

# National Council Meet: RTE Forum

Chanakyapuri, VishwaYuva Kendra, New Delhi

18-19 December, 2014

## Morning Session

The National Council Meeting of RTE Forum held on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December, in Vishwa Yuvak Kendra started by observing a 2 minute silence in memory of the children killed in the tragic attack in Sainik School in Peshawar, Pakistan. Participants expressed deep concern on terrorist activities targeting children, especially in the light of the fact that at least 70 schools/educational institutions were targeted during last one year. This is indicative of the increasing danger on children as the most vulnerable group.

Ms. Shireen Miller, Save the Children, welcomed the participants and shared the agenda and objectives of the meeting (0). Following this, Mr. Alisher Umarov, UNESCO, gave an overview of the *Right to Education* from an international perspective. He said that although it is the duty of the government to ensure that the RTE Act is fully implemented, an external push is necessary to make things work. He emphasized that the Right to Education is not a standalone agenda for India, it is a global movement. Therefore, it is important to have an overview of the global status, which will significantly contribute in the eventual implementation process.

He suggested that a focus in what we voice out as a forum is necessary. There must be an exclusive paradigm that talks only about RTE Act instead all the paraphernalia problems. "Learning would follow from enrolment," he emphasized, is a common misconception, which is unfortunately true in the Indian scenario. He further highlighted the errors in the reports that are submitted by countries- to the UN. Giving the example of India, he stated that the report submitted by India states the enrolment figure as 109%.

Usually the data asked for include numbers of teachers, students, infrastructure etc., which are all input data. Output data is usually beyond the scope. Similarly quality factor is also overlooked. He suggested a special chapter on finance in the next report of RTE Forum with assessment of financial requirements to fulfil the goal of the implementation of the RTE Act.

He stressed that the agenda of education is significant enough and is being voiced out in international forums increasingly. A Global Education for All Meeting was held on 12-14

May 2014, known as the Muscat Agreement. 7 exclusive targets pertaining to education are part of Millennium Development goals. An online platform called Education Indicator has been set up to discuss indicators for monitoring for Education Post 2015.

Following an extensive global view on the matter by Mr. Umarov, National Convenor of the RTE Forum, Mr. Ambarish Rai briefly shared the national status of RTE implementation. He raised the concern that the new government is silent about the Act so far, with only slight mentions of making a new education policy soon from January, setting up of a Commission etc. He mentioned that the last policy formulated for education was in 1986; hence an update is much required. But as the new government has not come out with anything solid yet, future direction is still unknown. Whether is it widening the scope of RTE/ implementation of RTE/curriculum change/Kothari's model of national system of education to achieve the larger goal of an egalitarian society are questions that remain. If the new policy heads in a different direction altogether, it is a matter of deep concern. Mr. Rai was sceptical of the present status- text book, curriculum problems for example. Financial part is another concern as it has affected the implementation of RTE ACT, 2009 widely- Educational cess 2%; additional funds 3.4% etc. All these challenges have not been addressed by the new government so far.

He said that RTE Forum has been working towards a National System of Education recommended by Kothari Commission, reiterated by "Ramamurthy Committee". RTE Forum has been incessantly trying to pivot RTE Act towards the "Common School System." Present scenario tells that ground-level achievements have not been much although the notions have been established. Only 10% of schools are found to be RTE Act compliant; fulfilling the indicators provisioned in the Act. Education as a fundamental right is here to stay, but the emphasis on RTE rests with the Civil Society. Mr. Rai announced that a financial report is underway which clearly states the exact amount required to fully implement RTE Act in India, with a National Consultation to be organised in February in collaboration with CBGA, so that the situation becomes transparent on how much the government is spending and what the gaps are.

Flagging the other important issues he told that *Grievance Redressal Mechanism* is very weak across the country. NCPCR, SCPCRs lack all kinds of resources. The situation is further aggravated by acute shortage of teachers, untrained teachers and contractual teachers, who continue to be recruited. About 90% teacher training institutes are private. Such shortcomings are not acceptable in the paradigm of a Fundamental Right.

Another major concern is that of school closures. Schools have been closed all over India on various grounds (if total no of students is less than 60, somewhere less than 20 or even 10 etc.), in spite of vehement retaliation by activists and masses (like in Rajasthan). There is a hidden propaganda of privatisation behind all this.

There are other challenges such as propagating a notion for amending RTE Act, RTE amendments such as age appropriate admission to be changed to ability appropriate admission (from Rajasthan government); no detention policy to be changed if there is parental permission for detention. These suggestions are diluting the essence of RTE. The private sector lobbying is particularly targeting teachers to bring back the exam system, among other reforms. SMCs albeit being an ideal instrument to bring together all stakeholders at ground level, are mostly non- functional. He reiterated the fact that only a nationalized system of education will prove effective to achieve our larger goal of RTE.

