

6th National Stocktaking Convention on the Status of Implementation of the RTE Act, 2009

The 6th National Stocktaking Convention of the RTE Forum was held on March 21st, 2016 at the Constitution Club, New Delhi. More than 600 participants from 18 states of India participated in the event. The Chief Guest for the event of the Vice President of India Hon'ble Sh Hamid Ansari, who made the keynote address expressing his concerns regarding the slow implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 and the need to strengthen the public system of education. The session was chaired by Prof. J. B. G Tilak, Vice Chancellor, NEUPA and other speakers included Prof. Muchkund Dubey, President, CSD, Mr. Loius George Arsenault, Country Representative, UNICEF and. Ambarish Rai, Convener, RTE Forum.

Other sessions included a plenary on the status of implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 and parallel sessions on- community and inclusion, teachers and quality of education, privatization of education and its impact on the new education policy. The concluding session witnessed the participation of various Parliamentarians. The Consultation saw a participation of eminent educationists, teachers and teachers' union members and NGO and INGO representatives. It was well covered by the media. A Draft Report on the Status of Implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 at national level was also released during the Convention.

This Convention was organized while RTE Act, 2009 was going to complete its six years journey since its enactment on 1st April, 2010. The Convention discussed on several thematic issues connected to the implementation of the RTE Act, the challenges and the way forward. It's clear that the objective of universal right to education for children still remains a distant dream. While certain initiatives have been taken by the government to ensure the implementation of the Act, broadly, *we have failed to make the RTE Act a reality*. Presently, *less than 10% schools are compliant with all the provisions of the Act*, while the deadline for ensuring the complete implementation of the Act has passed. There is *no road- map or time-frame* to determine the future of the Act as well as the intention of the government.

The Union Budget of 2015-16 saw *massive cuts in the overall spending on education* as well as SSA allocation. Fifty years ago, the Kothari Commission, 1966 had recommended 6% of GDP allocation to education. Unfortunately, we are *yet to cross the 4% mark*. Considering the cumulative gap, at least 10% of GDP needs to be spent on education. While the RTE Forum continues to participate in pre-budget consultations organized by the Ministry of Finance, *education remains low on the list of priorities of the state*. The recent UN call to universalize till higher secondary levels means that *the scope of the Act has to be extended* to bring children below six and above fourteen within its ambit. However, this will not be possible if spending on education is not increased.

The focus of the government has shifted to the new education policy and the *future of the RTE Act remains uncertain*. While the RTE Forum has formally *submitted its recommendations to the Drafting Committee*, new challenges have emerged which threaten the spirit of the RTE Act.

Talks of withdrawal of the no detention policy, recruitment of contractual teachers, large number of teacher vacancies and dysfunctional teacher training institutes are all contributing to the *dilution of the spirit and essence of the Act*. On the other hand, more than one lakh

government *schools have been shut down* in the last few years, clearly *violating the Right to Education- a fundamental right that the state is duty bound to provide.*

It's particularly important to underline the danger that while the state is shrugging away its responsibilities, the *private lobby* is working overtime, both inside and out of the government- to commercialize school education. *Low cost schools providing sub-standard education* to the middle income groups have sprung-up across the country. *Multinational companies* are now coming to India and opening *chains of schools* (for example, in the state of Andhra Pradesh). *PPPs and vouchers are being pushed* vigorously instead of concerted efforts to strengthen the public system of education; which continues to educate a majority of the children in this country. Education has been reduced to *learning outcomes* and the focus has shifted to *right to learn* instead of *right to education*. Discussions on broader perspectives and objectives of education have disappeared from the current discourse.