruitment of teachers, and for enhancement of infrastructure.

While these are the national policies of education in India, there are several significant developments that have impacted policy and have shaped or are shaping the school education sector. Among these, three recent significant ones are: **the Children’s Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RtE)**, **the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF)**, and **the Justice Verma Commission on Teacher Education 2012 (JVC)**. These documents underline the conception of education as children’s right and outline a framework to reform ‘quality’ of school education. While the RtE Act is meant to operationalise the Article 21A of the Indian constitution (that makes elementary education a justiciable right of the children of ages 6 to 14), NCF 2005 may be seen as defining what educational/curricular experience should be like. The JVC charts the revamping of teacher education in the country to reform teaching–learning in schools. These three policy related frameworks are at various stages of implementation and need to be taken into account while contemplating a new policy in education.

Furthermore, there are other developments that concern the provisioning of quality school education and are matter of intense debates. One of these concerns the spread of low cost unrecognised private schools and changes in the ‘school preference’ patterns among the economically weaker sections (EWS). While there is advocacy for low cost private schools for meeting the aspirations of the poor from some sectors (Tooley, 2009), there is a strong critique of these schools from the standpoint of equity and quality (Nambissan 2012). The second relates to the poor state of public education and the solutions on offer. While there is a fair agreement on the abysmal state of affairs implicating the quality of education in government schools, there are some who argue for systemic changes to strengthen the public system of education and there are others who suggest public-private partnerships as the future of school education. The third is the debate around the conception of “quality”. There are arguments that define quality in the terms of specific “learning outcomes” and there are those who critique these views and frame quality

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education as a larger and holistic concept that integrates equity in substantive ways (Nambissan, 2015).

All these debates are interconnected. Central in these are differences on the idea that elementary education is essentially a public good and thereby must primarily be the responsibility of the state. The debates closely relate to the positions around the conceptions of the goals of education — is the goal of education to deepen democracy and lead to critical citizenship, or is it primarily to create skilled workers? While these debates are not new, in the recent past they have made inroads in the official and public discourses on education in new and diverse ways and hence form the context that needs to be taken into account in any policy formulation.

In this context, it is useful to ask, how is the new NPE and its consultation framework positioned in relation to the education policy context and debates in India (some of which have been discussed above)? How does (if at all) it propose to take these developments further? What departures does it propose to/is set-out to make? What kind of reforms or changes in education policy may be envisioned given the objectives and scope of the policy? Positioning of the new NPE in relation to this existing policy context will to a considerable extent shape the continuities in the education sector. A complete departure from the current policy context may create discontinuities and ruptures in a cohesive vision urgently needed for education in India. A vision for education that builds on the pertinent past policy thrusts and addresses current challenges is expected from the National Policy. In this relation, it will be relevant to examine the objectives of the proposed NPE 2015 and the consultation framework laid down for school education.

School Education in NPE Framework:

The consultation framework/documents developed by the MHRD for school education do not present an overall policy perspective. A “grassroots consultative approach” is proposed for the formulation of the policy recommendations for which the MHRD has designed a framework covering 13 Themes and Questions for Policy Consultations on School Education (MHRD, 2015b) (see Appendix A) (and a similar framework with 20 themes for higher education). Through the prescribed consultations on these themes and questions, the Ministry has sought responses from ‘stakeholders’ by September-October 2015. The 13 themes are as follows:

1. Ensuring learning outcomes in Elementary Education.
2. Extending outreach of Secondary and Senior Secondary Education.
3. Strengthening of Vocational Education.
4. Reforming School Examination systems. Re-vamping Teacher Education for Quality Teachers.
5. Accelerating rural literacy with special emphasis on Women, SCs, STs &
6. Minorities through Adult Education and National Open Schooling Systems.
7. Promotion of Information and Communication Technology Systems in School and Adult Education.
8. New knowledge, pedagogies and approaches for teaching of Science, Maths and Technology in School Education to improve learning outcomes of students.
9. School standards, School assessment and School Management systems.
10. Enabling Inclusive Education – education of SCs, STs, Girls, Minorities and children with special needs.
11. Promotion of Languages.

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12. Comprehensive Education – Ethics, Physical Education, Arts & Crafts, Life Skills.

13. Focus on Child Health.

(MHRD, 2015b, p. 2)

The ‘grassroots’ consultations are accordingly being held at various levels with a view to consolidate the responses at the Central level for framing draft recommendations. This consultative approach is highlighted as a ‘unique’ feature of the Policy by the government. The HRD minister has been quoted saying that while in the previous official regimes a few “experts” (academics, bureaucrats and politicians) decided what the nation should study, this government's policy would be shaped by the views of India's Village Education Councils (VECs) (Kumar, 2015, para 2). The MHRD thereby decided to invite suggestions from across the country amounting to roughly 2,50,000 meetings at the village level, 6,600 at the block level, 3,700 for urban local bodies and 676 at the district level. Around 100 meetings at the state level, 6-8 meetings at the regional level and 12 consultations at the national level are meant to follow. A National Task Force will then put the recommendations emerging from these consultations together. At each of the ‘higher levels’ the views collected will be screened, consolidated and made public.

