

VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

We live in an era of an unprecedented focus on the universalisation of elementary education and child rights. The author highlights some of the special features of the Constitutional provisions on elementary education, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially right to education vis-à-vis the role of the voluntary sector in ushering the development processes towards the national goals and commitment to children's education. On our overdue historical task of making education accessible to every child a reality, Mr. Amod Kanth emphasizes on the greater need to acknowledge the role of NGOs and the voluntary organizations and develop meaningful linkages between the government and the civil society. Considering the mammoth task in hand, i.e., over 100 million children to be placed under educational programmes, NFE and other alternative modes of education have been strongly recommended. Mr. Kanth also mentions that India needs to develop appropriate human resources and supplement this through promoting voluntary efforts, including the democratic participation to achieve our much talked about commitment to children's education within the given timeframe.

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered to be the single most important factor that ushers in development and social justice. It enables meaningful participation of people in the mainstream of national life. The much talked about universalisation of primary education is fundamental to the development of children below 18 years of age into various educational programmes, an impossible task without the equal participation of the Govt. and the civil society at all levels. Following 5 decades of efforts to fulfill the constitutional commitment of education to each child below 14 years of age, the Govt. has now come to realize that it can never create the requisite infrastructure and national ethos except through a movement, now being mentioned as education for all' or 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan".

Although, there is a major emphasis today on the formal system of education or putting every child in the school, which would generally mean the Govt. run schools, there is now a growing demand for the voluntary participation. While recognizing the need for the concerted planning and action by the Govt., the respective roles of the other stake holders and the crucial responsibility of the voluntary sector is to be understood and appreciated. However, the rapid changes taking place in the Indian economy and the consequent effect on the society, has left the social sector in some kind of wilderness. At the same time, in all policy formulations, there is a commitment for devolution of power and the mobilization of the masses to achieve the national goals, among which 'Education For All" is one of the accepted themes.

In the given situation, there is a need to ascertain the role of voluntary sector which stands transfixed somewhere between an insensitive civil society, a doubly insensitive Govt. machinery and an indifferent political leadership from the level of Panchayati Raj institutions to the national leadership. Still, the demands being made from the voluntary sector is somewhat unreasonable. The volunteers or social workers, in the common parlance, are supposed to perform without being paid and act mostly in the spirit of charity. We have to understand that volunteers are not a class of people who are supposed to be driven by emotions and sense of social service alone as if they have no needs of day-to-day

existence, livelihood or any demands towards themselves and their families. Over the years, fortunately, when the activists and managers in the voluntary sector are attempting to institutionalize the efforts, their attempts are now being at least recognized as an alternative to the governmental efforts. In almost all the policies and programmes now, particularly in the social sector, in most of the schemes being implemented by the national and the State Govts. there is at least ritualistic mention of voluntary efforts. It is besides the point that the voluntary efforts are still not being taken to be a serious alternative except in case of some known NGOs who have created powerful models.

From our point of view, the volunteerism is now synonymous with multiple variety or voluntary efforts, described as volunteers, social workers, NGOs, voluntary organizations, voluntary action groups, or community based organizations. In fact, considering the status of the Panchayati Raj institutions despite the 73rd Amendment to the Consultation and other grass-root democratic organizations, like other local self-governments, even they may also fall somewhere between the Govt. and the voluntary sector. Although, such democratic institutions are supposed to be a political, in practice, they have become highly politicized whenever they have been founded or even struck deeper roots. They have to carry the conviction of voluntary sector for a fair democratic participation. When we discuss about the volunteerism and the role of this sector in tackling the national issues, such as, universal education, we cannot permit the grass-root democratic institutions to abdicate their primary responsibility.

Needless to mention that the voluntary efforts, albeit, in a more organized and institutionalized manner having the sanction and support of the Govt. and the larger society, holds the key to the basic transformation of the country. It is needless to further mention that Education For All or the Universal Education will decidedly remain a far cry with about 100 million children being out of school system, unless the entire efforts is given the shape of a nationwide movement. Out of nearly 380 million children who are found below 18 years of age in Census 2001, at least 1/3rd are said to be directly out of school system. Of the remaining 2/3rd children, at least half of them dropout on account of either the similar socio-economic conditions that hold the children out of school, or for the reason that the formal school system in majority of villages, towns and even in bigger cities like Delhi, are not able to create the possibilities of occupations or entrepreneurs leading to decent placement in life. As a result, there appears to be a major divide in the society in the name of education and, ultimately, a miniscule of the population, a very small segment, receives a meaningful education. One basic reason for this gap between what is needed and what is available in the name of service delivery, appears to be the lack of participation by the civil society and the absence of options from the informed choices. It is only with the support and participation of the voluntary sector that the national policies can be correctly formulated and appropriate infrastructure, curricula and systems can be created to deliver the requisite services to the masses.

