
Report

Meeting with Parliamentarians

Constitution Club, RTE
Forum, August 11, 2016



Consultation with Parliamentarians on RTE and NEP

A Report

Background

RTE Forum is a national level Network working towards implementation of the RTE work in collaboration with its state partners across 21 states. It is a nodal advocacy network of the RTE act in India which works with policy makers, ministries, teacher's unions and parliamentarians among others for changing the grim ground reality of elementary education across the country barring a few states. The nation moved into enacting a law for quality and equitable elementary education for all and the Network was formed to make this law translate its provisions into implementation. Even after 6 years of its implementation there are various gaps which require to be plugged and on some aspects it has progressed tremendously. However the complete picture is grim as less than 10 percent schools are RTE compliant according to the stock taking report of the Forum. Dovetailed with these issues is another emerging concern regarding the document 'Some Inputs for Draft new education policy' which have further diluted the Act instead of weaving a policy to strengthen it by removing the deficiencies and showing a renewed commitment to actual implementation of the Act. This has brought forth the culpability of the state once again which require immediate action. The consultation with the parliamentarians was convened to address these issues and 50 parliamentarians were informed about the issues and invited for a cross party parliamentary consultation on the 11 th August 2016 at the constitution Club in Delhi

Introduction

The two hour long consultation began with a lot of enthusiasm as around 80 participants gathered from various civil society organizations, teacher' unions, advocacy networks at the Deputy Chairman Hall in the constitution club of India. Honorable parliamentarian from Rajya Sabha Ali Anwar arrived right after completing his speech at the Rajya Sabha and others joined in later. Ambarish Rai welcomed the guests, participants and Prof Dubey, eminent educationists' ardent supporter who have contributed immensely to the cause of the Network, and thereafter shared the purpose of the consultation. The HRD ministry he said has shared a document titled "Some Inputs for a draft new education policy" which have not mentioned about RTE Act. Consultations were organized at various district/state and national level over a period of one year from 2015 onwards. It was reported that 2.5 lakh consultations were conducted

across the country however without the knowledge majority CSOs, educationists, and researchers working at various levels through the Forum. 25000 opinions were flagged on the website which came through the website and a five member committee was formed to consolidate the suggestions. TSR Subramanian headed the committee and came out with a 230 page report which he himself tabled before the public after the Ministry said that the report will be tabled only after consultation with the states. After some days the ministry came up with another 43 page report titled Inputs for the Draft New Education Policy on the MHRD website asking for suggestions from the public. Locating the history of educational policies in the country he said the 1968 policy was framed on the basis of the recommendations of the Kothari Commission which mentioned about allocation of 6 percent GDP on education and establishing a common school system in the form of neighborhood schools in the country. It ranted slogans across the country for an equal education for all irrespective of belonging to any caste and class. In the 1986 policy market forces came into play, however it also mentioned a 6 percent of GDP and a common a school. In this document towards a new policy it is a grave concern that RTE act has been treated in bit and parts. The Act came into force after a long drawn struggle and article 21A was inserted which made education a legal entitlement and gave children a fundamental right to education linking it to right to life. 100 years ago in 1911 Gopal Krishna Gokhale presented the idea of an equal universal education for all in the constituent assembly and RTE act finally gave this right to all children of India in 2009. Despite efforts the Act excluded the preschool component from its purview. This however brought the country to a juncture where it moved from a policy on education to a legal entitlement. The atmosphere has charged up again with the discussion on a new policy across the country on various dimensions. Firstly the purpose of the policy is not clear. Education is not only for employment and some narrow learning outcome but has a larger social goal of transformation and social change. It binds different culture, tradition, language and builds a diverse society. This also forms the core of the constitution and the policy should reflect the essence for creating mindset/world view for the future generation of how a society should be. However the input documents have raised several questions among educationists, activists, teachers on its objective and conceptualization of education. Quality education, ICT referred in the document is also raising questions as it doesn't reflect the existing ground realities. What have come out of a discussion in RTE forum is that the Policy should work towards implementing the RTE Act and strengthen it by removing the deficiencies. Otherwise there is a formidable threat of losing it.

This consultation is to discuss the Forum's response on the Input document for a draft New Education Policy with parliamentarians which are part of a regular advocacy intervention of the Network. Last time 17 parliamentarians came across party lines for a consultative meeting. Today coincidentally a debate is going on at the RajyaSabha on the New Education Policy and Ali Anwar from JDU arrived right after completing his speech in the RajyaSabha. Inviting Prof Dubey to chair the meeting further, he welcomed the guests and the participants once again.