It is believed that this approach will provide opportunities to the stakeholders to have their voices heard and will lead to recommendations that are accepted as policy recommendations (and are thus implementable). While the idea of democratising policy-making is indeed a laudable goal, whether a ‘grassroots’ consultative approach is the way to do so needs serious discussion. An overview of some of these issues discussed and those that have been peripheral in the discussions in the public domain is presented below.

Issues in the Policy Planting

Logistics and Logic :

The consultative exercise for the formulation of the national policy is reported to have turned into a “logistical nightmare” for the state governments (Kumar, 2015, para 1). Many states are finding it difficult to make-sense of the complicated multi layered process — and are already set to miss the deadlines (April to September 2015) decided by the MHRD. The rationale of the entire exercise has also been questioned (Behar, 2015; Kurrien 2015; Mody, 2015a & b). Several questions in this regard are being posed: What are the deemed benefits, and pitfalls, of such a consultative process and the manner in which it is framed? In this context, Kurrien (2015) notes, “It is unclear why this inductive approach was deemed appropriate for the framing of an educational policy for the nation as a whole.”(Para 9). Others have noted that the consultations are taking place in a pre-designed framework within which what questions are to be asked at what levels is pre-determined (Mody, 2015a; Mishra, 2015). Some have pointed out that consultations with stakeholders may be useful to understand the context in which the policy will be practiced and the challenges that some of the major new reforms envisioned may encounter in the field.

Yet it is relevant to ask — will the economic policy be decided through a similar consultative process? While that is clearly unlikely to be the case, it may be asked — why is such a process being followed for framing the education policy? What can be the possible benefits of this approach? How will the outcomes of the consultative exercise be used in framing policy recommendations? How will the quality of policy recommendations get implicated through this

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process? How will this approach mediate in (re)defining the status of the national institutions meant to design these policies? How is education as a field of study being (re)shaped in this process? How should policy-making process in a democracy be conceived, which is not populist but democratic in its substantive goals and procedures?

Themes and Questions for School Education:

On the one hand, the problems of the approach appear to be limiting the quality of possible outcomes. On the other hand, the quality of the themes and questions (MHRD, 2015b & c) for the consultations made public by the MHRD need serious attention. Some of these issues are discussed below as examples.

Learning outcomes, efficiency, employability and accountability can be seen as overarching concerns across the 13 themes listed for consultations on school education. While learning outcomes and skills for an employable workforce are presented front on in the themes 1, 3, 7, 8 and 9, the vocabulary of efficiency and effectiveness, measurement of performance, institutional assessment and accreditation, and ‘improvement and reform’ presents the paradigm that is meant to inform the policy consultations. While these concerns may be pertinent for the government, these represent a very limited perspective on education that has been sharply critiqued (Sarangapani, 2010).

Furthermore, the themes and questions document has several general statements hinting at the possible solutions to the problem of quality. The general assumption seems to be that the concern for quality can be “solved” through technological and accountability measures. However, ‘quality’, one of the major policy concerns, has not been spelled-out anywhere in the document. And, a clear concerted frame for addressing quality concerns does not come across from the themes and questions.

There are other kinds of issues as well — particularly relating to how well the consultation points have been framed. The formulations indicate that most of the policy concerns and questions are presented as givens and a space for critical reflection on these has not been imagined and provided. For instance, there are questions such as: “What needs to be done to improve student participation in Science and Mathematics subjects?” (p. 6); “What needs to be done to make VE popular amongst students?” “School services-sector courses, be introduced in schools rather than manufacturing based courses?” (sic.) (p. 8).

There are many more issues that come across from a general review of the document — which are sufficient to underscore the need to further deliberate on and refine the consultation framework. It also points to the need for critically engaging with the policy themes and providing a considered and informed response as an input for policy planning.

Missing Foci Needing Attention:

The themes and questions document (MHRD, 2015b) misses many critical matters that are at the centre of concerns in education at present. Some of the contemporary policy related concerns (RtE 2009, NCF 2005 & JVC 2012) that have been highlighted in the section 2 of this note do not find space (at least apparently) in the themes and questions. Education as a matter of rights of children does not find a space in the grammar of the document. “Child-centered” education, which has been a major curricular policy thrusts from 1986 onwards, is not in the focus of any of

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the themes. Similarly, the matter of quality teacher education has been defined only in terms of its bearing on the quality of the outcomes of school education. It is not imagined as a sector in higher education. Also, the Early Childhood Level as a whole has been restricted to the theme “Focus on Child Health.”

Thus, it appears that the policy consultation framework does not take into account some of the major policy developments of the recent past and is seemingly set-out to depart from the existing policy concerns. It is relevant to reflect on: Do these above foci need further attention? Are there other aspects that have not been captured in the policy consultation framework? Given the developments in the consultative process, are these missing but critical concerns likely to get any attention and be built into the recommendations? How to formulate a response within the consultation rubrics to reflect/address these missing links (if this is needed)?

In the committee we hope to discuss these issues

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