He asserted that we need to discuss our agenda post the deadline too because we must be prepared for the worst case scenario, instead of assuming a dead end for March 2015. We must network effectively with academicians, teachers, and lawyers and other stakeholders to come up with a solid education movement. Legal processes going on in the country need to be networked for the benefit of the RTE cause.

The session on state scenarios, deliberated by respective state convenors, followed. The session was chaired by Mr. Sanjeev Rai, Save the Children. Historically speaking, movements oriented towards empowerment and awareness has always faced obstacles, Mr. Rai observed. Trade Unions and Teacher Unions have been globally the most powerful unions in the world. Post 1990, trade unions have been dismantled completely due to economic reforms. But Teachers' Union is still strong and we have to explore their full potential. Educational establishments are being targeted both in a soft way (privatisation, discrimination) and in a blunt way (direct destruction as in Peshawar). These are very hard times. At least few electorally chosen people should regularly raise the issue of education in public platforms. Unless one claims their rights, one cannot enjoy the rights.

#### **TELENGANA (Mr. Hari Babu)**

Compared to Andhra Pradesh, Telengana is lagging behind in terms of quality and enrolment, school numbers etc. 150 days countdown national campaign has been launched with key slogan of Claiming Education for every child. Memorandum for implementation of the RTE Act has been submitted to the collector. Owing to the new state status, lot of studies by UNESCO and other organisations have been conducted in the state. He said that the first meeting happened only 2 months ago, and activities are being pursued enthusiastically.

#### **MAHARASHTRA (Mr. Madhukar Gumble)**

Although on paper Maharashtra seems to be doing very well, reality is quite different. Dropout figures among others have been substantially extorted. Tribal residential government schools are in complete ruins, practically with no infrastructure. Although

the number of students enrolled has increased, nothing has changed since the last 25-30 years. Poor infrastructure and inadequate expenses on health and nutrition has resulted in acute space and food shortage. Tribal school children face severe problems of sanitation and hence health issues. Every year 5-6 children enrolled in these schools succumb to death owing to health problems.

Mr. Gumble shared that No-Exam policy has created a different atmosphere in rural areas. Parents find it difficult to assess the child's progress without ranks/marks and doubt the utility of school education and eventually stop sending the children to schools. This situation must be handled wisely while there is no training of the teachers on this new - *no detention policy*.

Year after year students keep dropping out. Some teachers get caught in plethora of non-academic work. There is a missing link between RTE Forum and Teachers. Teachers are highly sceptical of the philosophy of RTE Forum and this is something that needs to be addressed urgently. He said that SCPCR of Maharashtra is in a pathetic state with no chairperson and members or any resource. It is a difficult situation when there is no one to turn to in case of grievances. He suggested more frequent meetings and better networking among the RTE Forum members and state convenors, for better mutual cooperation and solidarity.

#### **MADHYA PRADESH:**

Mr. Sandesh Bandsal presented the activities undertaken in Madhya Pradesh. He said that the campaign work is helping spread RTE awareness and enhancing interaction with school children (postcards are being made by children voicing their demands). Stocktaking has been scheduled for February 2015.

He said that in MP, the biggest problem is acute teacher shortage. There is no reliable data in government data bases, however guest teachers have been appointed. A data collection in this regard is underway.

Organisations associated with RTE Forum MP are small scale grass-root level ones which face their own challenges in terms of available resources. Hence support is necessary from national RTE Forum, SCPCRs and academic associations to take forth the mandate of the Forum.

An initiative has been taken to identify about 200 schools and 150 anganwadis with a focus on health aspect. There has been another initiative to train the SMC members to track the school budget and now they are better equipped to raise questions and take action on issues related to infrastructure development. Sexual abuse incidents in schools also have been taken seriously and programmes on awareness of children were undertaken; legal actions against alleged teachers were facilitated.

Post this, Mr. Ramakant Rai, NCE, shared the legal status of the PIL filed for the cause of enrolled children; non-enrolled children; and children enrolled but not present in schools. He stated that census figures of children between 6-14 age versus DISE data for the same have a startling contrast of about 3 crore children. He said that the mapping of children and schools has to be done as per the RTE Act, but it has not happened extensively and only sporadically in few districts. Homeless children, children engaged in child labour etc. seem to be beyond government's scope of vision. UID (like AdhaarCard for identification) for these children was suggested. He told that every school has a DISE id, to which all the data of a school are entered by the head of the school.

Out-of-school kids are supposed to be identified by the teachers. But joint initiatives must be taken by labour department, bonded-labour department and the police. How is it possible for a teacher to map these children? Teachers (including single teacher schools' teachers) have been commissioned with myriads of non-teaching duties such as the post of BRC resource person for 5 years; which is very detrimental to education system. He stated that evidences of violation/suggestion/critique from every state are welcome for a rejoinder which is to be filed soon. He also suggested the creation of a legal support committee to work closely with the RTE Forum and NCE.