Opening Remarks of the Chair

Prof Dubey began by saying that the situation of education in India is grim even after 70 years of independence despite persistent discussions and debate on the subject. Quality education for all children in the country still remains a distant dream. Any country without equal and quality education for all can ever become a developed country. Even today lakhs of children are out of school and there is a deficient of lakhs of trained teachers in the country. A study conducted by RTE Forum finds that less than 10 percent schools in India are RTE compliant. Drop- out rate is very high nearly 40 percent after the 8th standard and 60 percent after the 10th standard. Even for children who complete education, in terms of quality it is much below the required standards. Indian corporates claim that only 20% of graduates in the country are employable. Instead of addressing these glaring gaps and implementation of RTE act the draft policy document is not reflective of these issues. Further the concern of universalization of secondary education is missing in the conceptualization of the policy on education. A campaign was started on universalization of secondary education, however it couldn't progress beyond a preliminary stage. Citing the example of Bihar, he said teachers should be increased by 14% and budget increased by 40 % to achieve universal secondary school education in the state. The greatest impact of this deplorable condition of the education system is on the marginalized children belonging to SC, ST, minority communities. There are very few school education system which are so discriminatory and divisive. Reiterating how right to education came into force which brought the nation to a high pedestal on education, the new direction may take the nation back to 50 years. The state took responsibility to provide this entitlement and have failed to do so within the stipulated time frame. The two time frame mentioned in the Act has already lapsed.

There is no mention of a revised time frame within which RTE act will be implemented in the input document. Second there is no guarantee of providing the basic infrastructure in making every school RTE compliant. The state has failed to provide the resources and required budget within the stipulated time frame. RTE forum have recognized some issues which are against the RTE act and has laid out in the document for the benefit of others.

Mapping the forward trajectory towards quality and equal education he zeroed on the following points:

1. Government should prioritize implementation of the RTE act. It is a law framed under the constitution of the country
2. New time frame should be stipulated for implementation of the Act
3. Budget should be increased which at present have been slashed, 29 % in Mid Day Meal and 49 % in the only scheme on child development in the country ICDS.
4. If the policy wants to act towards a new direction it should try and remove the deficiencies of the Act and work towards making preschool and secondary school within RTE.
5. There has been mention of a commission on Higher Education but not on school education for monitoring and supervision. Child Rights Commission has been entrusted with the role which has no adequate resources for the specifies role

6. Requirement of a language policy to counter discrimination made towards children taught in their mother tongue.

Responses from the Parliamentarians

Ali Anwar, JDU

Member of parliament RajyaSabha

He began by saying that it is an important occasion today that a similar discussion is being held at the RajyaSabha on the New Education Policy. Seasoned leaders like SitaramYechuri, CPIM congress leader KapilSibal, Derek o Brien, spoke on the subject before him in the house and he also spoke for a rough 6 minutes before pushing off for this meeting. India is a welfare state and it is the state's responsibility to provide for universal education to all children in the country. However what is seen today is that there is a rapid increase in the privatization and commercialization of education in the country. Before slogans like equal education to all for an equal society were very popular, which emerged from various social and political movements. However with so many developments towards commercialization of school education even such slogans don't commonly surface during recent election campaigns. Today lakhs of rupees are charged as fees in private schools. Days when children of a manager and workers studied in the same school are no more commonly seen. Today somewhere the imagination of an equal society which also reflects in the constitution of the country is facing challenges from all quarters.

The opposition party congress failed to deliver but the BJP government is creating fractures in the society through raising emotional issues in education. Sometimes issues of Sanskrit education, teaching of religious scripts are discussed which is against the spirit of the Indian society as defined in the constitution. No one is concerned about the quality of education in schools. As Prof Dubey mentioned the RTE Act came about as a result of a long drawn struggle and it was passed by the parliament. It was also upheld by the Supreme Court of India and education was made a fundamental right. However it is going in the reverse direction threatening the diversity of the country. It is also diluting the RTE Act. In universities progressive laws are amended and Sakhas are placed instead inside the universities. Instead of respecting and representing the regional identities and diversity of the country educational spaces are used for some other work. After class use of library and transportation for female students has been scraped for setting up Sakhas in some universities. Even in the input document unfortunately it has taken inputs only from a particular sector instead of various sector representatives of the different regions and communities. It has excluded already excluded communities like Pasanda Muslims and others who are both socially and educationally backward. Extending his solidarity he said that the Forum should continue to organize such meetings and create awareness so that children belonging to diverse groups and communities are equally benefitted through education

