RTE Forum’s National Council meeting was held on 12 and 13 July 2019 at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra.

**On day 1, 12th July,** the meeting started at 10:30 am with a round of introductions. This was followed by a brief note by National Convener of RTE Forum, Mr. Ambarish Rai in which he recapped the points discussed at the Consultation on draft NEP with Teachers’ Associations held the day before on 11 July. He discussed the possibility of having a movement/campaign with TAs regarding the issues in NEP. It was suggested that a press conference to be held to make a joint comment (of TAs and RTE Forum) on NEP before 31st July. Ambarish Rai further reiterated that it is important to keep an eye on the current scenario in the country, react on it and continue the movement of education without cutting ourselves off from the current scenario in the country.

This was followed by a presentation by RTE Forum’s national secretariat on the activities conducted at national level for the election campaign – Right to Education for All, No Child Labour At All. After this presentation each state shared their experiences of the campaign:

**Jharkhand:** AK Singh, Convener of Jharkhand RTE Forum shared that during the campaign a number of activities were organized at the state level. Of all the candidates from political parties who signed the pledge card, 9 candidates won in the elections. No Voter left behind campaign was taken on in full swing in the state in collaboration with the State government. There are total of 14 constituencies in the state. Jharkhand RTE Forum met all probable winning candidates in the constituencies. People from the respective constituencies visited the candidates. Across party lines there was no disagreement regarding the demands on education. As far as the post-election campaign is concerned, there are going to be Vidhan Sabha elections in Nov-Dec in which JH RTE Forum will engage itself. The Forum will also reach out to MPs in their constituencies.

**West Bengal:** Convener of WB RTE Forum, Prabir Basu commented that there was a substantial amount of interaction on education but education is still seen as a charity issue and not a political issue. There was a public hearing in North Bengal on SMC and Teachers’ Vacancy and a joint report by SCPCR and WBRTEF was placed in the cabinet the comments on which are awaited. The next strategy is to reach out to MPs from the state including those who couldn’t be approached during the election campaign for eg. Mohua Moitra who is raising some vital points in the parliament.

**Maharashtra:** Hemangi Joshi, Convener said that at the beginning of the campaign, several meetings were held to finalize the campaign documents. CACL played a very crucial and proactive role. As a result of which MPs have become aware of our issues. Several successful press conferences were held in Mumbai in which there was huge participation of people. However, the issues weren’t taken up by the big papers. The state assembly elections in Maharashtra are due in September-October 2019. Members of Maharashtra RTE Forum are going to take forward the campaign in the assembly polls as well.
Himachal Pradesh: In Himachal Pradesh, they joined hands with organizations that have a similar vision. They were able to build favorable relations with other organizations and media. Half of Dharamshala was covered in a major rally but the result in the election was disappointing.

Assam: Advocacy Forum for Education for implementation of RTE Act and Plantation Act – this can strengthen the forum in the state. Ms. Bondita Acharya also posed a question as to if RTE Forum can release a statement on the on-going NRC in Assam, the final list of which will be released on 31st July and 15 lakh people will be declared stateless, many of whom will be women and children.

Pondicherry: RTE Forum and CACL together ran and participated the campaign in Pondicherry. The campaign was taken to Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Odisha, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Bihar: Bihar saw the successful running of the Desh Mera, Vote Mera, Mudda Mera campaign on 23rd March, 2019. Apart from this the pledge card activity was also undertaken in the state with great enthusiasm.

Odisha: A press conference will be organized in the state before the assembly elections on health and education.

Uttar Pradesh: A reflection from the campaign was that education can be made a prime agenda. During the campaign education emerged as a key issue from amongst all other issues, both in the political scenario as well as the media. In their annual meeting, U.P. will strategize as to what should be their next action plan. The UP team met with several candidates from different parties and some of them have been elected.

Uttarakhand: My Country, My Vote, My issues was launched in Uttarakhand and it was a successful attempt. Right now there is a campaign going on regarding books. Mr. Raghu Tewari, Uttarakhand RTE Forum’s convener said that it is very important to safeguard the issue of education in tumultuous times in the country.