National and International Commitments

The Indian Constitution has recognized the significance of education for social transformation. It is a document committed to social justice.

The Indian Constitution while recognizing the significance of education for social economic transformation and for social justice provided in the **Directive Principles (Article 45)** to ensure free and compulsory education to all children upto 14 years of age within 10 years from the commencement of the constitution. We have been chasing this dream for the past

52 years and we hope to realize it in some form now, following the **93rd Amendment** in the constitution, which converts this provision into the right to education for children in the age group of 6-14 years. The founding fathers also understood the value of education as a basis for life and liberty and thus, provided for the same generally for all persons (**Article 21**) and specially for the minorities and the down rodden (Article 30 (i), 41).

The Constitution makes incumbent that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.

National Policy for Children could be formulated only in **1974** and with all its inadequacies and lack of focus, it atleast gave a direction by recognising the educational needs of the children. It took another 12 years to formulate the **National Policy on Education** which attempted to create some concrete programmes towards the universalisation of education and fulfillment of our constitutional commitments. While recognising the **1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, of the four mentioned basic rights - Survival, Protection, Participation and Development, the last mentioned includes education which gave an impetus to the disadvantaged children. The subsequent **National Plan of Action for children** included education among other components like health, nutrition, sanitation, water and environment.

Most of these pious commitments and policy pronouncements have not been able to give the due position of dignity and equal participation to voluntary sector in the country. As a result, the efforts made by NGOs have, by an large, remained only success stories with very limited impact on the national scene. Precisely, for this reason, in case we are attempting to give substance to '**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**' to make the **Education For All** a reality, the participation of the voluntary sector representing the larger civil society alone with the Govt. shall remain the most important pre-requisite. The **Education For All** campaign of the government addresses 19 to 24 million children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.

Despite Government's initiatives for the educational advancement of children, over 100 million children are still reported to be out of school with a prevalent high drop out rate. Figures indicate the following :

	Indicator	Existing Levels (Year)	Expected Levels
EDUCATION	Literacy Rate (%) Definition age 15 and over can read and write	(M) 73 (F) 50 (1997)	Education for all Adult literacy rate of 80%
	Enrollment	60% children (6-14 years) (1999)	100%
	Drop-out rate	(M) 38.6% (F) 41.2% (1999) 72.63 million (2001est. NSS report)	20%

Source: Annual Report of dept. of elementary education and literacy, 1999-2000
NSS Survey, 2001-02

However, if we look at the overall literacy level at All India Level, (Census 2001), there has been an increase of 13.75% in the literacy rates in the last one decade with corresponding increases in the male and female literacy rates (M-11.83% F-14.99%).

This further necessitates a qualitative expansion in elementary education. More planned funds need to be diverted to the areas of necessity within the elementary education budget.

Resources and Priorities in Govt.'s Educational Programmes

The expenditure of education decreased from **4.9% of the GDP in 1991 to 3.6% in 2001** of which 50%, of the total expenditure was on elementary education. India's expenditure on education is one of the lowest in the world. Some East Asian countries spend 70% of the budget on primary education. Though education has been on the concurrent list since 1976, the share of the Centre has been increasing over the years from 6.8% in 1980-81 to 11.1% in 1998-99. A large part of the funds for the education sector are dependent on **external aid**. The component of external aid for elementary education has increased from 1.4% in 1990-91 to 27% in 1997-98.

Recognising the importance of the primary education sector, the Central Government has been working with State Governments on the **Principle of shared responsibility** for achieving the goals of UEE. This becomes more important in the context of our long standing commitment to make 'elementary education' as a fundamental right.