State presentations continued post lunch.

#### **TAMIL NADU (Mr. K. Murthy)**

Mr. K. Murthy said that various gaps can be found in the implementation of RTE Act even though Tamil Nadu is a comparatively progressed state. After last year's stocktaking report (implementation status report of 3<sup>rd</sup> year) was published, more than 100 people from all over the state took part and raised concerns during the event. He said SMC is the backbone of the RTE and most instrumental for implementation but the government and educational institutions have broken the SMC concept as no SMC is being constituted in democratic manner. It's democratic only on paper. NCE had conducted a meeting with RTEF, Tamil Nadu; the teacher's union members present in the meeting opposed the SMC. The power imparted to common people for school management is not taken well by stakeholders such as teachers and school managers. It's a serious issue and effective dialogue process should be started to resolve the issues between Community and Teachers. Government schools are increasingly being shut down/merged with other schools, in spite of having the tag of progressive state, increasing privatisation and English as medium of instruction in government schools (in order to stop student channelisation to English medium private schools) are all big challenges. Private schools focus too much on marks and take strict measures, leading to larger societal problems like increased stress level and student suicides.

Mr. Murthy shared about the forthcoming programs planned by RTE Forum which include mass signature campaign in Salem in January, 2015; mass demonstration in Kadalurin February, 2015 and in Education Convention in Chennai in March, 2015

### **GUJARAT (Ms. Parul Seth)**

Ms. Parul Seth, Convenor of Gujarat RTE Forum, shared that the main event that has been organised by the Gujarat RTE Forum- a Yatra from 14-19 November 2014- in association with Child Rights Collective in Gujarat. She stated that the yatra covered several districts and the residents were sensitized during the process. She mentioned that for a state that boasts of a successful development model, the number of working children in the state is extremely disheartening. Yatra also made way for “Voices of Children” which gave information about child-friendly schools and communities in various domains like child participation, recreational activities etc. She stated that child labour is still a big hurdle. A large number of children are being employed by agricultural sectors, restaurants; as domestic helps etc. It’s a matter of deep concern that a large number of children migrate from tribal areas only to be employed in these sectors.

She said that the situation is so bad that hardly a government school or private school complies with the RTE conditions. SCPCR is almost non-functioning. Labour officers are also very few who work on child labour issues. Most of the blocks have SMCs only on papers. Hardly any school has any facility for disabled children. Education, girl children, children of vulnerable group, children’s health, child labour, child participation were the main themes of the Yatra. She said that information was collected and disseminated from all possible sources.

She said that data distortion in government data is very common. For example, 80-90 thousand students are said to be utilizing transport services according to government data which is far from the truth. Challenges of all children in remote areas, children of migrant workers, workers going to earn livelihood in far away farms etc. need be addressed. There is an acute shortage of qualified teachers especially in private schools. A status report is underway; which will be completed in 6-8 months. She shared that there is also a large number of children which are going to schools in first half and working in the second half which contradicts the assumption that children won’t work if enrolled in schools. It was also pointed out that in the states of Gujarat, Bihar and Tamil Nadu- government school drop outs boys are more than the number of girls.

Another representative from the state, Mr. Mujahid Nafees, mentioned few other activities undertaken. RTE Forum Gujrat collaborated with IIM for a Convention on SMCs organised by RTE Forum and IIM, Ahmadabad. Around 70 SMC members, Ms. Rasila Ben, SCPCR member; Prof. Nalini Juneja, NIUEPA; Sukhdev Bhai, socio-political activist, Prof. Ankur Sarin, IIM Ahmedabad; Mitra Ranjan, RTE Forum among others participated in the Convention. A formal legal cell in IIM campus is about to be set up by March which will

take forward these issues to courts in terms of PILs and other such affidavits. Grievance redressal mechanism is also being studied in collaboration with IIMs.

#### **UTTARAKHAND (Mr. Raghu Tiwari)**

Present status of Uttarakhand is that 1200 schools are about to be shut down. The CM speaks of shutting down present schools to replace them with residential schools, which is essentially contrary to the neighbourhood school concept. Privatisation is steadily on the rise. 25% reservation is being implemented as per schedule but government has been reimbursing the private sector with an amount between 1.5 crores and 3 crores for this. SCPCR members are very complacent about RTE Act and now monitoring agency is defunct. Furthermore, schools destroyed in the floods and disasters last year have not been completely restored yet. There is no synchronisation in the data available on child labour. He told that RTE Forum did a study from which it can be noticed that about 20% children are engaged in child labour even if they are going to schools; 12% of girls enrolled in schools also work in farms, fields and substantial domestic work. Physical verification of data declaration by schools cannot be carried out unless a complaint has been filed by law in Uttarakhand. RTE Forum has organized a meeting to discuss such issues in detail.