Prof PrasannaPatsahani BJD

Rajya Sabha

Prof Prasanna from Orissa began by talking about how he personally takes interests in the education of children. He himself authored many books and spoke about the post-colonial impact on school education in India. Referring to hegemony of English education in India he mentioned Macaulay's educational strategy of using English language which continued in postcolonial India dismantled the Indian education systems. As a result of which people lost their local language and commercialization became the basis of English oriented education system. In Indian traditional schools, Education was never imparted in return of monetary gains. On the contrary today private English medium schools are increasing and are charging exorbitant fees from the students. Because of degradation of values in education youth are also being driven to anti-social activities. There is a need for revival of the indigenous education systems in India he expressed his interest for a continued relationship with the Network.

Arun CPM representative

Explaining the level of apathy of the government towards important issues he referred to PM's absence from important debates in the parliament. He brought the audience attention to PM Modi's request for ideas for 15th August, and requested the participants in the meeting to pick ideas from the meeting and share for the benefit of all. However on the same breadth he also expressed concern that the PM would not be interested in listening to any of the ideas discussed here because he only likes talking rather than listening to other's opinions, views and beliefs. Citing from a poem written by Bertold Brech the speaker said even if a general in Army has a huge tank, he will require a person to run it. Similarly manpower is required to maintain and run a fighter plane. He drew the point from the poem that besides working, man has also an important ability to think which makes human creation unique. The ability of human's to think make education important as it has been used as a control mechanism from centuries. Control through education couldn't be forgotten even in ancient times as examples of Eklavya and Sambhu can never be underestimated. Even the present government is giving so much importance on education because of a similar purpose. Thus a healthy inclusive debate on a new education policy is extremely important.

In 1986 policies several island like schools (KV, NV) came into being for a select few students. The budget for these schools remained much higher than the normal government schools. It was very carefully designed to reinforce quotients of mediocrity. Three imp problems surface even after passing of an act guaranteeing fundamental right to education-quality quantity and equity. Access is still a critical component to education. What and how quality education will be accessed by all children equally is unfortunately an important concern even today. The reforms regarding quantity and quality in education have to be parallel for effective implementation. In

tribal areas in Vishakhapatnam children have to travel for two days to reach their school and then undergo teacher's punishment for absenteeism. Most of the times telephone lines are disconnected as a result of which they fail to inform the teacher or hostel warden on time. These factors demotivate children immensely and feel comfortable not attending school and eventually drop out. Second because schools don't teach in their mother tongue, school calendar never match tribal festivals and events. Third there is a requirement for budget to plug these gaps. 6 percent GDP, 10% of central government expenditure and 6 % of state government expenditure is minimal and need urgent implementation which has been delayed over years. Expressing solidarity on behalf of CPM he closed his presentation.

Discussion:

Thanking the presenters, Ambarish Rai said that the RTE Forum was formed to bring together teacher's union, SMCs, activists, researchers, educationists and parliamentarians primarily for implementation of the RTE Act. New education policy has come about at a time where the Indian state has committed SDG goals in making education till secondary level universal. However, only states can universalize secondary education not the private sector. Private sector has its own business motives in education. The reverse is happening in this country where the private is regulating the state in framing policies in a way which will benefit the private players in school education in the country. In Andhra Pradesh the state has signed a memorandum with the Bridge International and Pearson Education to take over 4000 state schools and run them. These schools are not charitable schools but low cost business schools which get subsidies from the state and fees from the parents. These schools cut down on qualified teachers by introducing CD based digital programs which can be run by anyone with basic education skills, reducing the meaning of teaching learning processes. In a country where the cabinet secretary is paid more than the President of India a teacher's salary has been reduced to some 3000, 4000 rupees. This kind of teaching and schools are not only violating the country's law but also reducing the meaning of education to some learning outcomes promoted by studies like ASER which have indirectly reinforced privatization of schools. Kothari commission bestowed a lot of respect to a teacher's role and said the teacher should be equipped to free herself from any other work while teaching. Education is not a road construction project but carries a much larger responsibility and goal towards transformative education. The present situation will exclude poor from school education and reinforce further inequalities in the society. States instead of following the direction of the private business schools should work towards implementation of the Act which is a legal entitlement and hold the state accountable. He said the document has been framed keeping these ideas at the forefront and seek suggestions from the participants. Then he opened the house for discussion till the other parliamentarians joined the meeting.