Mobilising additional resources to reach the **6% mark of the GDP** for education is a goal towards which the country will continue to strive. Besides adequate resources, the major challenge for the basic education sector is to design a system of education that is relevant and integrated with the economic needs of the people. Keeping this in view, the approach during the years to come needs to specifically deal with the question of equity with focus on the educational needs of the following special categories:

- ◆ Working children
- ◆ Street children / urban disadvantaged children
- ◆ Women and girls
- ◆ Children with disabilities
- ◆ Educationally backward pockets in different states

Keeping in view the ground realities, there is an urgent need to transform the design of education to include **vocational and non-formal education** so that there is no dichotomy between the educational system and the workplace. This calls for radical transformation in the manner in which education schemes and programmes are designed and implemented. Recent surveys have captured the strong community demand for basic education especially among the poor and the backward communities. There is need to create a plan for '**community ownership**' of schools that can engage and supervise the work of teachers. The National Policy on Education (1986) had proposed decentralisation as a fundamental requirement for improving the efficiency of the education planning and management system and creating a meaningful framework for accountability. Involvement of civil society and NGOs is central to the urgent need for rapid access of Education.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of HRD have also taken certain steps for universalisation of education. The programme initiated by the Ministry known as the **Alternative Schooling system** is in operation in several states through **District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)**, which runs as a programme of the state

education department. Universal participation in education is one of the most important objectives of DPEP.

In the background of this objective, the DPEP operates to cater to the educational needs of children, who are **dropouts, children of school-less habitations, children of migrant population, street children**, children who support the parents and therefore can not attend formal school, children of **displaced families, children** working in **garages, dhabas, factories** etc., children involved in **agricultural labour**, adolescent girls, etc. Although the initiative on alternate schooling has been taken up by the Ministry, the programme is yet to be implemented on a full scale. The agencies involved in it are still in the process of identifying different strategies to make it viable. Since the target group is extremely heterogeneous in terms of the socio-economic profile, need based multiple strategies have to be formulated for the alternative school programme to show the desired results. In the alternative schooling system, there is also a stress on vocational education, but only after completion of primary education.

The National Council for Educational Research and Training (**NCERT**) and Ministry of HRD have also developed a programme, known as **Inclusive Education**, which is meant to help mainstream the disabled into normal education and also utilize the existing educational infrastructure for them. This programme is meant for children who are handicapped in certain respects like visual impairment, problems related to hearing and speech, slow learners, etc. Such disabled children, on account of situational infirmities, encompass a vast number of street children. NCERT has been associated with several educational programmes pertaining to the street children for more than a decade, directly associating with the NGOs like Prayas in developing the **Non-formal education** curriculum for street children. The curriculum and course materials developed by Prof.C.J.Daswani, former Head of the Non-formal education department of NCERT, are being implemented by several NGOs across the country.

The '**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan**' has been launched to achieve universal education in the age group of 6-14 years. There is need to provide one teacher for every group of 40 children for primary schools and the opening of a primary school/alternate schooling facility within one kilo metre of every habitation, provision of free text books to all SCs/STs children and girls. Planning, supervision and management of education must be through **local bodies and Panchayats** must be involved in the monitoring of the delivery of basic education in rural areas. Skill development and motivation of teachers is essential in initiating and maintaining quality education in the schools. Provision of basic minimum level of amenities in the schools would stimulate a greater participation of the communities and would make education more child-friendly. In areas where women's empowerment movements have been initiated and taken root, the literacy programmes have received strong support.

The **mid-day meal programme** has made a difference in attendance and retention wherever a proper cooked meal is served. The practice of only providing grains followed by some state governments defeats the very purpose of the scheme. Efforts need to be made to provide hot cooked meals in all schools specially those in backward and tribal areas where children are badly in of need this supplementary nutrition.

There is also need to develop opportunities for **skill development** among school dropouts and other adolescent groups. The combination of the '**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan**' with the

'**Jan Shikshan Sansthan**' at the grassroots levels would perhaps be one solution to integrating basic education with vocational skills. Focussed programmes for **female literacy** must begin with initiatives for the girl child at the stage of primary education itself. The concept and strategy for the education sector, therefore, need not just reform but being in a radical transformation since it facilitates the participation of the community in the larger development process.

Voluntary Sector and Education

In the common parlance, volunteerism and NGOs are talked about as being two facets of a similar kind of activities – the first being in the nature of a spirit and the second being organizational. **Volunteerism** is considered to be a doctrine in which the free will of an individual to act is a dominant factor. A **volunteer** is a person who offers his services spontaneously without any extra incentives. His work is conscious, automatic and instinctive, a desire translated into some good oriented activity. A voluntary organization may be considered to be a conglomeration of volunteers joining hands with **shared values of common concern** for specific goals. The raison d'être of a voluntary organisation is based on the principle interests of a group constituting the organization.