#### **HARYANA (Mr. Sooraj)**

The total student to teacher ratio is 30:1. But it's not evenly distributed among individual schools. An effort towards rationalisation was attempted, but it has not been successful yet. There is scope for great improvement because it is a small state, but education has not been given priority by the civil society or the government. Government works proactively but there is no consensus among the voices of different stakeholders. Standard of education has been contested from the point of view of assessment in the new system of no exams and no detention policy. Introduction of *learning level outcome test* was also attempted by the government, but had to be withdrawn because of protests by teachers on the grounds that since there are no exams, thus there should be no learning level outcome test. SMC training is also being done by the Government as a result of which by 2013 the situation of School Management Committee has improved in the backward districts of the state. RTE Forum trained one teacher each from 500 schools and trained over 4 sessions. But in spite of all these measures the situation is not very satisfactory.

#### **DELHI (Ms. Annie Namala and Mr. Bharat Singh)**

The Delhi RTE Forum has 35 regular members and about a 100 volunteers. Situation in Delhi is a mirror view of the entire nation. It is a complete fiasco because of multiple governments-3 MCDs, Cantonment and the State government. Also there are many fancy private schools that cater to the upper strata. In fact, only those who cannot

afford private education, resort to MCD and government schools. RTE Forum Delhi has worked on several issues. In the Grievance Redressal area, 500 written complaints and 700 online complaints were collected by DRTEF. The complaints were mainly pertaining to teachers that don't teach well, schools with no infrastructure, corporal punishment etc. The biggest challenge in Grievance collection is that parents of students subject to some problem are hesitant to lodge complaints for the fear of getting targeted/court proceedings. The MCD schools are not even listed in the online complaint portal; only hand to hand mode, which is very slow. Manual scavenging community kids are being discriminated against and targeted as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

On 14<sup>th</sup> November, there was a kite flying event by children for the cause of RTE Act implementation for the campaign. Further, RTE Forum had also organised a kite flying event as a part of 150 days countdown campaign on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014 at Connaught Place at "Raahgiri" to reach out to people and sensitize them. Steps are taken to give the political parties the RTE Forum agenda in order to kindle education as an important priority before Delhi Vidhan Sabha Elections in Feb, 2015.

#### **ODISHA (Mr. Anil Pradhan)**

RTE Forum Odisha was founded in 2011, as a network of existing networks, specialized agencies for migratory workers, tribal children etc. Functions include consultations, capacity building of NGOs on RTE. There have been several meetings conducted with Principal Secretary, ministers and other policy/decision-makers. Three stocktaking conventions organized and memorandum from RTE implementation was submitted. First complaint in the RTE implementation from Odisha state was through RTE Forum Odisha. SCPCR, Odisha is defunct in its duties and responsibilities. Status study of RTE implementation was carried out with Action Aid.

Mr. Pradhan flagged some points---- (i) No stress has been laid on the 25% reservation clause by the government; (ii) teacher appointment still happens on contractual basis; (iii) Acute shortage of teachers; (iv) Shikshaka Haq Abhiyan has remained unsuccessful; (v) School development Plans not referred to in District plans. He said that the toll-free number set up for grievance redressal and infrastructure development are the only two positive things.

MLE policy and guidelines for migrant children education are there on paper but no proper implementation. Other than these there are also the larger issues of school closure and out-of-school children monitoring (he pointed towards the fact that maximum number of the out-of-school children in the entire country is in Odisha).

He shared the future activities of the Forum include Regional Consultations, District Level Mela and collection of grievances; use of RTI and legal intervention; community mobilization for strengthening public system as opposed to privatisation of education;



Debates and discussion on common school system; and active engagement with legislatures.

#### **UTTAR PRADESH (Mr. Binod Sinha and Mr. Rajesh)**

SCORE (The RTE Forum of UP) is a 2 tier structure- strategic management group of 21 members; in day-to-day work 4-5 members engaged for technical support as well as campaign related and other activities. Organizations chose among the 4 issues of Quality Education, GR, community mobilization and SMC; thus organizing in 4 groups.

It was shared that 25% quota has given way only to 60 students or so when a total of over 7 lakh seats should have opened up as a consequence of the reservation. 16% children are still out of school in UP. It was found that boys' dropout rate was more than girls because they were enrolled into private schools for supposedly "better" education. GR- SCPCR was not constituted in UP for a long time, and the present day SCPCR members are biased and politically influenced.

