

Backdrop:

The need for reforms in Indian education sector has been a recurring theme in Indian policy circles. The Government of India has finally decided to give this area its due attention. A consultation paper has been released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development which covers important themes on school education and higher education, and raises pertinent questions. The objective is to initiate an informed and structured policy debate on the issue. While worthy of appreciation, this approach has its own limitations. The consultation might be limited to the issues which government deems important, thus ignoring other critical areas.

Therefore CUTS International Public Policy Centre (CIPPoC) which amongst other areas works on education reforms also conducted a roundtable in response to a discussion paper it produced. The discussion paper undertook an in-depth analysis of issues remaining uncovered or attracting limited importance in the government consultation paper while also highlighting the key issues raised therein. The objective was to widen the scope of discussion on education reforms, and contribute to the policy debate.

The roundtable was Chaired by Prof. S.K. Thorat, Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research, with keynotes addressed by Prof. C. Raj Kumar, Vice Chancellor, O.P. Jindal Global University; Prof. J. S. Rajput, Former Chairman NCTE and Former Director NCERT and Mr. Sanjay Bhargava, Chairman, Shiksha Mandal, Wardha. Nearly 40 experts participated in the discussion comprising policy makers, researchers, academia, civil society and media (*List of participants is appended as Annexure 1*)

The following is the substantial sense of what transpired at the roundtable:

Status of state universities and potential role for Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

The status of universities in India has gone down substantially. This situation is even more alarming at the state level since most of universities are state universities. Therefore, there is a need to identify universities which need assistance both financial and technical. Centrally Sponsored Scheme RUSA can be an appropriate tool in this context. The State Higher Education Councils as mandated under RUSA must engage in identifying such universities and then make a plan for the improvement of their infrastructure, faculty and academic

programmes. However, it must also be borne in mind that RUSA which would move the bulk of allocation of funds to colleges from UGC should not result in badly run institutions controlled by politicians cornering most of the funds.

Need to take into account relevant features and implementation failures of past polices

There is a lack of evidence with regards to the need for a new education policy. This is because there is insufficient analyses of past polices, their objectives and failures in implementation of those objectives. For instance, even today most recommendations of the Kothari Commission stand valid and should be considered for implementation. The Common School System as recommended by the Kothari Commission (1964-66), for securing equity and social justice in education is one such example¹. This mandates a review of past polices to identify the policy prescriptions in those polices which are relevant even today. Further, reasons for the failure in their implementation need to be identified and the future policy must spell out a clear time bound roadmap for their implementation.

Need for an education statistics institute

There is a need in India to have institutes like Higher Education Statistics Agency in UK to regularly gather and monitor data on higher education. There is also a need to have an institute to map and analyse data for other levels too namely pre-primary, primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary. Currently, neither there are such institutes nor credible data. Hence, policy formulation exercise is only based on estimates. The situation is worse with regards to diploma and certificate awarding institutions. The data pertaining to such institutions is even scarcer.

Need for NITI Aayog to play a more prominent role

In light of the fact that there is substantial budgetary cut in the education sector, there is a need to review states ability to provide for the missing funding in different levels of education. This may be a challenging task as states are

¹ [The Common School System was originally advocated under the chairmanship of Dr.DS Kothari. NPE, 1968 accepted the recommendation of the Kothari Commission for bringing about the Common School System. In the context of the national system of education, NPE, 1986 restated the determination of the Government to take effective measures in the direction of the Common School System. The concept of national system of education would imply, according to NPE 1986, that, upto a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location, or sex, have access to education of comparable quality. The NPERC noted that the Common School System still remained a concept even though mooted by the Kothari Commission over a quarter of a century ago and expressed the view that the educational disparities are being further accentuated by the failure to implement the Common School System. The NPERC advocated concrete steps to translate the concept into a reality.]

differently placed to take on the challenges related to education in equal measure. Therefore, NITI Aayog should play a more proactive role in this changing scenario through its governing council which consists of state chief ministers. The Aayog should also help states provide technical and innovative solutions to improve quality and scale. For this purpose Aayog must seek active support from think tanks, civil society organisations and education experts. This step will bolster the cooperative federalism framework in India.

Cognate Agenda must lie with single ministry

Cognate agenda of education must be with a single ministry. For instance, pre-primary education should be brought within the purview of the Human Resource Development Ministry to accord due focus on the early cognitive skills of children which as has been proven beyond doubt is crucial to their performance in elementary and higher level.

UGC should be reformed

As a central regulator UGC should be restructured to have representation from states and adequate mechanisms must be placed so that states' voice carry weight in the decisions of the central regulator. This can be done by setting up a UGC Governing Council with state representation in it.

