

# NEWSLETTER ANTRIEP

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## Recent Reforms in Primary Education

As informed to our readers through the previous issue of the Newsletter, this issue (January-June, 1998) focuses on **Recent Reforms in Primary Education**. We contacted the member institutions and requested articles on the subject for the present issue. We are happy to say that we got a very good response. We received write-ups from our member institutions in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka which are included

in this issue. These articles attempt to analyse recent trends in reforms in primary education in the respective countries.

The article on Bangladesh focuses on reform measures adopted in that country to attain "Education for All" by the year 2000 as reflected in the National Action Plan. It elaborates on the new schemes introduced and the curricular changes brought about by the country. The article on Nepal brings out the policy changes and administrative arrangements made to implement various innovative projects in the field of primary education, some of which are funded by external agencies.

The Indian experience captures the reform measures initiated at various levels, including the recent constitutional changes to make elementary education a fundamental right. The Indonesian experience dwells upon recent reforms to decentralise educational planning and management as part of the efforts by the Indonesian government to decentralise general functioning of the public sector activities. The write-up from Sri Lanka describes the recommendations of the National Education Commission, 1997. Central to the reforms in Sri Lanka seems to be curricular reforms and measures to strengthen management of education at provincial level and the internal management of educational institutions at the school level.

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A general trend in the reform measures adopted in this region seems to reflect the national desire to achieve quality education for all through a process of decentralisation and school-based management. Recent reforms in most of the countries focus on school as basic unit to introduce and implement changes to improve primary education.

It gives us immense satisfaction to note the encouraging responses we received from our member institutions. More so when we learn that in some cases, the member institutions even contacted other organisations/ individuals in their country to solicit the contribution for this issue of the ANTRIEP. All the write-ups we have received have been included in this issue. We once again acknowledge and appreciate the efforts made by the member institutions and the contributions made by the individual authors.

The third Annual Meeting of the ANTRIEP will be held in Colombo in December 1998. As per the discussions during our Second Annual Meeting held in Seoul in May 1997, the theme of the Seminar preceding the third ANTRIEP Meeting will be on “School **Autonomy and Educational Management**”. The preparations for the organisation of the meeting are in progress. While IIEP plays a crucial role at the regional level, our member institution in Sri Lanka (NIE) is looking after all local arrangements to organise the meeting.

We continue to receive encouraging response to the Newsletter from various individuals and institutions. We hope that this issue, like the previous ones, will be useful to educational planners and administrators.

**Editor**

## **Recent Reforms in Primary Education: Bangladesh**

### **Introduction**

Primary education in Bangladesh consists of a five-year school cycle beginning from grade I and extending upto grade V. A child is expected to enter school at the age of 6 years and complete the school cycle at the age of 10. At present almost 80% (1995) of the primary school age population has been enrolled in the primary schools. However, the drop-out rate is very high and quality of education is very low. Therefore, ensuring quantitative expansion simultaneously with quality improvement has become a pressing need in this sub-sector. The government in recent past has taken a number of steps to improve quality of and to enhance access to primary education.

### **Recent Reforms**

The Constitution of Bangladesh obligates the government to adopt effective measures to establish a uniform

mass-oriented and universal system of education and extend free and compulsory education to all children up to a certain level determined by law. Bangladesh is committed to the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, March 1990) and the World Summit on Children (New York, September 1990). It is also a signatory to the Delhi Declaration on Primary Education, New Delhi, December 1993. Eradication of illiteracy is commitment of the government. Recognising the importance of primary and non-formal education in ensuring education for all and for eradication of illiteracy, the Government created a new Primary and Mass Education Division in August 1992. The Division enjoys the status of a Ministry and operates independently. It has been given the responsibility for dealing with all matters concerning primary and mass education.

Primary education has been made compulsory by an Act (Primary Education Compulsory Act, 1990). Compulsory

Primary Education has been made effective throughout the country with effect from January 1993. In keeping with the commitments, Bangladesh has prepared a National Plan of Action to achieve 'Education for All' by the year 2000. The National Plan sets the following targets: (i) to raise the gross enrolment rate at the primary level from 76% (1991) to 95% by the year 2000; (ii) to raise girls' gross enrolment rate at primary level to 95% by the year 2000; (iii) to raise the completion rate at the primary level from 40% to 70% by the year 2000; and (iv) to raise adult literacy rate from 35% (1991) to 62% by the year 2000.

### **Reform Proposals**

Recent reforms in primary education sub-sector have been reflected through different measures and steps taken by the government for bringing school-age population within the purview of primary schools, reducing the drop-out rate and improving the quality of primary education. The measures and steps taken are as follows:

- Establishment of satellite primary schools for enhancing the enrolment of the children who have not yet been enrolled due to the distance of main primary schools from their living places.
- Establishment of low-cost community schools with community participation in areas where there are no primary schools at all.
- Decision to start pre-primary education to atleast children aged below 6 years to reduce their rush to the main primary schools and to dispel their school-phobia.
- Introduction of 'Food for Education' scheme in 17,203 primary schools for reducing drop-out rates and improving nutrition level of the learners.
- Introduction of the 'School Attractiveness Programme' inclusive of supply of learning materials, school uniforms, sports and games materials, occasional supply of food to the girl

students and various attractive curriculum and co-curricular activities aiming at making the schools attractive to the children.

