NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY WITH TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATIONS

RTE Forum organized a National Consultation on the National Education Policy 2019 (draft) with Teachers’ Associations and other stakeholders of education on 11th July, 2019 at India International Centre. The primary aim of the consultation was to get a sense of the issues of teachers and teachers’ associations as well as the civil society on the draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2019.

The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 has completed ten years of implementation after failing to meet the two deadlines as spelled out in the Act viz. 31st March 2013 and 31st March 2015. Teacher’s role in the education system is extremely critical and has been highlighted under RTE Act as well. This has been time and again discussed and reiterated that trained teachers are an important, rather the most important component which is directly responsible for quality education. Under section 23 of the RTE Act, 2009 it explicitly provides for the minimum qualifications and responsibilities of the teachers however its implementation is marred at the micro level with variations at regional and district level.

The consultation with teachers aimed to address the following issues –

- To reaffirm the agency of teachers as critical for quality education and advocate for its acceptance in the NEP,
- To understand the perception of the teachers on NEP and the Right to Education Act vis-a-vis quality education and role of teachers
- To engage the voices of teachers with the RTE Forum’s efforts to ensure right to education for all children
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- To address the importance of normative framework for quality education and articulate the basic norm of trained and qualified teachers
- To collectively address the role of teachers and the challenges faced in the changing

The consultation was divided into five sessions namely –

1. Understanding the context of draft National Education Policy,
2. Teachers as change Agents,
3. Role of Teachers’ Associations,
4. Current Issues in implementation of RTE Act and
5. The way forward as well as Suggestions to improve the draft NEP and next steps.

Session 1: Understanding the context of draft National Education Policy

The first session was chaired by Prof. Muchkund Dubey, President of Council for Social Development. The session commenced with a welcome address by Ambarish Rai, National Convener of RTE Forum. He gave a brief introduction of the draft National Education Policy, the problems and spoke about the attempts made at diluting the Right to Education Act 2009. He also talked about how the policy is not an extension of the previous education policy and it actually threatens public education, yet no political party has made it an issue. He added that education was not given any attention during the budget speech. There isn’t enough investment for education. The govt. is instead pushing towards private schools and low-fee private schools. Education has a role in social transformation, not just limited to learning outcome. Privatization is not the solution, instead public schools need to be strengthened.

Prof. Poonam Batra, Delhi University spoke about the key issues in the draft NEP 2019. She said that the NEP has been displayed in a positive way in its media representation because – it’s shown as a commitment, the document says government investment will go up, talks of a new vision for teacher education, promises RTE extension and a focus on foundational learning. It is a culmination of all steps that are being taken in the education sector. She further added that there is a lot of talk about extension for the RTE Act but the policy fails to give a roadmap for it. All this seems to be a step towards inequity. They want to make RTE norms less restrictive and in the process incentivise shishu-schools and saraswati schools. The document has been assumed that the learning crisis is happening because children aren’t learning. But actually, people need to understand how and why we got here. She said a pedagogical approach of peer learning is being turned into a program, almost like outsourcing teaching. There is not enough emphasis on doing away with para-teachers given how much the current system relies on it. Education frame is around learning outcome and testing (starting from grade 3).

She further said that school complex is another name for school merger and highlighted that the proposed system of school complexes is unfeasible. She questioned how school complexes
would be formed when distances are so much. She mentioned that it is also very odd that they’ll build teacher cadre at school complex level. The document speaks of subject teachers, but there is no effort to see the needs to recruitment and placement of subject teachers. She said it is a good thing that the document is talking about teachers not doing non-teaching work. On the issue of the 4 year integrated B.Ed program, she said the major question is- who will make the curriculum and how will it be forced on the university? Usually the university makes the curriculum. However, this policy doesn’t mention curriculum. There is no mention of NCF for teachers. She asked why the teacher education programmes are not being strengthened and how can the PM overlook the whole spectrum of educational institutes and schemes? She further added that this whole policy is only about education governance, not an actual policy. Its emphasis on homogeneity is dangerous for this country. She suggested an examination of the current status of RTE and to take the whole picture in account for policy formulation. There are amendments which are trying to dilute the RTE Act and which may be very harmful.