An SMC campaign and an SMC convention (government-SMC interface facilitation) were organized. 150 days countdown campaign is actively pursued and memorandums were submitted to various officials. 25% reservation; recruitment of improperly trained teachers as full time teachers and some other issues are scheduled to be taken to court on January 28<sup>th</sup>. There's a strong private lobby in UP that is lobbying CM with the propaganda of budget private schools and voucher system etc. which is a matter of huge concern.

An education consultation is to be organized- which is a revised version of Stocktaking convention which also takes into account post 2015 agenda. Teachers' training is not happening in a legit manner, nor is the teacher recruitment process. Private training institutes delay school session as per their training schedule. Moreover, out of school children number has been significantly distorted as per the convenience of the officials because of the procedural entanglement that follows in case the real number is exposed.

#### **BIHAR (Ms. Chitrlekha Kumari)**

Volunteer Forum for Education (VFE) was founded in 2003. It has spread its branches all over Bihar with every district having a nodal agency and with a strength of about 300 members managed by a core committee and a coordinating committee. Every year since 2006 education convention has been organised annually. Bihar Shiksha Sammelan was organized raising issues of quality education; universalisation of education; Regular stocktaking of RTE implementation.

As part of the 150 countdown campaign VFE submitted memorandum in about 20 districts; kite flying by children was organized in Patna as a part of 150 days countdown

National Campaign. She told that Mass Signature Campaign is underway and other district level programmes including state level stocktaking and press conferences are scheduled for until 2015.

She told that SCPCR, DISE, SCERT all these institutions need reconstruction and debates and discussions need to be conducted for this cause.

### **JHARKHAND (Mr. A. K. Singh)**

Mr. A. K. Singh shared the several initiatives taken in the state by the state RTE Forum. A district level SMC convention as part of the 150 days countdown campaign is being initiated. Pocket manuals are being made for better understanding of the SMC members. He said that the RTE Forum conducted studies and analysed the problems of the SMCs and found out that about 60% problems are those which can be solved internally. About 40 reporters have been identified from 6 districts, who are devoted to the cause of education and have been sensitized for dealing with news related to education and to cover widely in the state. Fortunately the forum has had good relations with the government irrespective which party constitutes.

“Saffronization of education”- a right wing team has become very active in the past few months targeting Christian missionary schools in particular. Something needs to be thought of by the forum to contain such activities. There are some challenges from within the forum as well which needs to be dealt with. Members tend to get carried away by one particular aspect and seems to forget about the larger picture and hence results in inefficiency towards achieving the larger goal of right to education. The forum has been guiding the SMCs intensively in preparing a School Development Plan. The Forum is further planning to make at least one model school development plan for the reference of other SMCs as well.

Grievance Redressal has been a highly neglected aspect in Jharkhand as in many other states. SCPCR is not functional. These will be brought to the notice of the new government once elected. He shared that 4 major organizations have been networked in the forum – and support organizations are also there in plenty. Facility audit has been conducted with collaboration with Bal Sansad and few other organizations- the outcomes were very revealing, many issues came to light through this close interactive process.

The forum in association with the SCPCR came up with the concept of a report card for each school; through an interaction-intensive process to survey to what extent RTE Act has been implemented in the grass root level. Some SCPCR members are very involved in the cause of education and to tap their potential per district 10 most critical grievances will be collected and submitted to SCPCR in order to find out what are the hurdles faced by the SCPCR and to identify the bottleneck.

### **ASSAM (Mr. Mukut Lochan)**

Mr. Mukut shared the situation of the Forum activities in Assam. He told that initial enthusiasm was driven by Action Aid. State RTE Forum was formed in 2013. It was only after National Convenor, Ambarish Rai conducted an important press conference in Assam, a dialogue on education was started in Assam and other North East states. There were some obstacles in the active functioning of the forum in 2014, but slowly overcoming. The main hurdle is that there is no constant fund for the Assam RTE Forum. RTE Forum has sensitised the people of Assam, where people were very ignorant of the significance of RTE Act. He said that a meeting is scheduled on 29-30<sup>th</sup> December with Action Aid to sort out the funding issues and it is expected that the forum will get back the initial attention Action Aid had given to the North East states.

### **CHHATTISGARH (Mr. BhupeshVaishnav)**

There are many challenges impeding the smooth functioning of RTE forum Chhattisgarh in the sense that the government is keen on improving the situation by manipulating the data only on paper; conflict area schools. The RTE Forum has established its presence in the state; managed to get the attention of the politicians and government officials; and is in conversation with the stakeholders.

Stocktaking report, when it came out last year, had raised questions on the data provided by the DISE. The forum brought to notice explicit discrepancy in terms of infrastructure among other issues. As a result there was a notice that action will be taken against such discrepancies in the DISE data.