Although, many in the voluntary sector and even outside, prefer to be called Voluntary Action Group (VOLAGS) or voluntary organization etc, the most common term used even now happens to be Non-Governmental Organisations. The emergence of such NGOs as presenting the participation of the civil society on common issues of concern is a global phenomenon. However, the significance of such non-governmental efforts to achieve the same goals as that of a welfare State through community or non-governmental efforts, finds a new meaning in the developing countries of South-East Asia and Africa. The NGOs are in existence in American and European countries as well, but in these individualistic and the capitalistic societies, the private endeavours to achieve similar goals are far more pervasive and institutionalized for altruistic and personal gains. The voluntary organizations in these countries serve a limited purpose, particularly to look after the disadvantaged and disabled sections of society, more in the nature of specialized activities where the government does not take major responsibilities and the business and the profit making organizations operate to merely express the social concerns. Contrary to them, in the developing countries, the NGOs or the voluntary organizations are often seen as the main driving force in the process of socio-economic mobilization and change. For instance, in Bangladesh, the powerful NGOs like **Gramin Bank** and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (**BRAC**) have almost substituted the Govt. in the areas of women's empowerment and micro-credit and primary education, respectively, reaching out to several millions.

In the changing times, in India as well, the NGOs are stated to play the most pivotal role in the field of education and child development. They have emerged as an important feature on the Indian social landscape and, for appropriate reasons, the 21st century is being described as the **decade of NGOs**. Whereas, the growth of voluntary sector is becoming pronounced worldwide, in India it attains far more significance on account of the need for massive participation of the people. With the State parcelling out a number of its responsibilities to the voluntary sector, and many non-profit organizations undertaking entrepreneurial activities to subsidize their charitable operations, the line between the sectors like State voluntary groups and corporate sector, is getting blurred. What then will be the distinctive contribution of the voluntary sector, and where lies its comparative advantage?

During its long journey, volunteerism has changed not only in form but also in spirit. In the past, religion, western liberal and humanist thought, leftist ideologies, and Gandhian philosophy served as the inspiration for volunteerism. Those drawn to voluntary action believed in simple, almost austere, living and total commitment, but this is not necessary to be so now. Today, the dominant motive may be said to be enlightened self-interest. Unless poverty and inequalities are reduced, violence and discrimination controlled, and the environment protected, the future for everyone will be blank. The voluntary efforts now a paradigm shift to meet up these high expectations.

Though commitment to social service and development is still high in the sector, it is not uniformly so. The professionals and non-professionals alike, are today in voluntary sector not because of ideology, but because they need a job. Moreover, not only do harsh economic realities make it difficult, even for those motivated by higher ethics, to work for a pittance of without remuneration, but many younger professionals no longer consider self-abnegation and sacrifice to be necessary adjuncts of voluntary action. They realistically believe that development work requires the best, and no less expertise and that even a voluntary organization must pay well enough to attract the requisite talents to it.

While discussing the spirit of volunteerism, the voluntary efforts, both organised and unorganized, the respective roles of the State and the Civil Society, we also need to understand the dynamics of the social and political mobilization and that of the market economy. While confronting the gigantic problems like education and primary health which are deeply inter-related with the overall development of the country, all these factors become extremely relevant and can't be dealt with in isolation.

As of now, nearly 750 NGOs are supplementing the governmental efforts towards UEE by rendering cooperation and resource support to non-formal education with assistance from the Government. NGOs are emerging as important partners in efforts of the Government towards UEE. The participation of NGOs together with community support has helped to improve the physical conditions and environment of schools as well as promotion for girls and children. All these voluntary initiatives unanimously believe in the efficacy of education as the gateway to the well being of these children, but their efforts are scattered and still not focused to galvanise into a national programme. This also creates the problem of sustainability.

The education provided by the majority of NGOs can be broadly classified into two categories, viz.-i. **Non-formal Education** and ii. **Vocational Education**.