The next speaker on the panel was Shatrughan Prasad Singh, ex MP and the General Secretary of Bihar Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh as well the National leader of All India Secondary Teacher’s Federation. He first of all mentioned all those provisions of the dNEP that are welcome. He said that barring teachers from making MDM is a great step. Teachers have otherwise become cooks. The term ‘teacher’ has been given a perverted meaning nowadays. Para teachers is a very derogatory term and is also insulting. Secondly, even though we want an amendment to include children from birth to 18 years in RTE Act as a constitutional right, because Article 21 only mentions the 6-14 age group, we welcome the inclusion of 3-18 years of children in the RTE Act as mentioned by the policy. He also mentioned that the definition of ‘non-teaching work’ needs to be revised. Those working in the field of education and not just teachers, also need to be exempted from non-teaching work.

He said the draft NEP 2019 have undone some provisions recommended by the Kothari Commission, and that is not a good sign. For example, neighbourhood schools and now they are talking of school complexes.

Those who don’t want to become teachers are also being made teachers by the state. It is to be noted that the education policy of a state is always in tandem with the financial policy of the state. Proper graduates are driving autos today. Teachers are being recruited only on the basis of marks. Those who don’t use chalk and blackboard cannot be made teachers. We should strongly recommend that there should be a Teacher Recruitment Commission.

We strongly oppose Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog as it will always be overtaken by the political party in majority.

The teachers were not notified of the consultation process for the drafting of the policy. This does not reflect the following of a democratic process. That is why we recommend that the Teacher Associations who are working relentlessly towards education should be asked to submit their suggestions for a period of 6 months.
The current committee should go to schools and villages and see how insulted and tortured teachers are. He also spoke about how teachers are disrespected, not paid salaries on time or for months and then changes are imposed on them. Suddenly SSA was been merged with RMSA and now there is SMSA, the payment of salaries is now the state’s problem. It is difficult to cope with so much. And then the government goes ahead and even makes people who can’t write a single grammatically correct sentence as teachers. Since the time of new economic policies, the privatization of education and health has started. But we will not get involved in petty politics. Another welcome step in the policy document is that teachers and schools are being given autonomy in the field of research.

NCF has been praised in the beginning of the document. However, changing the curriculum and its analysis were recommended by the Kothari commission itself.

We strongly oppose party-politics being played in the NEP.

He said that the Kothari commission had recommended a review of education policy every ten years, and that should still be adhered to. He concluded by saying that Education Policy should restore the values of diversity and syncretic culture of this country because education is a vital weapon for societal change. This weapon should not be used for petty, narrow party-politics.

Shri Rampal Singh, President of All India Primary Teacher’s Federation was the next speaker who said that he appreciated the new structure of 5+3+3+4. He also appreciated the integration of pre-primary with school education. He said that extension of RTE Act is a welcome move in the policy. But at the same time, they are talking about diluting RTE norms.

He further highlighted that many of teacher education institutes are private and the draft NEP talks about closing them. However, the timeframe given for doing this is till 2030 and that he said was too long a timeframe and this was an issue which needs to be addressed immediately. He flagged the question that will teachers for all classes be trained in the 4 years B.Ed program? There is no clarity on that. He further added that National Tutors’ Programme (NTP) is the most dangerous and reiterated that this move will not make up for teacher vacancies. He then asked if subject teachers in tribal areas teach at multiple schools? How will that work? He also questioned how School complex will tackle the problem of teacher vacancies. He highlighted that there are 7 lac para-teachers in this country, they have also been serving for 10-12 years and the document mentions their removal by 2022. At the same time, the document mentions the introduction of volunteers in the system and this will lead to creation of another form of para-teachers. He further said that the document mentions that teachers should not have the responsibility of preparing Mid-Day Meals but is silent on who will then take up the responsibility of preparing MDMs. He reiterated that there has been no active participation of teachers or parents in the formulation of this policy.
Next on the panel was Prof Jagmohan Rajput, Former Director of NCERT and India’s representative to the Executive Board of UNESCO. He said that the current document is not the education policy. This document is a suggested format of the same. This is a report which Govt. will have to change. Kothari Commission Report was of 600 pages after which the education policy was made of 20-25 pages.

He further said that many countries don’t make education policy now. They keep improving upon and changing what is already there, to keep the momentum of education going. This should be the purpose of education policy.

He further said that academic leadership has been finished. It didn’t happen in one go, but over time. He urged people to question the fact of an IAS officer heading things in the education department? He complained that nobody demanded that MHRD be headed by academic people, not bureaucrats. Even the initial (Subramaniam) committee had 4 bureaucrats. Prof Rajput who had been offered to come on board said the country will not accept that committee. Education policy cannot be made by bureaucrats.

He then said that when in 1996 ‘Learning the Treasure Within’ book was launched, he was present there. Its president said that “Education in every country must be rooted to culture, committed to progress.”