He informed that 500 schools have been identified by the Chattisgarh RTE Forum for monitoring by UNICEF, RTE Forum and the government and about 300 volunteers are being trained for this major move. SDP manual by the government (60 pages guidelines in English) is a complicated document which is beyond the scope of understanding of an average SMC member. Measures are being taken to make it more accessible to the stakeholders. He said that this year's stocktaking is scheduled for March.

He expressed his concerns regarding closures of schools informing that the schools with strength less than 60 students have been declared to be closed. Schools in tribal area are mainly targeted albeit they are the most crucial to make any difference in the situation of education in the state. He said that the conflict area schools need to be mapped and the Forum is trying to advocate with the government to map these schools because the area is inaccessible to media and NGOs.

He told that a district level SMC convention was conducted in Korba, Chattisgarh in July, 2014 in which nearly 250 SMC members along with government officials, SCPCR members, and member of the state and national Forum participated. Revelations such as "training

completed SMC members” according to government clearly stated in the convention that they have not undergone any training.

### **PUDUCHERRY (Mr. P. Joseph Victor)**

In Puducherry, a separate RTE Forum was recently constituted owing to the differences in governing bodies, administration and rules of law with Tamil Nadu. 25% reservation in private schools does not happen in spite of constant reminding through personal approaches and mass demonstrations. He said that 25% reservation has conflicted views, in light of questions being raised as to why the government has to reimburse which is ultimately promoting privatisation of education.

Regarding 150 days countdown campaign he shared that the state activities are scheduled for mid-January. An official structure of RTE Forum will also be formulated soon after electing a convenor. He said that the training of teachers have not been done properly during last 5 years after the RTE Act has been implemented. He said that the Forum has planned to file complaints and also to file RTI to get proper information for such issues from January, 2015 onwards.

With that the state deliberations were wrapped up. Mr Sanjeev Rai then summarized the state issues for identifying a common paradigm for the national RTE Forum to work on.

### **MAIN ISSUES IDENTIFIED AFTER STATE DELIBERATIONS**

- School Closure (Rajasthan, Maharashtra, MP, TN, Gujarat, Telangana, Uttrakhand,)
- Privatisation (AP, Maharashtra, Uttrakhand, UP)
- Teacher recruitment/Training/Working Conditions
- Out of School Children
- Status of SCPCR/Grievance Redressal& Legal Action
- No detention & CCE (it was shared that no uniform guideline is available on national level and there is a disconnect between NCERT and grassroots level)
- SMCs
- Corporal punishment;
- Issue of Social Inclusion; interplay between these issues like corporal punishment and private schools etc.

Mr Ambarish Rai asserted that school closure is a burning issue, with over 1 lakh schools getting closed all over the country. He continued saying that some perfectly functioning schools are also being shut to fulfil some vested interests. Only a few students are enrolled not because there are not enough children in the area to be enrolled in schools, it is because

children are going to low cost private schools. It is the Government's responsibility to get back children to public schools.

He said that we should take a strong political position in consensus in order for anyone to take us seriously. Negotiation position can be more nuanced and after deeper study. There is a dire need in this meeting to bring out that common voice of the forum at least in the broader sense of the main issues.

Mr. Daya Ram interjected that we are not the only country with a scattered population and that we have solutions for having a uniform school system, with uniform student and teacher strength. Neighbourhood schools (radius of 1 km) were originally thought of only for children up to class 3. So satellite schools for classes up to class 2 for main schools further away with the same principal and admin for both. China model of schools- the same wherein initially there are smaller schools which has a centralized school and eventually get merged. We need a nuanced approach to solve the school closure issue. Act doesn't dictate school every km that is not viable. We should advocate for three provisions: transport, escort and residential facilities.

Ms. Sneha Palit added that as part of the 150 days countdown national campaign we are planning to have public hearings in all the states to sort out the school closure issues.

The session for sharing data collection tool for 4th stocktaking report was facilitated by Ms. Reshmi Bhaskaran, NEG FIRE; Ms. Anandini, CARE India and Mr. Sanjeev Rai, Save the Children. It was shared that a tool has been devised for better dissemination of the data required for the 4<sup>th</sup> year stock taking. This session was focussed on evaluating the feasibility of obtaining the data required for the data collection from different states.

Mr. Daya Ram informed that DISE is the only data available to any state level or municipality level or any government official so it is recommended that when this tool is being used to compare with the DISE data ground level data be collected after field work. Mr. Sanjeev Rai remarked that this tool should be instrumental to fight the government against the baseless data displayed in DISE.

Some state convenors pointed out that it is difficult to get all the data at a state level because of the scale. During this conversation, Mr. Sanjeev clarified that 100% coverage in each state is not expected and we can try for the best so that we may be able to point out the difference between the govt. and our data based on ground survey.