Tamil Nadu: There was a joint action campaign in Tamil Nadu. They printed the national education manifesto in the state and included one more demand in it- that education should become a part of state list and not just remain in the national list. Several constituencies were distributed with the education manifesto and there were several assembly members who promised to raise questions on education in the assembly. Tamil Nadu RTE Forum also organized one state level consultation on March 19 at Chennai in which CSOs, media and educationists were invited. The education manifesto was disseminated to the public.

After this, Prof. Nalini Juneja told Tamil Nadu to reconsider the demand of bringing education in the state list. Tamil Nadu responded by saying that all political parties have resolved to bring back education in the state list. The state has the liberty to pursue its own demands but at the national level the demand is different.

Telangana: Two meetings were held- One in Andhra Pradesh and the other in Telangana in collaboration with Save the Children. A South India meeting was held in Vijaywada and the main intention is to consolidate RTE Forum in South India. A consultation on National Education Policy was held in Telangana. They now have to submit recommendations. State convener of RTE Forum
Telangana said that the coming days are very crucial for them. They will organize regional meetings. Capacity building of state level and district level conveners is much needed. He also added that there is a need to answer questions like why do we demand only 6% of GDP to be spent on education and not 10%?

**Andhra Pradesh:** State Convener Kommu Ramana Murty explained the activities undertaken in the state in the election campaign and mentioned how they approached candidates contesting for both MP and MLA positions as AP witnessed state elections during that time as well.

**Delhi:** Delhi RTE Forum members spoke about focusing on how Delhi RTE Forum will function. Which all states can participate on the issue of disability was also brought to the fore.

Though representatives from Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh couldn’t join the NC Meeting, however, they enthusiastically participated in the campaign. At Karnataka, People’s Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education (PAFRE) in **Karnataka** adopted a multi-pronged approach to make the campaign more vibrant and impact oriented- they prepared a memorandum of demands in Kannada and English to reach all political parties, elected members, MLAs/MLCs and sitting MPs. They participated in the pledge card campaign as well as the campaign “My country, my vote, my issues”. **Madhya Pradesh** launched the campaign with the release of a children’s manifesto and participated in the pledge card campaign as well. In **Gujarat** participated in the pledge card campaign, two candidates have become member of parliament.

There was a suggestion from Hemangi Joshi of Maharashtra RTE Forum that in any of the upcoming NC meetings, we need to discuss and understand the issue of disability.

Some of the issues that came up from the first session:

- Engagement with the campaign was a positive step and useful contacts were established in several states that would be carried forward by the network.
- Need to strengthen coordination support from secretariat and between three networks
- Strategy on upcoming state elections
- Regional meetings of state forum
- Understanding disability, mob lynching, NRC and other issues

**Session 2: NEP**

The next session of the day focused on developing a common understanding on the draft National Education Policy. It began with a discussion on engagement with different stakeholders, finalisation of RTE Forum’s submission. Many members mentioned that extension of deadline of submissions for NEP should be demanded, however, RTE Forum’s recommendations to be kept ready within the timeline. Aatreyee Sen from RTE Forum H.P. mentioned that the submission to draft NEP should be made in bullet points, first emphasizing on what steps we welcome and then on points in which we want change.

After this, Ambarish Rai said that the draft NEP should be seen as a political document. RTE Forum needs to take a stand on several of its provisions. It is not just a technical document. While the RT Forum welcomes the extension of RTE Act but we should vehemently oppose the dilution of its norms and standards, as suggested in the document.
After this there was a presentation by Dr. Aparajita Sharma on RTE Forum’s draft comments on NEP which was followed by discussions.

As agreed by all the NC members at the meeting, a presentation was prepared as per five themes: Birth to 18 years, Equity, Privatisation, Quality and Governance and it was discussed that the same would be presented to Anurag Behar, member of drafting committee of NEP the next day.

Session 3:

After this, a presentation was made by Anjela Taneja, Oxfam India on Abidjan principles—*the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education.*

This could be of use to the Forum members while undertaking advocacy against privatization of education. It was agreed that focussed work is needed to address commercialization of education and a dedicated group of people needs to be created to work on this issue.

