

National Education Policy 2020 and CSOs

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 approved by the Union Cabinet amidst COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted the educational systems worldwide, has raised new hopes and aspiration for millions of out of school children who are at the periphery of its theme, **‘Educate, Encourage and Enlighten’**. Prime Minister **Sri Narendra Modi** in his address to the nation on 74th Independence Day told that to attain the goal of self reliance (**Aatam Nirbhar Bharat**) there is a strong need of integration in all sectors rather than working in silos. He also expressed his faith in the NEP-2020 which is aimed to building strong foundation for the knowledge based contemporary aspirational India to match up with the new emerging world and global standards. He further tweeted, the NEP is based on **‘pillars of access, equality, quality, affordability and accountability’**, aimed to achieve inclusive and pluralistic society by producing sensible and responsible.

India’s new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, formulated and announced after a gap of 34 years from the last national policy, following prolonged consultations at all levels, promises revolutionary changes and integration of the broadly defined education with the national ethos and development. The Policy envisages broad-based, multi disciplinary educational programs coupled with Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE), interalia, holistic Pre-School and School education including middle & secondary with clear focus on character building, while, at the same time, to prepare them for futuristic gainful employment, being both visionary and ambitious. While assisting the NITI Aayog for over two years working with the Standing Committee of the leading service delivery CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), we clearly find the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal)-4 of inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning, being reflected in the NEP 2020.

The changes in the prevailing educational structure of 10+2+3+2, replacing it with the 5+3+3+4 and multiple entry and exit options, skill mapping, vocational education, access, equity, quality, multi-disciplinary education, blending of local with global, inclusive and interactive learning, developing critical thinking, reduced curriculum, emphasis on discovery, discussion, focus on research and innovation, graded autonomy to colleges, changes in Regulating Agencies and use of mother tongue and local language in the foundational stages, are all innovative moves. The strongly-felt need to achieve the universal access to quality education, scientific advancement, social justice and equality, national integration and cultural preservation at all stages has been brought into to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century. All these tectonic changes would require the participating of the civil society at all levels, particularly in respect of the foundational & ECCE programs.

The Draft National Education Policy of 2019 had estimated nearly **6.2** crore children of school age (6-18 years) being out of school in 2015. Largest segments among these children happened to be **10.1** million child workers and **35** million Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP), as defined under the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2015. **The same children, presumably, are now included within the NEP-2020 as the children in ‘Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Group (SEDG)’**. The Government has huge responsibility towards such large number of the children in accessing their right to education (6-14 years) as their Fundamental Right, inserted by Article 21-A, under Children’s Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

In India, even before the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, millions of children have been facing extreme poverty and social injustice. Children in India’s informal urban spaces, particularly those on streets, are exposed to hazardous environmental conditions of dilapidated housing, poor sanitation, vector and water-borne disease etc. The children of the sex worker, tribal children living

in the remotest parts of the country, severely disabled children, children living in refugee camps experiencing displacements, exploitation, abuse and trafficking, children living in the conflict-affected areas forced to spend their childhood in crisis, are mostly outside the purview of education.

The NEP refers to the 75th Round Household Survey (NSSO) (2017-18), estimating, **3.22** crore children in the age group of 6-17 years being out of school. The condition of these children and millions of others further exacerbates with lockdown, due to unprecedented crisis created by the pandemic COVID-19. The exodus of migrant workers from metropolises has severely affected the well being of their children who took arduous road trips, suffered extreme exhaustion and scarcity of food, water and medical aid, together with increased exposure to virus reached their homes in villages are out of school today.

The NEP envisions that every child under the age of five will be included in foundational learning process. Modifying the existing 10+2 structure of school education and introducing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program, NEP 2020 has responded to this long-felt need with a strong commitment towards universalizing pre-school foundational learning. Setting up of the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to achieve universal foundational literacy by 2025 will ensure a focused and time bound implementation of the mentioned strategies.

The NEP recognizes that socio-economic marginalization and exclusion is multi-dimensional and that children from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Group (SEDGs) have been under-represented in the education system. The recommendation to create ‘special education zones’ areas with larger presence of SEDGs (victims of trafficking, orphans, child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor) has broadened the framework of looking at exclusion from a class-caste-gender lens.

A vision of an inclusive education system towards achieving universal education system is one of the biggest highlights of the NEP. It sets the goal to achieve 100 percent gross enrolment ratio in prescribed to Secondary level by 2030. The participation of the CSO’s/NGO’s can be aligned with the government initiatives in recruiting teachers from local areas, availability of ‘special educators’ for differently-abled children at the middle and secondary level will be a revolutionary move towards a more inclusive and equitable education system.