Non-Formal Education

With the commencement of the planned development, special attention was paid to the education of children in the successive Five-Year Plans. Although, the outlay on primary education started showing an upward trend, the content and quality of education was not attractive enough to retain children in schools. It was soon realized that the dropout rates were extremely high. It was further felt that the majority of the out of school children were working in order to survive and fend for themselves. The present formal education system with inflexible timings is not suitable to their needs and requirements. They required a special curriculum that focused on life skills rather than on literacy alone. It is strongly felt that an **alternative curriculum built into the existing education system**, with scope for innovation and adaptation in response to the varied needs and problems of specific groups among these children needs to be developed.

Realizing the importance of education for this section of the population i.e. the street children, child's labour and other such disadvantaged groups, the government of India launched the Non-formal education programme with flexibility in timings and certain incentives (for example, mid-day meal programme) to attract children to the NFE programme. The NGO sector responded positively and this experiment in education outside the school system provided opportunities to millions of children to get into the educational network. Many voluntary groups, working in urban settings took up the challenge of imparting education through this unconventional mode. The NGOs working for street children in different cities across the country aim at mainstreaming these children into the formal school system. Many of them provide additional support service by way of shelter, clothes, and other enrichment programmes.

Main Features of NFE
The NFE programme is characterised by flexible features that facilitate spread of basic education among traditionally disadvantaged sections of population. Some of the important features are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condensed course of about two years' duration for lower primary and three years for upper primary level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time instruction at a time and place convenient to learners in small groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village community or the community in view provides the space and other facilities for running the NFE centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time honorary instructor/supervisor locally recruited and trained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on flexibility and decentralization of management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of curriculum and teaching-learning material comparable to the formal system and relevant to local environment and learners' needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing and certification of NFE students enable their entry into formal system.

Progress in NFE during 1990s

Since its inception two decades ago, the NFE programme has consistently grown in size and coverage, primarily due to the efforts made in the voluntary sector. In particular, significant expansion of the programme took place during 1990s in terms of number of NFE centres and the number of children enrolled in them. By 1997, there were 279,000 NFE centres covering about 7 million children in 21 States. Of these, 240,747 are being run with the help of the State Governments and 37,808 by 544 NGOs/Voluntary Agencies themselves. Five States, viz., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa account for 81 percent of NFE centres. The spread of NFE programme is moderate in Rajasthan and Assam. Coverage is very limited in Jammu and Kashmir, and NorthEastern States; the programme started in Arunachal Pradesh during 1990s. Following are some major points to be noted with regard to progress during the current decade:

- Number of NFE centres increased by 42,000 and enrollment capacity increased by one million learners
- Number of centres exclusively for girls increased by 39,000 resulting in additional enrollment capacity of 975,000 girls

- Number of NGOs participating in the programme increased by 277 and the number of centres run by them increased by 15,000
- The annual expenditure on implementation of the scheme increased by about three times

Expanding Partnership with NGOs

A unique feature of the NFE programme is its emphasis on implementation through local and national NGOs/Voluntary Agencies. Government of India has been giving grants to support such activities by NGOs. Participation of voluntary agencies in NFE has increased significantly during 1990s. While there were 7310 NFE centres run by voluntary agencies in 1993, their number swelled to 37,808 in 1996 and to 58788 in 1999. Besides running NFE centres, these NGOs have been implementing 41 experimental and innovative programmes for promoting elementary education.

Non-Formal Education programme and NGO experiments

The curricula and subjects taught in the NFE centres are diverse, ranging from basic literacy skills to minimum levels of learning, as well as life skills for adaptation of to life's meaningful activities. M.V. Foundation, an NGO of Andhra Pradesh, has developed a camp approach to equip illiterate working children in the age group of 9-14 years and prepare them for the formal education programmes. The essence of the camp approach is that the working child orients himself/herself gradually to the world of education. M.V. foundation initially adopted this approach for children working in the rural areas and has now extended it to the city of Hyderabad. Kolkata's CINI ASHA's bridge course on the other hand, is urban oriented and the striking feature of this project is that it encourages working children to continue education along with work activities. The basic objective of the bridge course is to give basic learning skills of reading, writing and numeracy, so that the child, in the day-to-day life, is able to make use of these skills meaningfully. The DoorStep model of bridge course started by DoorStep School covers 'on the street' children in Mumbai. The striking feature of the DoorStep model, distinguishing it from other NFE models, is the focus on preparing simple worksheets for making reading and writing skills easy for children. These worksheets are also being used by other NGOs in the city of Mumbai. The Open Classroom methods, initiated by the Tilaknagar Children Centre (TNCC) as an alternative education has been a resounding success. The Open Classroom education's first priority is the needs of the child. Recognizing the needs of the children, respecting the parents and listening to their thoughts and feelings about their children form the core of this approach. In other words, community participation is one of the important components of Open Classroom model. Many of the NGOs, working in the field of NFE these days are giving importance to this aspect. TNCC believes that for true education to take place, our system of education has to become a process-oriented where students and teachers are provided with the opportunities to express themselves, discover their true selves and develop in harmony with outer world. The curriculum, developed by TNCC for its Open Classroom is more oriented towards achieving this objective of education.