Session 4:

The next session focused on strengthening of the network and quite a few points were raised by various members. Some of the actionable points agreed upon were as follows:

- More meetings and more workshops with various stakeholders of education and members of RTE Forum.
- Various other organizations in various other places can be collaborated with and included in RTE Forum’s efforts.
- Involving professors, students etc. who would be interested in working on the ramifications of privatization of education. Identifying private players in states in the field of education and gathering information on privatization.
- Re-organising RTE Forum in Assam through Bondita Acharya. Aatrayee Sen and Joseph Victor to support this process through their contacts in Assam.
- Need to connect with youth who are aware of the current discourse on education in the country and eager to dedicate time for the same.

13 July 2019

Session 5:

The next day, 13th July, began with the presence of Dr. Anurag Behar, member of drafting committee of NEP. At the beginning Dr. Anurag Behar shared briefly the drafting process, after which the members gave their presentation in each of the pre-decided themes.

Dr. Anurag Behar categorised his responses into four types- points that he agreed to, points that he disagreed to, points on which he gave more clarification and points which he rejected as they were not there in the document. However, he reiterated that his responses expressed in the meeting were his own views and not the view of the entire committee.

Responding to the different themes, Dr. Anurag Behar said that he was in agreement with all the suggestions of the Alliance for the Right to Early Childhood Development. His only disagreement: he didn’t agree that RTE Act 2009 should be extended to children below 3 years and clarified by
saying that the RTE Act is addressing the education component and birth to 3 years cannot come under RTE Act and it is part of ICDS.

During the presentation on equity, several points were raised. He agreed to the issues related to transgender gender, marginalised children. He also agreed to the point that gender should seep through the curriculum as well. He further said that this policy is for high quality public education system. He clarified that from the budget point of view, equity translates to increase in investment for those who doesn’t have equity and hence Special Education Zones (SEZs). He further explained that SEZs are only to recognise regions that need more investment. The committee may further clarify this in the document if it is not clear at this point. He disagreed on inclusion of Common School System in the document. He mentioned the committee didn’t see the possibility of CSS in coming days. But he mentioned that RTE Forum may refer CSS (as an instrument to ensure equitable education) in our submission. He also said that everything in the document seeks to achieve equality.

On governance he clarified that school complexes had nothing to do with school closure. On the theme privatisation, he disagreed by saying that nothing in the policy is supporting privatisation. He said the regulation mechanism mentioned in the chapter (self-accreditation, peer school endorsement and SMC endorsement) will be more effective than the existing system of BEO’s endorsement. He further mentioned that parents shall play a role in the entire system and shall not be the sole regulators to private schools

After the presentation on the theme Quality, Dr. Anurag Behar said that RSA should be read for what it is. Its main purpose is not to leave education within the bureaucracy of the MHRD. There is no attempt at centralisation. With regard to RIAP, NTP he clarified that this will be there only to help the teachers and is a temporary provision. These will exist only if the teachers want it. If any particular teacher doesn’t want it, it shall not be done. Dr. Anurag Behar finally said that everyone should make short and crisp recommendations that can be included in the policy.

After the above session with Dr. Behar, the way forward was discussed with states, with each state giving their inputs on their plan of action.

**West Bengal:** Mr. Prabir Basu, convener of West Bengal RTE Forum said that there will be a discussion in WB RTE Forum after which recommendations would be submitted with a copy to National RTE Forum. There is also a plan to involve youth in advocacy process as per which there will be a meeting of different organizations in Kolkata. The conveners of U.P., Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa will be there in the meeting along with two young people from each state- points of discussion of 12 and 13 July will be taken into consideration and then there will be a discussion on NEP. Viewpoints of young people will be taken and WB RTE Forum will support them.

**Odisha:** Odisha said that they had already had two rounds of discussion on NEP. They will now compile it and submit the recommendations. Apart from this, they are planning to do something on school closure. They are planning to talk to political parties and editors of newspapers so that they publish news on school closure. They also plan to talk to MPs who can raise the cause of school closure. They will also publish documents on school closure and hold consultation with SMCs on
school closure. Ultimately, they will file a PIL in high court on school closure. There will also be interaction with Govt. Departments and different groups in Orissa on NEP.