As per him there should be a 30-40 page document that should contain all that is important. He went on to talk about how India is not at a point where it can compare itself to models like those in Finland. What may work is an approach similar to the one adopted by Japan wherein they inculcated a sense of respect for nation and work via training.

He then said that we were looking at education very impractically. He urged the gathering to be determined while expressing their points to the Govt.

He then went on to say that there should be a movement that if teachers are removed from teaching work by the DM, our association will go and give a dharna there. Such a movement has never happened, it should happen. He also said that in every country, curriculum should be changed after every five years and those who are affiliated to political views will not know how to write a curriculum.

One demand he asked the group to make way for a read-able, short and concise policy document. In one of his interactions with Dr. Kothari, he asked him what he would change about his policy to which he said–“ I would change the title to –‘Education for character building’”

His explanation for that was: ‘all the developed countries in the 60s were just talking about development, but we (India) didn’t know the suitable ideology for development of our country at that time and just spoke about education for development. So if we would have adopted the education for character building approach, Bhakra Nangal and all may have happened 10 years after they did, but would be done by people who had a vision for development of all people’.
The next speaker, Ramachandra Begur, Education Specialist from UNICEF said it is important to look at the policy from what is happening on the grassroot level. According to him the points to be addressed were:

**Importance of ECCE.** It has been recognized and called the best investment. There is importance of close coordination between MWCD and MHRD. The draft policy has taken cognizance of international ECCE policy. There is a need for additional qualified and trained teachers in AWCs/pre-schools

**Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.** It’s beyond a learning issue, it’s a systemic issue. There are multi-grade multi-level teachers. He flagged the question that what should be a coordinated change in teacher education system to address this.

**NTP** – The various questions asked by Mr. Begur were- why did something like NTP have to come up? To what level is the move strengthening teaching-learning process? Are BRC/CRC seen as teacher support mechanisms?

**RIAP** – what is the root of this conceptualization? There is emphasis on holistic development of learners – especially on socio-emotional learning. He asked what sort of teacher support systems that are being provided for the same? Not much has been spoken about children not in school. There are difficulties of never enrolled children and children at risk of dropping out.

He further said that this is a time for us to reflect and contribute. So much is happening via various platforms and consultations

After the session, comments were taken from the audience. And the following issues/points emerged from the discussion:

- There is an issue of enrollment of street children, labour children. There should be provision to complain about child labour
- Is this policy implementable? There is no clarity on funds. Expenditure on education in budget is falling
- Equality of education does not seem to be addressed by this policy. What will be the approach for remedial? Pre or Post? The Policy has forgotten about ashram schools or schools run by other depts? What kind of teachers do they have and what curriculum will they follow?
- In terms of volunteers – who will decide and train them? Who are reputed community members?
- There is a need for trained teacher for AWCs
- ‘Indian centered education system’ is problematic. They are spreading their ideas very cleverly. Regional issues are not addressed in policy like- Conflict, floods, child labour.
First thing insurgents do is occupy primary schools, and there is no provision to deal with anything like that.

Session 2: Teachers as Change Agents

This session was chaired by Prof. Anita Rampal, Delhi University (Rtd.)

She expressed concern over the new structure given that the 10+2 structure still hasn’t been universally implemented and bringing in a whole army of new personnel into the education sector like retired army personnel and other volunteers via RIAP. What will teachers do if kids rely on RIAP for 10 years, she asked. She did not welcome the division of teachers into 5 categories, wherein salary structures are different and tests by NTA will determine their promotions. She said that the only way to actually be heard is to be on the streets like was done in opposition to the three-language formula.

Dr. A.K. Singh, Professor from NIEPA said that the policy is not reflective of a process that involved stakeholders. Not all tribal people want tribal language, many want to study like those in cities and become part of the mainland. He also highlighted the fact that private schools are flourishing. The regulatory part of this policy is very weak – have to regulate private schools, not govt ones that are already so regulated. He questioned the intent of the government to implement the extension of RTE since they have not mentioned any provisions for the same and the fact that they couldn’t provide education for all when RTE only for 6-14 with minimum norms. He emphasised the need for govt to increase level of funding to make NEP a reality, especially to universalize the system.

Dr. Neerja Shukla, who is formerly the head of dept of Education of Groups with Special Needs, NCERT was next on the panel in this session. She suggested the need for the policy to tackle many issues relating to teacher education like developing a synergy between content and pedagogy. She stated that students get same books in B.Ed and M.Ed and as a result have to rely on downloading things from the internet. This makes the process very difficult and hampers training. Another critical area to be addressed is the issue of non-attending colleges and non-attending candidates. She spoke about how teachers get transferred to a school near their house, but draw salaries from other schools. So, children at the other school will suffer because numbers show they have a teacher even when they don’t actually. She highlighted that there is a need to have induction and refresher courses for teachers. She also spoke about resource sharing between schools. Since residential schools are cut off from other schools, resource people for special needs go to schools near residential schools, but don’t go into residential schools.