Issues raised by the participants

Inclusion which was envisaged through EWS is working towards reinforcing people's aspiration towards private schools. Out of the 1000 applications in a school, 100 applicants get admission under this category and other 900 who are left out are joining budget schools.

In SMC election social workers were supposed to be elected from education sector, however in Delhi they are all selected from the AAP workers.

Children rights should be part of education rights. 250 children are taught by one para teacher in Jharkhand where 65% of teachers are para teachers. Besides teaching they are supposed to perform multiple roles as well.

These issues were recorded and incorporated in the draft note before submission to the ministry. The parliamentarian who joined after the discussion shared their thoughts after the discussion.

Responses from Parliamentarians

Ravi Prakash Verma Samajwadi Party

MP Rajya Sabha

He joined the consultation after the debate was over for the day in Rajya Sabha. Calling it an important debate to be continued in the house the next day, he said that even after 70 years of Indian independence the trajectory of education remains to be defined. The discussion in the house also discussed at length what education should be to meet the demands of changing society. To prepare India for the future challenges, in a way where everyone irrespective of caste, class community, religion can participate through a legitimate official structure based on human rights. However it was made clear by the HRD minister that the input document is not a draft and consultations are on-going for preparing a draft new education policy.

One important component of RTE Act is relating to grievance redressal, so that dutiful stakeholders could act promptly, in cases where intervention is required. Such an institution is required where stakeholders could directly intervene. Another aspect as pointed out in the discussion is the pre- school education which is the foundation basic education should be brought into the RTE act and curriculum should be designed as per the constitution of the country. The NEP which was supposed to be out by 2015, is still in the formation of the draft policy. It should be inclusive of all children with a quality that will equip doctorates not to apply for lower jobs where research skills are not required. It is time to overcome such grim situation and the NEP should work towards it.

He further shared that it is heartening that 25-30 parliamentarians, hold these concerns seriously and will be willing to give their solidarity to the voices and concerns of the RTE forum.

Javed Ali Khan Samajwadi Party

MP Rajya Sabha

Recalling how he worked with Ambarish Rai and others on equal education from his student days, he said issues have not changed much. There was a time where privatization in education was despised by people and there were protests and yatras against schools like Doon. The scenario changed drastically in the present times. Today everyone only wants to send their children to a private school. There is a reason behind this change as well. There has been an attempt to deteriorate the quality of education in government schools that even poor people at any cost want to send their children to private school which is perceived to be providing better education than a government school. Thus private schooling has become a profiteering business option for many.

Policies are passed in the parliament but along with it people's movement play a major role. The shrinking spaces of movements require to be renewed for proper implementation of a law/policy. This he said hold true even for the right to education. He called for a larger people's role to counter these increasing concerns which is creating divide in the country.

Alok Tiwari, Samajwadi Party

MP Rajya Sabha

Adding that he is with the concerns raised by the other speakers he said that education is required for mental health of a child and National Policy should reflect the larger goals of education for the overall development of the child. Education is an extensive agenda covering children across the length and breadth of the country. In the current deplorable situation of education system in the country with increasing commercialization the primary responsibility is to ensure that no child is deprived of education or excluded from access to quality education. A large constituency of children population is outside the ambit of elementary education even today.

He expressed that it is this collective effort made by networks like RTE Forum which could make a dent in spreading awareness among people towards their right to education.

Closing remarks of Chair

Reiterating his previous remarks Prof Dubey said that the country have reached a high level in the form of an Act guaranteeing free and compulsory education for all. The state is accountable in implementing the Act and any new policy on education should be able to strengthen the Act. Otherwise it will push backwards the entire discourse on education some 50-60 years which is actually lamentable. Rather the policy should lay down the principles and signposts in the direction of the Act and bring in new aspects removing the deficiencies of the Act. It should include pre-school and secondary education within the RTE and universalize it so that education from preschool to secondary education could be accessed by one and all. Even a new law if formulated should be able to strengthen the existing law and not like the input documents violate the RTE act on several grounds. He requested the parliamentarians to include these concerns

which have been expressed by the Forum and thanked for their gracious presence for a longer collaboration.