It was also shared that the tool also has a comparative feature for the budget allocation over the last 5 years. This tool is not the only source for this year's stock taking; it is just meant to add to the qualitative features of the basic aspects of education in ground level. Data from this tool cannot be used in its raw form; there will be analysis/critique done. Questions were raised as to what will be the basis for the analysis.

The already existing data which has been collected by the state forums who have been working with a number of schools as mentioned in their deliberations) can be used to fill up the data for this tool. There was a consensus that some data can be collected as part of the campaign too. This tool looks for a qualitative reflections based on the state forums' ground work so far.

Mr. Ganesh Nigam gave a detailed power point presentation citing the loopholes in the collection of DISE data. He remarked that the children's school attendance data is very disappointing nation wise. The lowest turn-out was recorded in the states of Bihar, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and UP with only less than 70 % of enrolled children. Trends of out of school children are as follows- 6.94% students were found to be out of school in 2006; 4.28% in 2009; 2.97% in 2014. This is solid proof that the RTE Act is not a great success. There has been no significant decrease in the dropout as a consequence of RTE Act (only about 25% drop). In responses to questions on how surveys were done, he said that madrasas that provide schooling on general subjects as well they are considered as schools. Surveys are done in households also and the children who have not gone to school for more than 45 continuous days are treated as out-of-school. He shared the data on Out of school children based on social groups: SC-32%; ST-17%; OBC-36%; while SC, ST constitute 24% of general population. It reveals that children of these social groups are largely excluded from educational scenario. Out of school by type of disability: 1.08% of CWSN; 28% of CWSN are Out of School; Share of CWSN is 10% among OSC.

His analysis clearly showed that DISE calculation of out of school children is not satisfactory, which summarily assumes that 5 kids out of 100 are not available in our societal system for primary schools (drop outs) without any sense of accountability. For upper-primary it is 2% or so, however states wise dropout rate is still high. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, UP, Meghalaya, Manipur, Rajasthan have high drop outs. There are also chronic drop out areas in comparatively better states of TN and Karnataka.

He presented the data on working children (5-14 years, 2011). He told that media tends to distort the data (In India 6-13 year age group of the children is taken usually into account). 11.72 million (4.51%) children are working out of which 4.81% are boys and 4.19% girls; SC-max 3.86%; if we take children in the age group of 10-14, it is 6.68%.

He said that 37% of child workers are definitely out of school they have been working continuously for more than 6months a year. They are main workers. 16% are marginal workers who work for less than 3 months a year and hence not attending school regularly; 33% children work for a time period between 3 and 6 months; 14% children are available and seeking work- vulnerable to be out of school.

He said that national average of working children is 4.5%; Lowest Thrissur, Kerala 0.7%; Highest Peren, Nagaland 37.38%; Urban areas Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad etc. have

more than 6% working children; also continuous belts in Rajasthan, Gujarat which employ children extensively.

Mr. Nigam said that Post RTE Act, there has been infrastructure facility improvement but it is mostly on paper and by tweaking definitions; even on that basis there is a long way to go to achieve RTE Act 100% compliance. Student classroom ratio has come down from 32 to 28 in 2013-2014; PTR is 29.9% in primary schools and 16% in upper primary.

Trends in financial provisions for SSA in union budget has been improving from 2009-2015; but nevertheless it is not matching the promises made by the GoI with a huge gap of 25%.

Concluding his presentation he told that although the indicators are slowly improving, the rate is slow. Infrastructure focus is only narrowed to drinking water, toilets and kitchen shed and all the other aspects are neglected. There is a growing imbalance between teacher deployment and availability. Much more attention and differential strategies are required for marginalized communities and ST dominated districts. Private sector reconciliation and Budget allowance remain huge challenges. Use of data-limited to AWB&P and data dissemination calls for more transparency; Maharashtra is a good model with transparent data district wise available online.

### **Post-Lunch Session**

The concluding session was mainly a discussion on freezing deadlines for data collection for the tool, for the final year stocktaking report and suggestions for concluding impactful events for the 150 days countdown campaign.

It was suggested by Ms. Seema Rajput (CARE India) that only a few schools can be shortlisted and it can be done like a case study. First a fixed number of schools per state have to be decided upon. Suggestions to improve the functionality of schools were invited by end of December and data submission date shall be scheduled for January.

Two large scale events were envisioned by the National Council. The smaller among the two was decided to be held in Constitution Club, with about 600 participants and a bigger mass demonstration to be organized at Jantar Mantar for two days although a lot of opinions were raised on the Jantar Mantar event, which are summarized here.

It was decided that day 1 would witness a participation of around 500-600 people. Day 2 is expected to be a bigger gathering (a rally) of about 5000 people. States were given responsibilities to ensure the presence of (at least) a fixed number of people from their states. (UP- 300; MittraRanjan-50 (Artists, Poets, cultural); Haryana-200; Gujarat- 20; Telengana and AP- 100; Odisha- 25; Kerala- 50; University students- 50; Retired Teachers-few).