- Creation of 3138 primary education centres with NGOs' involvement with a view to bringing drop-out and out-of-school children within the purview of primary education.
- Observation of 'Primary Education Week' as a part of well thought out process of extension of primary education movement in society.
- Revisions of the curriculum for making it more interesting, need-based and life skill-oriented. Competency-based curriculum has been prepared on the basis of essential learning continuum.
- Preparation of teachers' edition and teachers' guide and their distribution to teachers.
- Imparting both in-country and foreign training on management of primary education to professionals engaged in primary education.
- Arrangements for imparting training, in addition to the government primary school teachers, to registered non-government primary school teachers for updating their knowledge and skill.
- Creation of a body of school supervisors (Assistant Thana Education Officers-ATEOs) for regular and effective supervision of schools and teachers' entrusting the ATEOs with a cluster of schools comprising 20-25 schools. Extension of support services to the teachers in the form of regular in-service training and classroom supervision by the ATEOs.
- Identification of one primary school in each Thana, that is, a total of 481 primary schools in 481 Thanas of the country, or turning them into model schools and for utilising them as in- service training centres of teachers of respective Thanas.

*Md. Khurshid Alam  
NAEM, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

## Recent Reforms and Innovations in Primary Education in India

Indian Constitution proclaimed in 1950 that the State shall endeavour to provide universal compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14. Meeting this goal has, somehow, remained elusive all these years. It should, however, be noted that the country has made significant progress in quantitative terms by expanding the outreach capacity of the system. From around 200 thousand primary schools in 1950, the number has increased to more than 600 thousand. Yet, several millions of children continue to remain outside the fold of primary education and a large number of those enrolled drop out without completing the first cycle of education.

Within the above context, the last decade and a half in India has witnessed a number of innovations and reforms in the field of primary education. Some of the reforms are related to the basic policy of the government while others are concerned with structural changes and operational innovations. Broadly, all these reforms echo the concern expressed in the National Policy on Education -1986 (NPE) on the unsatisfactory status of the primary education scene in the country with a large proportion of children continuing to stay out of the primary education system. The NPE emphasised the need to view the goal of universal primary education in a comprehensive manner focusing on (a) improved provision of access to primary education; (b) universal participation ensuring that all children complete eight years of elementary education; and (c) universal achievement referring to the need to ensure that all children achieve at least a basic set of competencies. The reform processes and innovations launched following the NPE cover all these three dimensions. Some of these are presented in this paper.

### Improving Access and Participation

One of the radical reforms being undertaken with respect to primary education in the country is to amend the Constitution to make "Right to Elementary Education" a fundamental right of every citizen in the country. It is not that the Indian Constitution adopted nearly five decades ago does not guarantee education for all. In fact, one of the Articles in the constitution affirms that "The State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14". However, being only a Directive Principle, the provision was not justiciable in a court of law. In order to overcome this lacuna, a Constitution Amendment Bill has been moved in the national Parliament making Right to Education a Fundamental Right at par with right to life and liberty of speech. This move to incorporate basic education as a fundamental right has already unleashed a large scale debate all over the country on the role of State with respect to primary education in the country and also on the legal obligation of the parents to ensure that their children receive basic education. This has also resulted in an in-depth analysis of the cost involved and the strategy to be adopted for mobilising resources from government and other sources.

Another measure being initiated all over the country to expand the available network of primary schools is to establish a rational framework for decision making through school mapping. This is considered an important step as traditionally schools have opened either on social demand coupled with political considerations or based on the thumb rule of having a primary school within a distance of about a kilometre. This move coupled with participatory micro-planning is beginning to make pri-

mary schooling facilities more accessible to all children. Empirical analysis of the availability of schooling facilities and the demand for schooling has also led in the recent past to creation of several alternative mechanisms of primary education.

### **Structural Changes in Educational Management**

A second area that is engaging the attention of Indian policy makers is that of creating a decentralised management structure for education. Several significant moves have been taken during the recent past. The first in this regard is again the Constitutional amendment brought for holding regular elections for Panchayat Raj bodies which constitute local self-governments from district level downwards. Several features of this legislation have far reaching impact on the primary education scene. One of these is the specifications made in the Act to transfer the responsibility for planning and management of primary education to these local self-governing bodies. The Act also specifies the composition of the elected panchayat bodies in order to ensure that the deprived sections of the society are well represented. Along with this process of legal empowerment of the local bodies for planning and management of primary education is the efforts being made to initiate planning processes at levels below the State level. For instance, the District Primary Education Programme has initiated a process of project planning and management for education for all with district as the unit of planning. In fact, based on the experiences gained through Lok Jumbish Programme of education for all in Rajasthan, there is a strong move for decentralising the management structure further to the block level which normally has 100 to 200 primary schools. At the grassroots level, village education committees are being set up to monitor the functioning of primary schools both in terms of quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement.

### **New Framework for Capacity Building**

An important measure taken in the recent past is to change the framework for capacity building among people

working at the grassroots level. Traditionally, the responsibility for providing in-service education support to various educational personnel had been with the National Council of Educational Research and Training and the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration at the national level. At the state/ provincial level, the task is being performed by the State Councils of Educational Research and Training. However, following the recommendations of the National Policy on Education in 1986, a District Institute of Education and Training was established in each district with about 1000 to 1500 primary schools.