The NGO Forum for Street and Working Children, Delhi, founded in August 1987, took several initiatives by organizing workshops to discuss goals, objectives, approaches and strategies for NFE centres. This forum is a member of the National NGO Forum pursuing similar objectives at the national level and emphasizing on the needs of education for such children. Several other networks have been created to protect the interest of the street children in different parts of the country. Besides a host of other activities for the street children, all these networks attach prime importance to the education of such children in

different ways - starting from curriculum development, content development, preparing them to get admitted into the formal school or to the extend the facilities of National Open school.

Over the years, the NFE scheme has given rise to a number of innovative experiments by NGOs as well as other implementing agencies. Almost all the major EFA projects have evolved different approaches and institutional arrangements for reaching primary education to the disadvantaged children within the broad framework of NFE. Some of these are the '**Sahaj Siksha programme**' under **Lok Jumbish** in Rajasthan and the **Alternate School Programme under DPEP in Madhya Pradesh**. This aspect of the scope provided by NFE for promoting pluralism and variety in design and delivery of primary education needs further attention from policy makers and planners.

- During 1990s, two features of the NFE programme were stressed. These were importance of making necessary investments in qualitative improvement of NFE, and reiteration that the advantages of NFE lay in its flexibility and adaptability to the needs of disadvantaged children. Evaluation of the NFE programme has also made several useful suggestions for streamlining the organisation of the NFE scheme, improving infrastructure, qualitative improvement in various inputs and their monitoring with a view to increasing the internal efficiency of the NFE system and enhancing its effectiveness. These factors have to be further strengthened during the years to come.
- Despite numerous difficulties encountered and challenges faced, it cannot be denied that NFE has provided access to primary education for millions of children in remote and inaccessible rural areas and urban slums, specially girls and the disadvantaged sections of the society. In that sense the contribution of NFE in EFA is substantial and significant. Though contribution of NFE – about 3.5 percent of total enrolment at primary stage and reduction of over one percent in overall drop-out rate, is quite small when seen in numerical terms, its significance lies in providing an instrumentality for providing institutionalised framework for reaching primary education to socio-economically disadvantaged children and unreached areas. This should not be lost sight of in assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme.

Several NFE programmes, run by NGOs like CINI-ASHA, Prayas, M.V. Foundation, Vatsalaya Foundation, Salam Balak Trust, Project Mala and many others are being considered as important examples from the voluntary sector. The success stories of these NGOs can be used as models with regional variations and experimented with in other parts of the country.

PRAYAS NFE model

Prayas NFE system is directed towards 2 priority groups, namely, out of school children and the school dropouts in the age group of 6 to 14 years and the other categories of neglected, disadvantaged and working children in the age group of 15 to 18 years. These age groups are constantly merging in various programmes and activities having a powerful component of **life and occupational skills**. The NFE model has its own functional curricula, teaching-learning material, community and governmental resource mobilizations besides constant upgradation of techniques through researches, workshops etc. The model caters to multiple entry and exit points for the children where, on account of socio-economic compulsions, they are not able to remain constantly in the

formal educational system. The programmes and activities are thus tailor-made to suit to their unusual and changing requirements.

A majority of the NFE models adopted by various NGOs either follow self-designed curriculum or replicate the primary school curriculum of the concerned state education department. The NFE model designed by **Prayas**, initially based on the BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and NCERT models have been largely modified keeping in mind the needs and interests of such children. Some of the tools designed by Prayas are very child friendly and also based on the premise that in an NFE environment, a child too can be a resource person. Prayas provides children a space to express their imagination, thoughts, skills etc. in several ways. The organization also stresses on personal contact of instructors with the family members of the child. An important component of **Prayas NFE programme** is a constant inter-face with the community. It not only interacts with the children, but also involves the community and parents through its various programmes like Prayas Samudai Samiti (PSS). PSS is a body, consisting of parents, children, community leaders and NFE instructors. This body essentially provides support to Prayas NFE programme in the slums in its management of educational programmes and monitors children's progress. PSS also provides counseling to dropouts, maladjusted and abused children. Such community-based bodies have been created by many other NGOs in different parts of the country keeping in view the needs of the community and children.