After this, Shashi Bhushan Dubey, Secretary of Bihar Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh, spoke on the panel. Emphasizing the need for trained and qualified teachers, he said that it is possible to get information from the internet, but it cannot supplement the role of teachers. He expressed concern over recruitment at BRC level and the quality of teachers that it will provide and the
closure of schools in tribal areas. He said it is unfortunate that there is a lot of talk in the name of Govt School but our own confidence in it does not reflect because our kids go to private schools.

Next to speak was Sanjeev Rai, adjunct professor from TISS Mumbai. He was skeptical of the policy changing the state of teacher education. He said the process of becoming a teacher educator is a very long process. First a 2 year B.Ed., 2 year M.Ed., then another MA and then PhD to become teacher educator, no one would want to opt for it. Only those people will go for it who have no other option, and that itself reduces quality of teacher educators. Anyway, more than 90% teacher training institutes are private. There isn’t a single sentence to address education inequality and the creation of 3 types of higher education institutes will only increase inequality.

The next speaker, Hemangi Joshi, convener of Maharashtra RTE Forum, said the Policy has not brought out any new thing, just new terms. She expressed apprehension as to how they’ll bring in radical steps. She said that the Policy acknowledges that SMCs are weak, but have put more responsibility on them. According to the new Policy, teachers’ performance appraisal will be endorsed by SMC for it to be authorized. Teachers increment and promotion will be endorsed by SMC, she was unsure about how this will play out in reality. She further said that there are 2 things that may cause trouble: firstly, SMCs are weak because teachers were given responsibility to strengthen. But they saw it as a challenge to them and thus never strengthened it. Secondly, teacher performance appraisal is in their hands. After the new policy, the feeling of SMC being opposed to them will further increase. It may altogether lead to the end of SMCs, since the body that has to run it is against it. The tone should be more on lines of how to strengthen SMC structurally and how teachers and SMC can work together.

Another provision in the policy is that SMCs will be also be there for school complexes. We have ashram schools in our area- the parents there live in far off areas- thus the SMCs of ashramshalas are never functional. She went on to asked how will the SMCs of school complexes, the parents of which live in far off places, be strengthened? She also posed the question as to what is the plan of action for strengthening such SMCs? No such plan is given in the policy.
Session 3: Role of Teacher’s Association

Sanjay Bhattacharya from World Vision and Ajay Choubey facilitated this session. Sanjay Bhattacharya raised questions on the need and level of volunteers to provide for quality education. He then opened the session by stating how there are lots of challenges before teachers, a lot of non-teaching work and now they may be tasked with implementing the policy as well.

Ajay Choubey, an educationist started by saying that there is an ideological attempt behind this draft. The narratives within are not new, whether in terminology or provision. It’s just that their use has been done within an ideological framework. A major drawback of the policy is that it sees teachers as passive recipients. As teachers and teachers association, one needs a trans-ideological approach to respond to the policy.

The document would have been participatory if in an ideal situation it would have started from survey at district level to identify issues. Right now, he asked, do teachers have ownership in this new vision, even if not the process?

He pointed how there are multiple conceptions of literacy in one document.

Next to speak was Anuj Tyagi from UP Prathmik Shikshak Sangh. He reiterated that the policy did not follow democratic and representative process, thus is not representative of needs and demands of stakeholders. He said it’s likely to fail like CCE that was implemented nationally without the involvement of teachers in decision making. The policy says teachers will not make MDM, but then who will make MDM, he asked. The responsibility of it will fall on the teacher and they’ll have to account for it, no one else is given the responsibility. Firstly, the document should have been translated in all 22 languages so everyone can participate in the policy process.

He emphasized the need for more regulation of private institutions but said that this policy withdraws from that responsibility. He stated specifics like how there are no safai-karamchari in schools in UP. The policy then should provide for safai-karamcharis. There is need for a roadmap for functioning of the pre-nursery section under MHRD. The intention of the government to have volunteers needs to be questioned, they want to take some people out (para-teachers) and bring others in (volunteers)- this is confusing and contradictory.