In the recent past this has been further strengthened by creating institutional structures at block and cluster levels. It has been realised that the District Institutes of Education and Training cannot reach out to all the school personnel in a sustained form as the number of schools and teachers in an average district is quite large. The purpose of creating resource centres at block and cluster levels is two fold : (a) to ensure that all teachers receive periodic inservice education in a regular fashion; and (b) to reach academic and technical support to teachers and other personnel concerned with primary education nearer to the place of their work. It is foreseen that this arrangement will make training programmes more need based and contextualised in terms of the requirements of different schools.

### **Participatory Planning at the Grassroots Level**

Traditionally, educational planning has been a top down exercise largely focusing on input allocation. There is no doubt that the District Primary Education Programme made a major break from the past in identifying 'district' as the unit of planning. However, it is being felt that the process of planning needs further transformation from one of externally designed supply oriented framework to a participatory demand based framework. In recognition of this factor, there is an emerging focus all over the country on grassroots level planning at village and school levels. The attempt is to institutionalise village education planning and school improvement planning in a systematic manner in all schools and villages. Vil-

lage education plan preparation is being initiated through village level bodies relying on school mapping and micro-planning techniques. The approach worked out for this purpose under Lok Jumbish Project in Rajasthan is illustrative of the grassroots level planning being tried out in the country. It is foreseen that the task of village education planning will become, in course of time, a standard feature of the work of all village education committees and form part of the decentralised planning to be institutionalised through the panchayati raj system described earlier. The school improvement planning is still in a beginning stage with some of the states experimenting with the idea. It is being realised that the schools are

too varied in nature and even the basic parameters of school improvement plans will have to be locally designed taking into consideration the contextual factors. An important outcome of this twin move towards village education planning and school improvement planning is that it has quality concerns to the centre stage without undermining the need for ensuring total enrolment and participation,

*R. Govinda  
NIEPA, New Delhi, India*

## **Recent Reforms in Basic Education : Decentralisation Efforts in Indonesia**

### **The Problem**

Improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of schools are major concerns of educational reforms in Indonesia. There are at least two major problems facing planning and management of primary education in the country. These are dual-control system and lack of autonomy of school principals. The dual-control system is difficult to solve, since it involves reconciliation between two ministries, i.e, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). The sector reviews conducted by the USAID team (1986) had identified some negative consequences of the dual-management system at the primary level.

The management of educational resource in Indonesia is complicated by the fact that the MOEC and the MOHA share responsibility for primary schooling. The MOEC is responsible for teacher-training and curriculum development and evaluation, while the MOHA is responsible for the provision of educational facilities and equipment, as well as recruitment and deployment of teachers.

This dual-management system in primary education also extends from provincial level to the sub-district (Kecamatan) levels. At each level, both the MOEC and the MOHA support staff and offices. At least two issues result from this duality. First, the improvement of the quality of primary education depends, to a great extent, on the availability of educational facilities and equipment and the quality of teachers and other staffs. Under the dual-management system the availability of these factors are neglected. The MOHA whose responsibility is to provide educational facilities and equipment as well as to assign teachers to schools is less concerned with the adequacy of these factors than is the MOEC which is accountable for the quality of schooling. In other words, control on and accountability of resources are not located in the same unit.

Secondly, dual-management also means more offices and thus more staff. As a consequence, more educational resources are allocated to administrative expenditure than might have been the case under a unitary control

system. This is of particular concern because of the urgent needs of schools and classrooms. The implementation of annual plans also takes more time than might otherwise be necessary as a result of the complicated bureaucratic procedures and lack of coordination between the two institutions (as noted by the World Bank in 1989 and IEES in 1986). As a consequence of the dual-management system, the government is also faced with the problem related to curriculum implementation, especially in schools located in rural or isolated areas. These schools are frequently left behind in implementing the curriculum.

Another major concern is the lack of autonomy for school principals. The World Bank (unpublished) identifies lack of autonomy as one of the factors which affects educational effectiveness at the school level. The ineffectiveness of schools is reflected in terms of low levels of student achievement, high dropout rates, and high repetition rates. An evaluation conducted by Balitbang Dikbud (1997) shows that student achievement, especially in subjects like Mathematics and Science, is still very low. This low student achievement is also accompanied by high dropout rates, specially in early grades (I and II).

The often proposed solution is to give more autonomy to schools as a mechanism to strengthen school-based management. At the policy level, there has not been any sign of moving towards giving more autonomy to schools. The educational policy during the Sixth Five Year Plan (Repelita VI), for example, emphasizes the improvement of educational efficiency and effectiveness. Yet this policy has not specifically mentioned about strengthening school management, or giving more discretion to school principals.

Improvement of efficiency of the education system continues to be a major concern of the government for a long time. The current plan - Five Year Plan (1994-95 to 1998-99) - lays emphasis on this aspect. The plan has adopted decentralisation of management of basic educational programmes as the basic reforms strategy to

improve efficiency of the basic education system.