Vocational Education through NGOs

The experience of the NGO sector with educational programmes of street children reveals that most street children express interest in acquiring skills, which they can apply immediately for their livelihood. Keeping this in mind, several NGOs have introduced vocational training courses in their NFE programme. Imparting vocational education along with the NFE programme and linking basic education with vocational education has also been experimented with by several NGOs in different parts of the country. Prominent NGOs, imparting vocational training courses included Akhand Jyoti Foundation, Sarjan(both Ahmedabad), Sanjivani Welfare and Care Society (Allahabad), Prayas, Delhi Brotherhood Society, Vatsalya (New Delhi), Jan Kalyan Samiti (Bhadohi), APSA, Maya, REDS, SPURD, Y.M.C.A.(Bangalore), Ruchika (Bhubaneswar), FADUC, Tomorrow's Foundation, Bengal Mass Education Society (Calcutta), Don Bosco, ICCW, Jeevan Jyoti (Chennai), SAHARA, URDES (Hyderabad).

Vocational education has now been recognized by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India as an important component of the National Literacy Mission Programme. It is for this reason that the Ministry has handed over the erstwhile Shramik Veedyapeeth (oldest and prestigious national level project on vocational education) to some prominent NGOs. The entire programme has now been renamed as **Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS)**. The Ministry identified 20 NGOs in the country to enstruct JSS to impart vocational education to the neo-literate, women belonging to the deprived sections of the society, street and working children, etc. The JSS represents an institutional framework for offering non-formal, adult and continuing education for the disadvantaged groups including women and children and to provide academic and technical resource support to the National Literacy Mission programme. The programmes are to be based on polyvalent or multi dimensional approach to education. The objectives of JSS are: i. improves the occupational skills and technical knowledge of the neo-literates and to raise their efficiency and increase their productivity, ii. provide academic and technical resource support to Zila Saksharata Samities in taking up vocational and skill development programmes for neo-literates in both urban and rural area iii. serve as nodal continuing

education centre and coordinate, supervise and monitor 10-15 continuing education centres/ nodal centres iv. organize training and orientation courses for key resource persons, master trainers on designing development and implementation of skill development programmes v. organize equivalency programmes through the open learning systems vi. widen the range of knowledge and understanding of the social, economic and political systems in order to create critical awareness about the environment vii. promote national goals such as secularism, national integration, population and development, women's equality, protection and conservation of environment etc. The Ministry of HRD has identified Prayas among other NGOs to run the Jan Shikshan Sansthan programme in the city of Delhi.

Why NGO partnerships?

In order to encourage such partnerships, government must move beyond mere rhetoric of participation and develop collaborative approaches to draw upon local communities' strengths. For this, NGOs need to be included between the non-formal education system and the government structures, so that the approaches developed at a community level can be scaled up and their benefits multiplied. There are good reasons for education policy makers to encourage such participative approaches as these can help to :

- ◆ Identify local factors causing low enrolments, high drop out rates and gender gaps
- ◆ Improve the relevance and quality of education, thereby increasing demand
- ◆ Overcome problems faced by the Govt. in recruiting and training teachers.
- ◆ Pioneer new strategies, which can be adapted at the district, regional and national level.

NGO programmes, particularly those incorporating the holistic approach for education for the deprived sections of the community developed by organizations like Prayas, has achieved high levels of success through a bottom-up approach in which, through intensive participatory work, literacy-training methods are adapted to the specific needs of local communities. In primary education, micro-level initiatives, such as the BRAC programme in Bangladesh, have often been far more effective than government action in increasing the enrolment and performance of girls.

However, the crucial point is that, in India, only the Govts. have the capacity to generate improvements in education on the scale required. But the community-level initiatives and integrating some into national and regional planning can enhance the capacity to a great extent. In the given situation, the States should remain the lead agency for achieving universal primary education. What states and non-government organisations can do together is to develop partnerships geared towards increasing participation at all levels to make the Education For All a reality.