Dr. Bhola Paswan from Bihar Arajpatrit Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh spoke next. He spoke about the need for a big campaign to bring change in education. 1,773 schools in Bihar have been closed. He also told that primary schools are being closed in the name of merger. It’s like the govt is attempting to end the existing system of education

After the panelists spoke, comments were taken from the audience. The following comments emerged from the discussion thereafter:
Requests were made for extension of deadline for giving submissions till 6 months to really get response from ground-up

In RTE Section 31 – there would be a three-level system for addressing teacher complains. Still no such system has been set-up

How will govt deal with administrative difficulty of providing for bus services in school complex

In Assam – venture school that are set up and run by the community are in plenty, then the govt provincialises them. But they aren’t getting salaries regularly so teacher suicide rate is very high. Even college services are provincialised.

Lots of uncertainty and anxiety over School Complex was expressed, especially in terms of resource sharing. School complex in Russia is seen as a learning community, and that is successful.

Redress mechanism for RSA is not very strong

There were questions about how the different bodies being created will coordinate amongst one another.

Session 4: Current Issues in Implementation of RTE Act and Way Forward

This particular session was facilitated by Anjela Taneja from Oxfam.

She spoke about the poor state of affair of education in terms of low rates of RTE compliance, increasing privatization of education and the additional problem of saffronisation of education.

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Anil Pradhan, convener of Odisha RTE Forum was the first to speak on the panel.

He spoke in-depth about the problem and scale of school closures in Odisha and the SATH program. The most alarming thing he said was they were doing closure based on DISE data, but there are discrepancies between DISE data and actual field situation. Their demand is to stop school closures and proceed only after consultation with stakeholders. The actions towards the same would be evidence building and interaction with political parties.

Speaking on the poor state of education in Odisha he said the RTE compliance is much lower than the national average and the teachers union is very weak because they are too many in number.

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Next to speak was AK Singh from Jharkhand RTE Forum.

He said that given that so many structural changes are happening – SSA to SMSA, DOE to DO, the state system is very confused with RTE and NEP and everything. People who come to implement policies are technical, an academic person is needed to lead policy implementation.
He also said they have prepared a draft about state-specific concerns in NEP, and even though Jharkhand has a history of school closures, it is not on the governments agenda right now.

After this Prabir Basu from West Bengal RTE Forum expressed his views.

He said this policy is like a conspiracy document, with bad intent. It will encourage RSS volunteers to get into the education system. The state is under huge danger of RSS ashram schools coming up. All kinds of tribal schools and madrasas will be shut.

In the context of West Bengal, they wanted regional consultation on NEP with RTE forum and young volunteers. The state of RTE implementation has also been bad. Mergers and privatization has been happening, but not to the extent of Rajasthan or other states.

Next to speak was Joseph Victor from Pondicherry RTE Forum and who is the national convener of CACL.

He said division of stages into 5+3+3+4 is compartmentalization, it is not a welcome move as it gives more scope for child labour and more points where kids can drop out.

There have been demands of social workers and counselors in school, but he was unsure about how it will play out in the new socio-political context.

The last session of the consultation was devoted to discussing what should be done to improve the draft NEP and what should be the next steps. It was facilitated by Aparajita Sharma from Council for Social Development and Seema Rajput from Care India.

It was discussed that as a starting point, 3 things have to be done:
1. Give commitment
2. Strategic and realistic planning
3. Timely action

Making use of extra time to do more consultations and strengthening our submissions is crucial. This policy may take time to be passed, but the teacher association will have to take responsibility for the children and schools in the meanwhile. Teachers unions need to strive harder to make space for themselves in the decision making process of govt schools.

Issues before all those who were present:

- Ensuring every school has pre-primary school
- Extension of RTE without diluting RTE norms
- Issue of school closures
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- Regulation of low-cost private schools
- Work on issues of financing
- If they’re ending contractualisation of teachers, question arises that what about volunteers and social workers?
- The process of bringing schools into the school complex should not dilute their autonomy.

More consultations can and should be done to identify other loopholes. There is a need to take it to the public. Would be helpful to have other national level organisations to come together and create one platform. Also, there is a need to create Jan Andolan like was done for Shiksha Andolan.

Other suggestions were:

- A press conference
- Use social media in all possible ways
- Even the smallest of groups should send their submissions
- Share mobilization in different states. Some comm bw civil society and union
- Need a meeting with NCERT
- Include SMC federation in process as well

During the consultation, the forum had the privilege of hosting Honorable MP Shri Mohammed Javed, who congratulated the gathering for coming together and critically looking at the Policy document. He showed support and also said the forum should reach out to him with its points so that they may be raised in the parliament.