### **The Reforms**

The decentralisation effort in basic education is an integral part of a broader scheme of decentralisation of public sector activities. The decentralisation effort shows that the central government is delegating some of its authority to the district (Dati-II) government to manage its own public sectors. In managing its public sectors the Dati-II government has two sources of budget, the central government and the local revenue.

The implementation of the scheme of decentralisation is based on two laws passed in 1992 and 1995. The former law (1992) basically provides the legal basis for decentralisation of public sectors and the latter law (1995) elaborates the procedures for implementation of the reform. Based on these laws, decentralisation had been currently introduced in 26 Dati-II as a pilot project. One Dati-II each from all provinces, except Jakarta, is selected as a location.

Nineteen (19) public sector departments/activities are delegated to the Dati-II government. These include agriculture, forestry, education, culture, labour, social sectors, etc. Only two sub-sectors of education — primary education and out-of-school education — are decentralised to the Dati-II level.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) redesigned its management system to implement decentralisation efforts. Eight ministerial decrees have been issued for this purpose. These eight decrees, in general, focus on restructuring the organisation under the MOEC of Dati-II and sub-district (Kecamatan) levels and their functions. As a result, the representative of the MOEC in Dati-II and Kecamatan, prior in the pilot project, called The Office of Ministry of Education and Culture at Dati-II level (Kandep Dikbud), and the Office of the MOEC at Kecamatan level (Kancam Dikbud) respectively, were renamed to become the Inspection Office of Education and Culture (Kanin Dikbud), both at Dati-II and

Kecamatan levels. There are no significant differences in terms of functions and tasks between the two types of offices. The Kanin Dikbud, both at Dati- II and Kecamatan levels, are more autonomous as compared to the former type.

So far as the management of primary education is concerned, there is an Office of Education and Culture (Dinas P dan K). This office is under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). More specifically, its responsibility is to plan and to manage the 3Ms of primary education, namely, Men (recruitment, deployment and promotion of teachers); Money (allocation of primary school budget); and Materials (planning and distribution of educational materials and equipment to the schools). In this case, the role of the Kanin Dikbud, is to control the quality of primary education through ensuring proper implementation of the curriculum and supervision.

In the non Dati-II pilot project the Kandep Depdikbud and Kancam Dikbud still exist. Their main responsibility is to exercise control over educational management of secondary schools, to appoint and promote secondary school teachers, and to plan and allocate educational

resources to secondary schools, as also to ensure the quality of secondary education.

### **Future Prospects**

There has not been any comprehensive evaluation on the effectiveness of implementation of decentralisation in Indonesia. The central government plans to expand the Dati-II pilot project to include one more Dati-I pilot project in each province. The expansion is planned to be initiated in the Seventh Five Year Plan which will begin in the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

In the 1998-99 fiscal year The Center for Policy Research plans to conduct an evaluation focusing on effective implementation of decentralisation more specifically pertaining to the management of education programme (both primary education and out-of-school education). This evaluation is intended to provide better strategy to improve management of basic and out-of-school education under the decentralisation scheme.

*B. Indriyanto  
Balitbang Dikbud Centre for  
Policy Research,  
Jakarta, Indonesia*

## **Innovations in Primary Education in Nepal**

### **Introduction**

In 1951 Nepal had a population of 10 million and had only 312 primary schools. Now the country has over 22 thousand primary schools. This quantitative expansion has contributed to solving the problem of providing access to primary education. The concern for improving the quality of education has increased in the recent years.

### **Progress of Primary Education**

The first formal initiative for educational development in general and for primary education in particular was made

through the formation of Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) in 1953. The report of the commission included recommendations and strategies that provided clear guidelines for formulating initial educational policies and plans. Thus the report set the stage for the expansion of primary education in Nepal. It recommended a five-year primary education cycle, emphasised the need for making primary education relevant and accessible to all and advocated for adopting a decentralised management system with increased community participation.

The subsequent education committee, known as All



Round National Education Committee 1962 (ARNEC), recommended more of a centralised and controlled system of education for the country. The norms and values favourable to ruling class and elite were emphasised in the curriculum. Sanskrit was made compulsory language even at the primary level. Naturally, Brahmins benefited most both as teachers and learners of Sanskrit.

In 1971, the government introduced National Educational System Plan (NESP) which comprised a set of strategies for the development of primary education in the country. The goal and structure of primary education was re-defined. It proposed a three-year cycle. Primary education was identified with basic education and focused on basic literacy and numeracy skills making it distinct from education at the higher levels that focused on vocational education. The main issue of primary education continued to be that of its expansion and making it available and accessible to all. The NESP, therefore, called for innovative approaches to primary education. However, in the following years, owing to the growing criticisms against the NESP's "unrealistic" effort that intended to bring about too many changes too soon, many decisions taken were to be reverted. The decision of three-year primary education was withdrawn to re-institute the earlier five-year cycle.

With the re-installation of multi-party democracy in 1990, the National Education Commission (NEC) was formed in 1991 to reform the educational system and make it conducive to the changed political context. The major reforms suggested in the field of primary education pertained to: (i) curricular contents; (ii) improving access particularly of women and disadvantaged groups to primary education; and (iii) ensuring quality of primary education.