These attribute of a visionary and ambitious approach enshrined within NEP 2020 sets the most difficult goal to achieve the 100 percent Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) from the Pre-School to Secondary levels by 2030 and to also introduce vocational education to the children starting from the class sixth onwards, aimed to increase to 50 % in Higher Education with vocational education by 2030. Vocational education alone will not help as it is happening with the millions of youth coming out of the skilling India programs, since their placements remain a challenge when country is witnessing a huge disconnect between *education and skill, between skill and industry and between the education-skill and community.*

THREE DISCONNECTS

In order to understand the significance of the Voluntary Sector in the NEP 2020 continuum of children’s education with protection as a matter of right coupled with skilling and livelihood, it is important to understand the strengths and limitations of the government machinery. The government machinery which is present at various levels has enormous resources at its command. However, it is constrained by lack of access, community contacts and commitment to the needy, absence of ground level knowledge and the inability to translate the programmes into services. There is a huge disconnect between India’s education programs and skilling programs, between skilling programs and industrial and other employability situation and also major disconnect between India’s education, skilling, community, industry and the people at large.

The lack of access to good education and training keeps the vulnerable and the marginalized sections into the vicious circle of low skills; low productive employment and poverty. The marginalized group which includes rural poor, youth, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and women constitute the highest number of poor. In India 70 per cent of the labour force reside in rural areas and depend on low productive productivity. agricultural activity where there is huge underemployment leading to low level of productivity. In view of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), the NEP 2020, recognizes the special and critical role that women play in society. Thus, providing quality education to girls is the best way to increase the education levels for current and future generations.

Potential of NGOs in galvanizing the Skill India

The history of India's development sector shows that the civil society organizations have always been the medium for major changes and progress. On the flip side, wherever public pressure, large scale or in segments, is against the change, the development has been often obstructed or becoming a challenge. It is thus clear that the present government's vision for the year 2030 coinciding with the Sustainable Development Goal's (SDGs) must galvanize the CSOs into a major player in this huge endeavour. However, in the present fast changing scenario the glaring disconnects between the civil societies and the government, the ambitious and far-reaching policies and their know-how to the people, all need to be bridged effectively and at a faster pace. There should be no gap between conceptualization of service delivery and their actual implementation. Though government machinery is almost omnipresent and is characterized by overlapping functions-myriad legal and other factors; whereas, the creditable NGOs have well-trained personnel with missionary zeal to serve the society, if facilitated by the government and carved out space for them in the policy and programs implementation.

To achieve the mandate of the Skill India and the vision of NEP 2020 in reaching out to the target of 50 percent of exposure in skill development to the youth, the participation of NGOs are required to play the catalyst role through identification, mobilization to actual services. Experience in several parts of India shows that NGO focus on sector-specific issues, such as, livelihood, community organization, community asset creation, women group formation, etc. and they also accelerate social and economic recovery after disasters.

The Government of India's National Policy on the Voluntary Sector, 2006 envisaged encouraging an independent, creative and effective voluntary sector. The support for NGOs, however, cannot be merely based on subjective assessments and factors not relating to their commitment, integrity, capability and experience in the given field. These CSOs/NGOs have to act as the 'million bridges' between the Union and State Governments through the bodies like the Standing Committee of NITI Aayog and the role of CSO's in providing services, implementing Schemes and Policies responding to the real needs of the people and thereby ensure good governance. Through, holistic vision and collaborative efforts between the Government, NGOs, Corporates and Industries, the vision of 'Skill India Mission 2015' to make India skill Capital of the world can be achieved.

The policy has given utmost thrust on the implementation of Vocational Education along with the foundational education as an integral part, starting from class sixth itself, aimed to provide exposure to at least 50 percent students in due course. This aspect is going to bridge the huge skill gaps in various sectors of economy wherein less than 6 percent of the workforce is reported to be skilled. This is also in alignment with the ***SDG's Goal 4.4 (Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill)***.

To ensure the participation of the community members in Adult Education, Social Workers/Counsellors travelling through the communities to track and ensure participation of non-

enrolled students and drop-outs will also be requested, during their travels, to gather data of parents, adolescents and other interested in adult education opportunities both as learners and as teachers/tutors. The Social Workers/Counselors will then connect them with local Adult Education Centres (AEC's). Opportunities for adult education will also be widely publicized through advertisements and through events and initiatives of NGO's and other local organizations.

The CSO's/NGO's can involve community and alumni through voluntary efforts for enhancing learning by providing at schools; one-on-one tutoring; the teaching of literacy and holding of extra help sessions; teaching support and guidance for educators; career guidance and mentoring to students.

