



Press Statement

RTE Forum launches 150 days countdown National Campaign

Claiming the Right to Education under the RTE Act, 2009

RTE Forum, New Delhi. 28 October, 2014. Right to Education Forum, a civil society coalition of 10,000 grass root organizations, educationists, national networks and teacher's organizations announces the launch of a National Campaign '**Claiming Education for Every Child**' for the last **150 days** till the final deadline (31st March, 2015) for the implementation of RTE Act, 2009.

During 150 days RTE Countdown Campaign (1 November, 2014 - 31st March 2015) the RTE Forum will bring all the stakeholders together as a collective to demand for the fulfillment of the constitutional obligation of the government with regards to education- within the stipulated time- in its true letter and spirit! 31st March 2015 was the deadline set for the regularization of all contractual teachers; while simultaneously training them to improve the overall quality of Govt. schools in India. However, no mechanism has been set in place yet.

Mr. Ambarish Rai, National Convener, RTE Forum, announcing the launch of the campaign expressed his disappointment regarding the apathy of State towards RTE Act, 2009, still far away from achieving its targets. India lacks **1.2 million regular, trained and qualified teachers** in the Govt. schools while **10% schools are single teacher schools**. Millions of children continue to remain out- of- school. Despite the RTE Act strictly prohibiting the appointment of contract teachers, States are continuing the recruitment of low paid contract teachers, in gross violation of the RTE norms. Instead of strengthening the RTE Act and restructuring government schools, the government is handing over schools to private entities, in the name of quality improvement. **A**

Processes of merger and closure of schools have been started in different states to surrender the assets to the private players. Mr. Rai said that about one lakh schools have been shut down all over the country after the enactment of RTE Act. (Rajasthan 17129 schools merged (4000 are completely closed), 2000 schools in Telengana, 900 in Panjab, 1200 in Uttrakhand and 5000 in Orissa).

Moreover, unregulated and mushrooming low-cost schools and PPP-model based schools are other mechanisms diluting the spirit of legal mandate. The deteriorating state of public education is a big challenge facing the people of India. In 2014, the government admitted that even the minimalist norms it set for itself has been implemented in only 10% of the 1.3 million schools in this country. This being so, we do not perceive any sense of urgency or anxiety in the governments, centre or state, to make amends in haste.

As a part of the Campaign, he stated that 10 lakh Grievances would be collected from different parts of the country highlighting the violation of different provisions of RTE Act. These grievances will then be submitted to the NCPCR and SCPCRs for immediate action. A memorandum will also be submitted to the Hon Prime Minister with a charter of demands highlighting some quick action points for the implementation of the RTE Act.

Prof. Dubey, former Foreign Secretary and President, CSD pointed out that in spite of some of its fundamental flaws; the RTE Act was a landmark in the evolution of the educational policy of India. Its distinguishing features are:

- (a) An undertaking by the state to provide free and compulsory elementary education as a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution.
- (b) Legal basis in the form of an Act of the Parliament, to ensure this right. Its provisions are, therefore, legally enforceable.
- (c) Its holistic approach, as it provides for action to be taken by the state in almost all the relevant areas simultaneously – i.e., provision of infrastructure, teachers training, bringing out-of-school children to school, reforming and democratising school management – to name only a few.
- (d) Its implementation is time bound – all provisions except those related to teachers, should have been implemented by 31st March, 2013; and those related to teachers are to be implemented by 31st March, 2015.

Thus the law is expected to be fully implemented in a five-year period. Unfortunately, this is far from the reality on the ground. The previous government hardly did any preparatory work to implement the Act – no mapping of schools, no mapping of teachers' education institutions; no creation of institutions, no training of personnel, no mechanism of co-ordination among government departments.

The government also did not provide the required quantum of resources to implement the Act. Very meagre resources were allotted to put in place the infrastructure and create capacity to implement. On the other hand, non-implementation and hence non-utilisation of resources was used as an excuse for stagnation and reduction in the level of resources. It appeared that the Act had been enacted only to gain electoral advantage without having any intention to implement it.