### **Innovations in Primary Education**

#### *(i) Education for Rural Development: The Lahachowk Approach*

Almost immediately after the implementation of NESP, the then Ministry of Education and Culture established the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and

Development (CERSD) within the National Education Committee to carry out, as the name suggests, research and innovations for the cause of educational development in the country. One of the early and major initiatives of the centre focused on education for social transformation. Lahachowk village of Kaski district was chosen to implement the innovation related to this theme. For the first time, an integrated social approach to educational development was initiated. Primary education, non-formal education, literacy, improved fanning and kitchen garden, health and sanitation were the aspects covered in the project. The Lahachowk approach was later adopted in the Education for Rural Development Project (ERDP) at Seti zone which became known for its successful implementation. The impact of Seti project has been widely acknowledged for the kind of social transformation that it brought about in the project areas. The integrated rural development endeavours coupled with non-formal education activities enhanced childrens' participation in primary education.

#### *(ii) Instructional Improvement in Primary Schools: An Experimental Study*

In 1982, by which time CERID had already become part of Tribhuvan University, another major innovation in the field of primary education took place with the initiative of CERID and funding from International Research Development Centre (IRDC), Canada. An experimental project entitled Instructional Improvement in Primary Schools (UPS) was implemented for two years in three villages each from Kaski and Dhanusha districts. The project adopted a three-pronged approach, comprising parents, teachers and students, and demonstrated significant improvement in children's performance in the primary schools at the project sites. The project provided a model for the Primary Education Project (PEP) of the Ministry of Education. PEP was implemented in 6 of the country's 75 districts. All these innovations paved a way for the development of successive programmes in primary education. The current Basic and Primary Education Project is an expanded form of the very Primary

Education Project and Seti-ERD Project. The other ongoing Primary Education Development Project (PEDP) also has been informed by those earlier endeavours. Therefore, Lahachowk Seti, UPS and PEP experiences have provided a solid foundation for the large-scale projects like the BPEP and PEDP to carry on with more innovations in the field of primary education.

*(iii) Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP)*

In 1991, with the assistance of UNDP, World Bank and Asian Development Bank, a comprehensive long-term plan for the development of basic and primary education was formulated. A document known as Basic and Primary Education Master Plan 1991 was prepared. In the meantime, the report of National Education Commission (NEC), which was formed following the change of the political system, became public. Both the Master Plan and the NEC-report contributed to the development of the BPEP and the PEDP.

The Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) started in 1992 is the most comprehensive project that the country has ever experimented. It has completed its first phase of five years in 1997 and is now in its second phase of implementation for another five years. By the end of the second phase, the project aims to be totally integrated into the mainstream educational system, encompassing all the primary schools within its pedagogical and managerial folds.

*Main Features of the BPEP:* Three aspects namely, access, quality and management, formed the main basis for the formulation and implementation of the BPEP. Various programmes have been developed and implemented to improve these three aspects of the country's primary education system. Some of such programmes have aspect-specific distinctive objectives while those of the others overlap between the aspects.

The problem of ensuring better quality and management of primary education has been addressed through:

(i) improved management scheme; a decentralised support system for technical as well as supervisory matters has been placed through a resource centre for each cluster of about 25 primary schools in all the project districts; (ii) non-formal schooling programme for out-of-school children; (iii) adult literacy; (iv) compulsory primary education programme; (v) Shishu Kaksha (pre-school) programme for children of age between 3 and 5 years; (vi) construction of new primary school buildings or rehabilitation of the existing ones; (vii) short-term teacher-training programmes; (viii) curriculum reform; and (ix) improved monitoring and evaluation scheme.

By the end of the first phase, the BPEP activities have been implemented in a total of 40 districts. During this period about 25 thousand school buildings were constructed; curriculum of all the primary grades were revised; primary school textbooks were revised accordingly and implemented in all the grades in a phased manner.

In 1997, following the recommendations made by the Mid-Term Review Mission of the BPEP, a comprehensive Basic and Primary Education Master Plan 1997-2002 has been developed. The second phase of the project (1997-2002) aims at enhancing the relevance of basic and primary education and improving its efficiency, access and quality. To this end, several specific strategies are being developed and implemented. For example, the concept of compulsory primary education, which was pilot-tested in the first phase, has been further implemented in all the village development committees (VDCs) of two districts and one VDC each of the remaining 38 project districts of the country. Similarly, early childhood care and education programme will be further strengthened and expanded together with liberal promotion policy in early grades with an aim to increasing the internal efficiency of primary education.

As already mentioned above, while the project activities will gradually be transferred in the mainstream

programmes of the Ministry of Education by the end of the second phase, the project activities are also being extended to remaining 35 districts as well.

*(iv) Primary Education Development Project (PEDP)*

The responsibilities of development and needs of primary education in the districts that are not covered by the first phase activities of BPEP are being borne by several other initiatives of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Primary Education Development Project is another major initiative of the Ministry that mainly carries out massive primary teacher training programmes through its nine regional Primary Teacher Training Cen-

tres (PTTC) spread across the country. Under the PEDP, MOE created a new institution called National Education Development Centre (NEDC) to take the full responsibility in developing necessary human resources for the school education system. Under this, the NECD has already begun massive training programmes for primary school teachers through PTTCs, training of school administrators, school management committee members, district and regional education administrators and school supervisors.