Mr. Ambarish Rai shared that the 150 days countdown campaign has become pretty visible at national and state level through memorandum submission, press conferences, online

portals, social media etc. Now we have to pitch it in a higher level for the desired impact before next Stocktaking Convention in March, 2015.

Following this, Mr Shreedhar Mather, Save the Children, briefed the participants about an amendment that has been proposed where any crime involving a child will be considered in the same penal code for serious crimes which can impose an imprisonment of greater than 7 years. **The house has resolved to go against this proposal.** Violence against children needs to be taken seriously. The RTE Act has provisions on this too- which is often overlooked. The MDGs have been formulated in 2000 to be met by 2015. In 2015 a new set of goals shall be determined and this is a good chance for the RTE Forum to start a global dialogue on education. Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary General has brought forward a synthesis report which would be used by all countries to come to the UN to negotiate and agree on the new set of goals. The discussions shall go on from January to September. The more affluent countries may talk more on environment while the southern countries will be about poverty. There is a notion to add children's issues in the synthesis report. The RTE Act in India was a fallout of "All children will go to school" of the UN. So this is a great opportunity for us to take forward our cause.

The last session for the day (facilitated by Mr. Maju Varghese and Mr. Ravi Prakash) discussed the Campaign in details. It was stated that the last four years were divided in terms of advocacy, campaigning, lobbying etc. Mass contact programs need to be underway. National Council Meet at Ranikhet came up with this countdown campaign during which several events were organised which included kite flying, district level marches, memorandum submission, press conferences etc. It was shared that momentum needs to be built systematically for 5000 people to come and participate in the Jantar Mantar event. For this we have to work along the following lines:

1. We need more coordination
2. How do we assert ourselves? need to use the same slogan, same logos and unite our voices
3. Mass GR campaign to build pressure on the system, RTE is a justiciable act and we need to claim that. We will bring about 10 lakh grievances to bang the system. This has not been done at all. More focus on this aspect- very strong measure
4. Divide responsibilities as to how to bring this grievances, report with a clear data such as 5 lakh grievances related to teacher shortage; which will prove to be very effective

It was shared that the Delhi forum has started grievance collection, including an online portal; many states have come up with their own action plan. A small discussion on how Delhi is doing this and how other states can follow suite; and build a common system for this objective



Small scale GR is happening in all the state forums. The challenge is to multiply it by manifolds and bring 10 lakh grievances. Same complaint many signatures; same signatures for many complaints all counted- it is not unachievable. If a particular complaint is being signed by many people; complaint format for every country is different. Many issues are being considered- teacher, sanitation, infrastructure discrimination and dignity. Discussion required to reach a consensus on the broad question formulations related to these four issues, although it will be appropriately edited in local levels. These are all ways of handling large number of grievances. A rough estimate of grievance collection from different states are as follows-: 1 lakh from UP; Delhi 1 lakh; Jharkhand 50k; Gujarat 10k; TN 10k.

Ms. Annie Namala (CSEI) briefed the participants about the meeting with different social groups that was conducted on October 27, 2014. SC/ST/Muslim and other marginalized community leaders were present in the consultation. Discrimination in education must be focussed upon, along with other problems like corporal punishment, sexual abuse-double/triple the no of incidents with other children. Their entitlements are very irregularly distributed; SMCs poorly represent the Muslim community- no guidelines as well; all the funds allocated to minority development etc. are not utilized properly.

Mr. Mitra Ranjan shared that social exclusion news are on the rise. We should take care of it seriously. Haryana principal asked SC girls to clean the toilets; Shimla different utensils for SC/ST students; 9 boys detained in UP for drinking water from principal's water pot.

Odisha convenor volunteered for Odisha, as one of the states to work on social exclusion issue. Other planned- UP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Delhi (would be relevant from the point of view of urban migrants)

Mr. Ambarish Rai also shared a plan for engaging like-minded parliamentarians by drawing up a list of approachable people. He invited state leaders to motivate their parliamentarians to create some difference in their constituency. He stated that an agenda kit will also be prepared and the state convenors can come to Delhi and approach their parliamentarians before the budget session. It was proposed that readymade questions may be given to the parliamentarians so they can raise the agenda of education within the Parliament. This can also balance the present propaganda to dilute/amend the RTE Act to suit the private sector vested interests. He invited members to volunteer in this process by forming a taking and taking forth the process.

6 major milestones to be achieved by end of march-

1. Online signature campaign
2. GR
3. SMC

4. Parliamentary meet
5. Public hearing
6. Social media campaign

It was decided that activities undertaken by the state forums need to be updated on social media with #150dayscountdown and claiming education as the theme line; Pictures, case studies, videos have been requested by the State representatives.