The present government is doing worse. It is maintaining silence on the RTE Act and taking ad hoc measures to dilute the Act. It is closing down schools in the public sector and thus creating the space for the private sector to move in. Instead of the state reiterating its commitment to discharge its responsibility under the Act, the government is repeatedly invoking corporate social responsibility and legislators conscience to implement on an ad hoc basis some of the provision of the Act, like toilets for girls, for which the government has undertaken legal responsibility and which should have been in place by 31 March, 2013.

This government also does not seem to have even grasped the significance of school education for achieving the goal of accelerated and sustained development, let alone promoting other social and human rights objectives. Otherwise, it would not have taken so long in clarifying its attitude on the Act and reassuring the nation that the goal of free compulsory quality elementary education will be achieved within the framework of the RTE which will be upgraded if necessary, and within the time limit stipulated in it. The government has announced the project of skill India without, however, realizing that skill formation can take place only on the foundation of school education. Similarly the goal of clean India will not be achieved by teachers and politicians wielding brooms on a particular day during the year and getting appropriately photographed, but through the integration of the importance of cleanliness and the method of achieving it, into the syllabus and its inculcation through class room teaching.

It is universally recognized that education is a fundamental human right and providing public education is the primary responsibility of the state. Non-state actors can provide education but only to supplement the public effort and not for profit. Private education has mushroomed in India because of deliberate neglect of public education by the government. This neglect is continuing, most conspicuously through the non-implementation of the RTE, and private sector has apparently taken advantage of it. Thus, private education in India which is by and large of very poor quality is being promoted owing to the lack of sufficient public provision of education or the under-performance of the public schools. The answer is not to allow private education to further proliferate with all its adverse implications for human rights, non-discrimination, social justice etc., but to make sufficient provisions

for public schools and improve their performance through the concerted time bound implementation of the RTE.

Privatization in education cripples the universality of right to education. There is no way the private sector can ensure universality within a time bound framework. This can be and has been done all over the world only by the state; India can be no exception to it. The proliferation of private schools based on the capacity to pay which in many cases are exorbitant, flies into the face of ensuring non-discrimination based on social and economic conditions or birth or property, as laid down in the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education of which India is a party.

Expressing his views on the broader framework and goals of education and its linkages to RTE Act, 2009, Prof. Vinay Kantha, Educationist, Patna University, outlined the need to revisit some of the past debates on education. While we have to claim fully all the rights belatedly conferred in the Act, reinforced by sustained mass mobilization in all corners of the country, he stated that we should revisit the past debates and experiments in education in India and abroad. This will include Gandhi's Nai Taleem, Tagore's Shanti Niketan and scores of international experiments in Latin America and other places. A rights-based perspective, purportedly given in the Act, will have to be understood and adopted in letter and spirit. At this juncture we ask for further meaningful changes in the RTE Act, extending it to the full cycle of school education from pre-school to senior secondary, involving development of skills that are being so much emphasized today. To conclude, he stated that RTE Forum re-iterates the demand for increasing the spending on education to 6% of GDP, accepted in successive national education policies, and reflected in the last BJP Manifesto as well.

Ms Annie Namala, Director, CSIE and a former member of NAC, emphasized that proper inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized group including dalits, tribals, disabled and minority groups should be in focus in the implementation of the Act. This will necessitate combating discrimination at all levels and in all forms in many ways. R C Dabbas, Vice- President, All India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), drew attention to the plight of teachers. Regular cadres face extinction in many states with larger recruitment of contractual teachers of various kinds. He emphasized that without trained and motivated teachers, it is impossible to address quality issues in education.

As part of the Campaign, activities will be conducted in district, state and national levels. Some of the events will include:

Nov 11, 2014 marking Education Day	Memorandum in the name of the Hon Prime Minister will be submitted to the District Collectors
Nov 12, 2014	District level press conferences
Nov 14, 2014	Children celebrate their day demanding their right to education with kites and songs and celebrations
Dec 6, 2014- Ambedkar Vardhanti	Marginalized sections will raise their voices together
Dec 10, 2014– Human Rights Day	Memorandum submission to the state education minister
Jan 26, 2014- Constitution/Republic Day	Resolution for school development in the gram sabha
March 8' 2014- Women's Day	Women's group to raise issues of gender parity

Every state will hold public programmes and undertake **stock-taking** activities before March 31st 2015.

A **National Stock Taking** will be held in March, 2015 bringing together over 10,000 people to highlight the status of implementation of the RTE Act, 2009, in different states.

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