*Roshan Chitrakar  
CERID, Kathmandu, Nepal*

## **Recent Reforms in Primary Education : Sri Lanka**

### **Introduction**

Sri Lanka is a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious country with an estimated population of nearly 18 million. There are around 4.2 million children enrolled in schools. Sri Lanka follows a 5+3+3+2 pattern of education, that is, five years of primary education, followed by three years each of junior secondary and senior secondary, and two years at collegiate level. The country follows a national curriculum. Education is free up to the first degree university level. Mother tongue is the medium of instruction at the school level and free textbooks and uniforms are provided to all students at the school level.

The quantitative expansion of the education system in the past five decades has been impressive and it has helped in improving the country's literacy rates. The recent priorities are: to improve internal efficiency and quality of education, and to make the schools more cost-effective.

### **Why Reforms in Primary Education?**

The major objectives for introducing reforms in primary education are: (i) to introduce a viable system of education which will facilitate development of basic competencies in the child and ultimately contribute to character building, nation building, development of general competencies and specific capabilities; and (ii) to address the key issues and problems in the existing system of education.

The major problems faced by the Sri Lankan education system are: (i) non-participation of approximately 14 percent of 5-14 age group in school education; (ii) low levels of achievement in First Language, Mathematics and Life Skills; (iii) poor linkages between pre-school and primary school curriculum; (iv) too heavy and inappropriate curriculum; (v) teaching of English language not conducive to communication and interaction; (vi) learning and teaching processes are dominated by the

textbooks and are not activity-based; (vii) many teachers lack competencies in assessing and evaluating pupil progress; (viii) criterion - referenced assessment is an unfamiliar practice; and (ix) primary cycle is often severely under-financed, leading to over-crowded classrooms and lack of basic facilities.

A Commission was appointed to suggest measures to be adopted to improve the educational situation of Sri Lanka. All recent reforms emanate from this National Education Commission.

### **National Education Commission (NEC)**

National Education Commission (NEC) was constituted by an act of Parliament of Sri Lanka in 1991. Recent reforms in Primary Education are based on the recommendations made by the NEC. To operationalise the recommendations, a Presidential Task Force (PTF) was constituted. The PTF is headed by the Hon. Minister of Education and Higher Education. The PTF is supported by thirteen technical committees to prepare action plans for implementing reforms.

The reform proposals at all levels of education are broadly grouped under five main areas. These are : Extending Educational Opportunity; Improvement of Quality of Education; Imparting Technical and Practical Skills through Education; Teacher Education; Management of Education and Resource Provision. The reforms in primary education discussed in this article mostly fall under the broad area of improvement of quality of education.

### **Reform Proposals on Primary Education**

Reform proposals on primary education can be classified into six main areas: (i) Curriculum and Assessment Procedure; (ii) Teacher Development; (iii) Designing of Appropriate Buildings, School layout and Equipment for Primary Grades; (iv) Strengthening of Management of Primary Education at Provincial and School Levels; (v) Providing Syllabi, Textbooks, Workbooks, Resource

Materials and Supplementary Reading Materials; and (vi) Providing Buildings, Furniture, Equipment and Library Facilities in Schools.

The NEC (1997) has recommended the following proposals to improve primary education: (i) enactment of regulations on compulsory education for 5-14 years old children; (ii) improving pre-school education and programmes for Early Childhood Development; (iii) upgrading disadvantaged schools located in rural areas, urban slums, plantation areas and coastal areas; (iv) promotion of teaching of Tamil to Sinhala students and Sinhala to Tamil students; (v) improving teacher-pupil relations and counselling services; (vi) to reduce school size to a maximum of 2000 pupils; (vii) initiate programmes to improve rapport with the parents; (viii) introduce school-based management; (ix) introduce performance appraisal of teachers; (x) increase allocation of funds for education (from 2.9 per cent of GDP to 4.5 per cent); (xi) provision of a financial grant to schools; and (xii) enactment of a New Education Act.

### **Distinctive Features in Curricular Reforms**

Grades 1-5 constitute the primary cycle of education. Under the new framework, primary cycle will constitute of three key stages and the teaching methodology in these three stages will vary as under:

Key Stage 1 consists of Grades 1 & 2 and focus in these grades will be on physical and mental development through activity-based methods.

Key Stage 2 consists of Grades 3 & 4 with focus on an integrated thematic approach and activities.

Key Stage 3 comprises Grade 5 where the focus will be on deskwork-based academic work leading to demarcated subject specifications.

Competency-based curriculum will be followed in the country and the subject areas in the curriculum are limited to four, namely: language/languages; mathematics;

religion; and environment-related activities.

The integrated nature is more prominent in the present curriculum than that in the past due to the introduction of environment-related activities which encompass several disciplines needed for the total development of the child. The language teaching also follows specified stages.

Activity-based oral English is introduced in Key Stage 1 followed by formal teaching of English from Key Stage 2 and a second national language (Sinhala/Tamil) from Key

Stage 3. Similarly, continuous classroom-based assessment with increased emphasis on using informal methods and a movement towards criterion - referenced assessment techniques. Another measure introduced is to assign the same teacher for the entire Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, so that a single teacher will be able to stay with a group of children for two years continuously.