Building such partnerships is not an easy process unless it is recognized that each of the actors involved has strengths and weaknesses. Governments may lack local understanding, but local communities are not homogeneous - and their decision-making bodies often don't prioritise the needs of the poor. Simply transferring authority from central to local and community-level structures in the absence of a coherent national strategy is not a solution. Added to the difficulties created by NGOs' and states having entirely different institutional ethos and political perspectives, are those associated with the social, ethnic, cultural, and geographic distance between various actors.

For all these problems, collaboration in achieving shared-goals can help to overcome mutual suspicions. Although many of the benefits of participation are difficult to measure,

some are more tangible. For example, local participation can make it possible to hire more teachers - especially female teachers - through local recruitment. Community involvement in school management makes it possible to develop schedules, which take into account the reality of seasonal labour demands. Qualitative improvements in the relevance of curricula, the standard of teaching, and the development of teaching materials can also be generated through collaboration, and there is often a demonstrable impact in terms of enrolment, attendance, completion, and gender equity.

As a broad policy country needs to promote the role of NGOs / Voluntary Organisations at all levels in the social sector with a view to achieving participatory development and also unburdening the administration. This approach can be followed with the involvement of NGOs in the education development programmes also. It has been recognised that the voluntary sector has tremendous creative potential to contribute in innovating and implementing educational programmes. While continuing with existing programmes of NGO involvement, effort needs to be made to identify competent NGOs and enable them to assume a larger role by functioning alongside government agencies in a significant manner.

Challenges

The Government at the Centre needs to mobilize all agencies to rejuvenate the educational system for the benefit of the children. Sufficient funds should be provided to the PRIs for opening and maintaining new schools, so that the Panchayats can play a dynamic role in achieving the targets by creating literacy awareness among the rural people. The country has undoubtedly been successful in evolving a national structure for elementary education in the last fifty years. Primary education is now provided in the mother tongue or regional language in all the States and UTs. There has been substantial increase in access to elementary education. First generation learners, girls and the under privileged sections of society have been provided with unique opportunities for vertical mobility. Literacy standards have been sustainably improved across the country.

The stupendous task of providing education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 2010 cannot be performed and sustained by the Government alone without active and meaningful collaboration with voluntary organizations and participation of the volunteers at all levels. Despite substantial achievement the task of universal education is far from complete. School enrolments have certainly increased significantly, but the number of out of school children is still alarmingly large, particularly when we add to them the school dropouts. The country today has still the largest illiterate population in the world and the gender, class and regional disparities in the education sector, though reduced, are still glaring and persistent.

During its long journey, volunteerism and the voluntary sector activities have changed not only in form but also spirit. In the past, religion, western liberal and humanist thought, leftist ideologies, and Gandhian philosophy served as the inspiration for volunteerism. Those drawn to voluntary action believed in simple almost austere living and total commitment. This is not necessarily so now. Today, the dominant motive may be said to be enlightened self-interest. Though commitment to social development is still high in the sector, it is not uniformly so. Many professionals and non-professionals alike, are today in the voluntary sector not because of ideology, but because they need a job. Moreover, not only do harsh economic realities make it difficult even for those motivated by a higher ethic, to work for a pittance or without remuneration, but many younger professionals no longer consider self-abnegation and sacrifice to be necessary adjuncts of voluntary action. They, perhaps, appropriately believe that development work requires the best of expertise and that even a voluntary organisation must be in a position to pay enough to attract them.

CONCLUSION

The new slogans are:

***Primary Education is a basic need
For every child, no matter what caste or creed,
Every child we must carefully nourish
So that our country may progress and flourish
From illiteracy to literacy – Education for all by the year 200....***

In the end, it can be said that the task to provide education to all the children is indeed a colossal challenge. The governmental machinery in any case can not address the problem within its own strength and resources. Through direct interventions, not more than a few thousand, may be lakhs, out of the existing millions out of school child population, could be covered. Mainstreaming them into the formal school system alone is not the solution. Considering the potentialities and nature of such children with pressing economic compulsion, the Alternative School Education appears to be an answer. The central and the state governments will have to collaborate with the National Open School, national and state level literacy and vocational programmes to encourage spirited individuals and voluntary organizations to run educational programmes for children. The task is indeed gigantic, but with the support of partners including international bodies, funding agencies, government agencies and voluntary sector and a strong political will, the objective of universalisation of education is achievable.

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