Assam: It was suggested by Bondita Acharya from Assam that we need to decide upon a plan of action if our suggestions regarding the draft NEP don’t get incorporated into the document. She also informed that many women organisations of Assam are going to hold a press conference to discuss NRC in Delhi in August. It will be a fruitful conference if RTE Forum could also join it. RTE Forum, after studying NRC thoroughly can also draft a statement after the NRC list is out on 31st July.

Pondicherry: Victor Raj from Pondicherry said that they will give their recommendations to other CSOs. They will then send their suggestions to MHRD.

U.P: SCORE will hold discussions in our respective states keeping in mind the two days discussion on NEP at New Delhi. At a personal level suggestion can be sent to Anurag Behar. Sanjeev Sinha, convener of Score, U.P. reiterated Bondita Acharya’s point that we need to decide upon a plan of action in case our suggestions to the draft NEP are not taken into consideration.

Bihar: Suggested that the recommendations on NEP may be published based on consultations held in Bihar and also at the national level.

Uttarakhand: Submission regarding the NEP should be made on behalf of RTE Forum. However, a stand of RTE Forum in a parcha should be sent to all states so that consultations can be held in all states as per that. Individual level submissions to be made to Anurag Behar.


Maharashtra: There is a consultation in Mumbai on NEP on 18th July. A statement of RTE Forum is required. State specific recommendations will be sent to MHRD and Maharashtra RTE Forum’s state convener Hemangi Joshi will contact Anurag Behar for some clarifications on the document.

Chhattisgarh: Chhattisgarh will organise consultations on RTE and ECCE in the tribal belt in the state.

After the inputs from states, there were some individual inputs from the gathering. Sudatta Khuntia from Action Aid said that we should make a document tactfully. We should clearly state the good and the bad in short and give a crisp feedback. Himmat Singh from RTE Forum said that RTE Forum should have an alternative education policy. Dr. Aparajita from CSD and RTE Forum said that the drafting committee of the National Education Policy should be more dynamic. Educationists should have been included in the committee.

National Convener of RTE Forum, Ambarish Rai said that discussions need to continue. The document on RTE Forum’s stand on NEP which was circulated will be revised in light of the two-day discussion. By 25th of July, it will be sent to all the states. He also suggested that few submissions be made along with signatures from all 10,000 organisations of the network. In this way, we will be able to press for the demand of common school system and 6% expenditure of GDP with
a greater impact. Regarding school closure, he suggested that data/evidences will be acquired from Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar and M.P. and then PIL will be filed in Supreme Court. This has to be finalised by 30th August. Alliance for Right to ECD said that there is a need for planned consultations for a deeper understanding of NEP and subsequent steps to be taken in its regard. A parcha from RTE Forum is needed on the policy.

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>By When</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share presentations used at the NC Meeting (12th - 13th July 2019) and the format for NEP Submissions</td>
<td>Secretariat</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Share RTE Forum’s final submission on draft NEP with the states</td>
<td>Secretariat</td>
<td>Try to share by 25th July 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final recommendations on dNEP to be submitted</td>
<td>State Forums/ National RTE Forum</td>
<td>By 31st July</td>
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<td>Press conference on draft NEP</td>
<td>National RTE Forum</td>
<td>By 31st July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting on Girls Education, SDG 4</td>
<td>Jharkhand RTE Forum</td>
<td>10th August 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional meeting at Kolkata- conveners of U.P., Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa to be invited</td>
<td>WB RTE Forum</td>
<td>End of August 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting on Education in the tribal regions of the country (focus on RTE and ECCE)</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh RTE Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIL at Odisha High Court on School Closure</td>
<td>Odisha RTE Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIL at the Supreme Court on school closures with evidences from Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.</td>
<td>National RTE Forum with support from respective state forums.</td>
<td>Have materials/evidences ready by end of August.</td>
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<td>States to approach parliamentarians with a congratulatory letter</td>
<td>State Forums</td>
<td>By 30th August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-organising RTE Forum in Assam</td>
<td>Bondita Acharya (Aatravay Sen and Joseph Victor to support with their contacts)</td>
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<td>Dedicated group to address commercialization of education (using Abidjan Principles)</td>
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