*Subashine Wijesundera  
Department of Education  
Management Development  
National Institute of Education  
Colombo, Sri Lanka*

## **Third Annual Meeting of ANTRIEP on School Autonomy and Educational Management Issues and Questions**

Educational planning is undergoing a fundamental shift in almost all countries. This shift, which has been visible in educational research for at least a decade, but which is now increasingly influencing actual policy-making, has two major characteristics. Firstly, the attention has moved from ensuring that schools have the necessary material and human resources, to making sure that these resources are properly utilised in schools. In other words, the focus has shifted from 'inputs' to 'processes'. Secondly, there has been a move from 'action at the system level' to 'action at the school level'.

### **Why More School Autonomy?**

The reasons for these shifts are varied. One can mention the realisation that traditional system-wide educational programmes and projects were not sufficiently adapted to the sometimes very varied needs of the individual schools. At the same time, studies on both developing and developed countries indicated that, in order to improve the quality of schools, the quality of management of the school itself had to be enhanced. According to some recent international research work, the difference

between a poorly performing and a successful school can be explained, to a great extent, by the quality of three sets of relationships, namely: those between actors within schools, in particular between the headteacher and the teaching staff; those between schools and the community; and those between schools and the administration, in particular the supervisors. Consequently, to make schools more successful will demand an improvement in these relations.

This new consciousness about the role and the importance of each individual school is increasingly influencing policy-making. A growing number of countries has concluded that it is necessary to allow schools more leverage in their decision-making. The realisation that standard programmes could not be implemented nation wide without some adaptation to the specific context of each region or district is not new. This was one of the arguments pushing towards decentralisation in South Asia. What is new is that, in a growing number of countries this policy has taken the form of awarding schools, rather than regional or district offices, more autonomy.

### **The Case of the State of Victoria**

One of the most far-reaching of these reforms, generally known as school-based management reforms, taken place in the State of Victoria, Australia. Although in a very few other countries schools have received as much autonomy as in this case (New Zealand is 'other example), the Victoria example is interesting because it invites a number of general comments and questions.

The 'Schools of the Future' programme, as it is called in Victoria, was launched in a climate characterised by distrust towards public education and public services in general, combined with a severe budget crisis. The programme started with a serious rethinking of the distribution of roles and responsibilities between actors different levels in education management. At least four elements are worth mentioning:

The schools, and more precisely their headteachers, are given an increased responsibility, especially in personnel. This implies, for instance, that they can select their own teachers and exercise systematic control over them.

With more tasks comes more money: about 90 per cent of the total education budget in Victoria has been decentralised to the individual schools, including the payment of salaries, although these are still set nationally. The budget amount is decided on the basis of the school's enrolment and student characteristics. Students are free to move from one school to another. With certain limits, the school principal is free to decide how to use the funds.

The central Ministry counterbalances this growing freedom at school level by providing schools with a clear and rigorous 'Curriculum and Standards Framework which covers primary and secondary schools. The Framework sets out what students are expected to know and what they should be able to do at each learning level. In addition, a "Learning Assessment Project" is being implemented, which combines assessment by the teacher and the use of standardised state-wide assessment instruments.

Accountability towards parents and the community is stressed. The school prepares an annual report, which compares its performance to the objectives set out in its charter. This report is presented at an open meeting with the local community. In addition, in every three years, a special team composed partly of external members, undertakes an in-depth review. No inspection or supervision function as such exists anymore within the Ministry.

Before examining into more detail some of the implications of such a policy for educational planning at the system level, it is worth stressing that a distinction should be made between introducing market reforms and school autonomy, even if in the case of Victoria and New Zealand, the two were linked. The strategy of tying school budgets to enrolment and allowing parents to choose schools freely, in order that schools benefit from parents continuing to send their child to a particular school makes little sense in most developing countries. This is because most parents in developing countries have neither a choice about schools, nor the information required to make such a choice. The unintended effect could well be one of undesirable increased inequity. In such a context, it could be argued that what is needed is co-operation between schools and teachers rather than competition. Several countries have understood this and are working towards strengthening relations between schools to their mutual benefit. Sri Lanka, for instance, is one country where the policy of more autonomy for schools, combined with more co-operation between them, is being advocated.

### **Extent of Autonomy**

While, as mentioned above, the degree of autonomy of schools in Victoria is rather exceptional, almost everywhere there is a trend to put more responsibilities on and give more powers to the schools. Wherever countries move into this direction, two main issues arise. The first relates to the level and type of autonomy to be given to schools. The second issue has to do with the monitoring of quality and equity standards at central level. The way in which the first issue is handled will depend

to a large extent on the particular background of each country. In some cases, such as Korea or Sri Lanka, the trend towards school-based management is the result of explicit reforms in education policies. In others, such as Nepal, the scenario is different; in the field, schools have taken more responsibilities because of the lack of intervention and support by central authorities. This scenario is more prevalent in many remote rural areas, where schools feel abandoned, as even supervisors, who are supposed to be closer to them than any other actors, seldom 'if ever' visit them. In both the scenarios, a number of questions are worth considering, some of which are quoted here.