To address the gaps in the community participation and dearth of vocational education in schools within the skilling eco-system of the country, especially the vocational training meant for the marginalized and vulnerable youth, the services of the NGO's like, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, functioning under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, (MSDE), GoI should be taken. The **Jan Shikshan Sansthan, (JSS)** in existence since **1967**, as '**Shramik Vidyapeeth**', as polyvalent or multi-faceted adult education program in India, is acting as a catalyst to strengthen the socially disadvantaged groups, namely, neo-literates, semi-literates and illiterates, migrant workers, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, slum dwellers etc.

Today, 247 JSSs in total, including 43 JSSs established across 42 Aspirational Districts are playing an significant role in bridging the existing gaps and fulfilling the aspirations of the marginalized youth. The role of CSOs in strengthening the vocational education program over the years should be integrated into the existing skilling eco-system on the identification and mapping of the local opportunities and the types of training needed to provide requisite skilled man-power.

The National Literacy Mission, established in 1988, was largely based on the voluntary organizations and support of the people during the period of 1991-2011. For Adult Education to be effectively implemented, the space for genuine long-term partnerships between government and civil society organizations, based on appreciation of their respective strengths and mutual respect, must be evolved. The strong and innovative government initiatives for adult education-in particular, to facilitate community involvement along with the smooth and beneficial integration of technology, to achieve the 100 percent literacy.

Critical to ensuring this would be to legitimize and institutionalize the different roles of NGOs within the institutional and other mechanisms. The adult education system envisages the flexibility in the implementation of programs by NGOs. Civil society organizations and NGO's can also be associated in capacity building of Gram Panchayats, with funds from adult education department or the Panchayats. The institutional framework and mechanism may be developed along with the credible NGO's/CSO's at State, District, Block and Gram Panchayat/Village levels and it must be envisioned and ensured as part of the mandate upon the Central Government.

The NITI Aayog has constituted sub-groups within the 'NITI CSO's Standing Committee' on different thematic areas, aimed to identify framework and best practices from across the sectors/countries to regulate the voluntary sector in a sector led manner. It has integrated the various departments, namely, Ministry of Human Resource & Development, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, NCERT, CBSE, UGC, AICTE, NAAC, CSIR by casting the responsibilities of coordinating with the service delivery organizations in the space of the education to Azim Premji Foundation and to Prayas JAC Society on Child Rights and Child Protection along with the International Organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF.

Prayas JAC Society, a national level, non-profit, humanitarian organization working since 1988 into the lives of the marginalized, vulnerable, destitute, deprived, trafficked, run-away, street children, missing and lost & found children, aimed towards their transformation through education and social & economic empowerment programs was one of the staunch implementation partner of the '**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan**'. Prayas' efforts in reaching out to the unreachable children living in the most difficult circumstances and enabling them to get enrolled into formal schooling coupled with vocational training, aimed in strengthening their arms towards social and economic empowerment. Hundreds of thousands of such marginalized and vulnerable children have undergone the process of change, as adopted under the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 1986/2000/2006 and 2015 along with the mandate of SSA, aimed towards education for all, as their fundamental right.

Prayas JAC Society with its presence in 10 States/UT's, namely, Delhi, Bihar, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Jammu & Kashmir with more than 700 professionals, has successfully implemented various education programs, aimed to achieve the objectives of the universal elementary education and through convergence. It has partnered with the various state governments by setting up various Literacy and Vocational Centers and through its own '**Jan Shikshan Sansthan**' functioning at **Samastipur (Bihar) and Jahangirpuri (Delhi)** has trained and empowered more than **2 lakh** marginalized youth by imparting education and skills aimed towards socio-economic transformation.

To address the unprecedented crisis and also to achieve the vision of the '**National Education Policy-2020**', the services of 96,000 NGO's registered on DARPAN Portal of NITI Aayog may be immediately taken from the stages of intensive inclusion of the 'Out of School Children' through mapping exercise of such children along with their families, particularly, those into the vortex of migration/reverse migration. Further, NGO's/CSO's can be engaged in enhancing the capacity building of 'Aanganwadi Workers could be also engaged through the Volunteers and Field level functionaries. The NGO's/CSO's build mechanism for adoption of the good practices along with its sustainability to achieve the aim of 100 percent of GER by 2030 and 50 percent youth to undergo the process of vocational training in the country by 2025.

The NGOs' role in implementation of the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), now 'Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan'**, a comprehensive and integrated flagship program of Government of India is aimed to universalize elementary education, obviously including the out of school children. It needs to be done by filling the gaps through the bridge and educational programs provided by the voluntary organizations and by improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes for all the children, including the children with special needs.

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