Need to rein in high rate of litigation in education

There is a need to check high rate of litigation in the education sector. This is because not only there is enormous litigation but also contradictory judgements in different states. Litigation consumes a considerable time of authorities at the helm of institutions and contributes to diminishing focus on core educational concerns. Additionally, lack of legal clarity also hampers the growth of the sector. Hence there is a need to look more closely at the nature of legal disputes. Findings of such an analysis must also inform the policy.

Need to reconsider no detention policy at elementary level

No detention policy envisaged under Right to Education Act needs to be revisited. This is because, theoretically, the policy is an ideal pedagogical instrument but can only work under certain conditions such as with availability of good teachers and better infrastructure to enable improved learning. No detention policy needs to entail a stronger assessment system strengthening the competitive edge of children.

Incentivise admissions in government schools

Revival of government schools is a task that must be taken on board in a mission mode. This can be done by incentivising government employees to send their children to government schools and incentivising teacher jobs at such schools. This may require a systemic reform such as revisiting the teacher eligibility tests and teacher education system in India.

Nuanced discussion on for profit vs not for profit needed

Global experience suggests that best educational institutions / universities across the world are 'not-for-profit'. In India too this has been the case however

many unethical practices have rendered the charitable objectives ineffective. This mandates a detailed review of existing positions and need to learn from international experiences.

The policy should adhere to a time frame

There is a need to have a time frame for the policy. It needs to be reviewed periodically. There should also be a real time citizen feedback mechanism on the policy so that regular feedback is reported from the ground on policy objectives. This will be a step to instil responsive governance.

Policy must not be conceived in isolation

The education policy must be made in consonance with other policies like policy on skill development and other initiatives like make in India and Digital India.

Annexure 1

List of Participants in alphabetical order

S No.	Name	Particulars
1.	Abhishek Kumar	Associate Director CUTS International
2.	Ádithya Narayanan	Fellow Teach for India
3.	Ajay Mohan Goel	Executive Vice President Wadhvani Foundation
4.	Anurag Goel	Former Member Competition Commission of India (CCI)
5.	Apoorva Shankar	Education Analyst PRS Legislative Research
6.	Ashish Mehta	Program Manager LIQVID eLearning Services
7.	Avani Kapur	Senior Researcher Centre for Policy Research
8.	C. Raj Kumar	Vice Chancellor O.P. Jindal Global University
9.	Furqan Qamar	Secretary General Association of Indian Universities
10.	Garima Babbar	Standards and QA National Skill Development Corporation
11.	Honey Gupta	Junior Fellow CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC)
12.	Huma Masood	National Programme Officer, Gender and Education UNESCO

13.	J. S. Rajput	Former Director NCERT
14.	K. S. Chalam	Political Economist and Educationist & Ex-Member Union Public Service Commission
15.	Manish Upadhyay	Co-founder and Chief Evangelist LIQVID eLearning Services
16.	Meenakshi Gautam	Phd Student Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies School of Social Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)
17.	Milindo Chakrabarti	Visiting Fellow Research and Information system for Developing Countries (RIS)
18.	Monika Banerjee	Phd Student Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies School of Social Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University
19.	Mukul Priyadarshini	Miranda House, Delhi University
20.	N. Mathur	Independent Researcher
21.	N. V. Varghese	Director Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), NUEPA
22.	Nidhi Sabharwal	Associate Professor Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), NUEPA
23.	Parth J. Shah	Founder President Centre for Civil Society
24.	Pawan Chopra	Director Dua Consulting
25.	Pradeep S. Mehta	Secretary General CUTS International
26.	Pradyumna Bhattacharjee	Fellow Teach for India
27.	Pramod Kumar Anand	Retd. IAS
28.	Pratibha Jain	Partner & Head (Delhi Office) Nishith Desai Associates
29.	R. R. Koireng	NCERT
30.	Rajesh Pankaj	Joint Director FICCI

31.	Richard Everitt	Director (Education) British Council
32.	S. S. Chawla	Senior Director ASSOCHAM
33.	S.K. Thorat	Chairman Indian Council of Social Science Research
34.	Sabina Dewan	Senior Fellow Just Jobs Network
35.	Sajad Santosh	Research Associate Centre for Civil Society
36.	Sanjay Bhargava	Chairman Shiksha Mandal Wardha
37.	Saumen Chattopadhyay	Associate Professor Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies School of Social Sciences Jawaharlal Nehru University
38.	Shamika Ravi	Fellow, Development Economics Brookings India
39.	Tarun Cherukuri	City Director (Delhi Operations) Teach for India
40.	Vandana Singh	Associate Fellow Digantar Shiksha Evam Khelkud Samiti
41.	Vimlendu Jha	Founder Swechha
42.	Vivek Vellanki	Regional Resource Centre for Elementary Education University of Delhi