What responsibilities should be assigned to the school level, and what should remain as the tasks of the central level authorities in relation to curriculum development, teaching methods and management of human, material and financial resources? For instance, if schools do receive some financial autonomy, what part of the budget should then be in their hands? Should schools be able to decide for themselves how to use their budget, to choose, e.g., to upgrade classrooms rather than to buy new textbooks?

Who, at school level, should take such decisions: the headteacher, with or without the involvement of the senior staff; a school committee, with or without involving community representatives?

How should these new decision-makers be trained?

What kind of special arrangements should be made for small, remote schools, where management capacities are very low, etc.?

Coming to the second issue, the question is how can central authorities, while giving schools more autonomy, monitor their quality? What mechanisms are at their disposal and how should those mechanisms be used so that their impact on the efficiency and quality of schools is positive? Central authorities can rely on at least three mechanisms for this purpose: (a) the supervision and

support system, (b) the school evaluation system (mainly examinations, and (c) achievement tests, and the deployment and training of teachers.

#### *a) The Role of Supervision*

It is well known that present-day supervision services rarely have the requisite skills and resources to exercise continuous and systematic monitoring over schools. Services are also located too far from schools to give significant support to teachers. This is one of the reasons why almost all countries in the Asian continent are giving, in practice if not officially, a greater supervision role to senior school staff, which generally means the headteacher. In addition, co-operation between schools is being strengthened through the introduction of such initiatives as school clusters (e.g. in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Philippines), master teachers (in Sri Lanka), resource centres and resource persons (e.g. in Nepal and some States in India). But setting up such structures, which are closer to schools has not automatically led to making these services more supportive to teachers. In addition, because in some cases they exercise the same tasks as the 'traditional' supervisors, conflicts occur between these actors, to the detriment of teachers, who need 'above all' coherent support. Several management issues also need to be considered, including, for example, the selection of staff to man these centres, their training, the way they reach out to teachers and schools, etc. Some of the questions to be tackled in this respect are the following:

- If teacher supervision and support increasingly become the task of in-school and close-to-school actors, what should remain the core tasks of external supervisors?
- What is the most appropriate balance between the levels involved in teacher supervision and support?
- A change in structures should be accompanied by a change in culture, but how can such a cultural renewal be ensured?

#### *b) The Role of Evaluation*

The second mechanism on which central governments rely to monitor schools is the evaluation system. It is r

surprise that those countries, which have given school more decision-making powers, have also at the same time set up strong central school evaluation systems. These evaluation systems, generally relying on the results of central examinations or on achievement tests should serve different purposes: enable planners and supervisors to identify poorly performing schools; allow schools to monitor their own progress or lack of and to compare with neighbouring schools; improve on the quality of teaching.

The creation and use of such evaluation systems has led to quite some controversy. Firstly, examination (or even achievement test) results are a poor reflection of the variety of factors which influence the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Comparing schools solely on the basis of such results, it is argued, is unfair and unhelpful to the schools with low scores. When, for instance in the UK, such results are made public, their impact on the quality of the weakest schools and on the relationships within them is often detrimental rather than positive. Secondly, for such systems to be really useful for educational planning and for school supervision, should they not form part of a broad EMIS, which contains a comprehensive file with relevant information for each school? Several countries are working in that direction. Thirdly, what pedagogical autonomy does a school have, when the examinations are nationally set and its quality is judged on the basis of its performance in such exams? Fourthly, few countries so far have succeeded in using exams to really obtain the improvement of the quality of teaching. In principle, this objective should be attained through two channels: by motivating schools through the comparison with others and by identifying weakly covered curriculum areas or topics with which students have particular difficulties. But can one motivate schools simply by telling them, that they are not doing well? Is that what is needed 'above all' is not to give specific support and advice to poor performing schools, just as a teacher is expected to do for poor learners? In addition, to enable teachers to use the test results to enhance their teaching, an efficient and detailed feedback)

System on the examination results needs to be set up, which is often not the case. Equally important is that there exists consistency between the inputs, which teachers receive through the evaluation system and the support extended by supervisors. Finally, in many countries, the content and methods of the evaluation, in particular of national public examinations, might need to be revisited.

### *c) Teachers Deployment and Management*

The third mechanism, which is crucial for maintaining quality and equity standards, is the system of teacher deployment and management. At which levels should decisions about deploying and managing teachers be taken and how can this decision process be improved? Teachers are indeed the most expensive input into the system and at the same time it is the most crucial resource. There are convincing arguments both for giving schools more autonomy in this area and for keeping decisions rather centralised. For example, matching posts with their talents constitutes a major prerequisite for optimal teacher utilisation. With respect to teacher satisfaction and the effective functioning of schools, it is important that teachers are posted where they can give the best. Seen from this angle, it may seem logical to give school boards and/or headteachers more decision-making power in the selection and recruitment of their staff. However, this might lead to serious inequalities in the distribution of teachers between different schools. In the same way, one can argue that a headteacher, in order to have effective control over his or her school, should be able to discipline and reward the teaching staff. On the other hand, imposing teachers inspection and evaluation on headteachers might well make it more difficult for them to create a team spirit and a sense of co-operation among the teaching staff, aspects that are necessary for the success of a school, especially in the more remote areas.

*A. Grauwe  
IIEP, Paris  
France*