

District Primary Education Programme
Digumarti Bhaskara Rao

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DISTRICT PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME
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DPEP—A Programme for Educational Transformation

DPEP was launched in 1994. It seeks to operationalise decentralised planning and management, identified by the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 to be the main strategy for Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). This is done through district and population-specific planning.

DPEP emphasises on

- contextuality, i.e., giving primacy to local needs
- reduction of existing gender and social disparities in educational access
- provision of alternative schooling of comparable standards to the disadvantaged groups
- obtaining genuine community involvement in the running of schools
- empowerment and capacity building at the local level
- addressing access, retention and quality issues
- devising an appropriate fund flow mechanism from Centre to the States.

Ownership is the Key

DPEP is an attempt to initiate a process of planning from the grassroots. Districts identify their needs and formulate a plan. State level interventions are meant to provide support to the district level. The programme has drawn inspiration from earlier experiences in community participation such as the Bihar Education Project and the Lok Jumbish Project in Rajasthan.

Strategies and interventions which include, amongst others, construction of school buildings, improvement of teaching-learning materials and teacher training practices, as well as capacity building

for academic and management support, are designed through wide ranging consultations with grassroots level functionaries, NGOs, teacher representatives and support institutions.

DPEP effectively builds on the groundwork that has been done by the Total Literacy Campaigns and the Panchayati Raj Constitutional Amendments to ensure popular participation in primary education.

The programme has definitely kindled a feeling of ownership among the officials, teachers and the community

Equity Focus

A gender perspective has been incorporated into all aspects of planning and implementation of DPEP. Pertinent lessons have been drawn from the Mahila Samakhya Project DPEP targets low female literacy districts. Apart from specific strategies designed to enhance girls' access, enrolment and retention in the school system, DPEP recognises the crucial importance of enabling communities, particularly women, in the activities of the programme through—

- formation of village level women's collective and training of local women activists
- empowerment of local bodies such as VECs, mother-teacher associations and women's groups
- intensive capacity building for community and women's groups
- involvement of community and women's organisations in mobilisation, school management and monitoring.

Tribal education has received a boost with DPEP giving priority to the opening of schools in tribal areas. Some of the interventions include setting up of residential schools, providing alternative schooling, creating a cadre of parateachers within the community, involvement of NGOs, teaching in local dialects and developing culturally sensitive education material.

Pedagogical Renewal

Pedagogical renewal which includes teacher motivation and competence is the key to UEE, DPEP strives to link pedagogical necessities with broader educational concerns with the ultimate objective of improving the school processes and classroom practices. The APPEP and Shiksha Karmi Projects, forerunners to the DPEP, have provided valuable lessons in this area.

The multi-pronged strategy to improve pedagogy include—

- MLL bases teaching/learning practices

- improving textbooks
- changing teaching styles and practices
- enhancing teacher motivation and competence
- strengthening academic support to teachers
- supporting educational evaluation at district and school levels
- developing strategies for multigrade schools
- promoting educational research
- promoting joyful and child-centred learning.

This programme has created local-specific and favourable conditions to improve teacher competencies through frequent in-service training programmes at decentralised levels in block and cluster resource centres.

Building Capacity for Sustainability

Building institutional capacities at all levels is the *sine qua non* for proving sustainability to the system. This assumes greater significance in view of the Panchayati Raj legislations transferring responsibilities, including that of primary education, to local bodies. The experience gained in the UP Basic Education Project served as a starting point.

DPEP seeks to strengthen District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and State Institute of Educational Management and Training (SIEMTs) and make them vibrant, optimal functioning institutions: National level apex institutions such as the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) are supported so that they can in turn lend their expertise to state and district level institutions. Expertise is also being developed in crucial areas such as planning, management and action research.

A Responsive System

What perhaps sets DPEP apart from earlier attempts at UEE is the efforts towards demand based interventions, systematic planning, empowerment and accountability at all levels. Well defined activities and goals are specified and taken up for implementation in a time-bound manner. Clearcut responsibilities are assigned to various agencies.

Empowered management mechanisms have been set up for project management and implementation at all levels which facilitate

flexibility, quick administrative decision-making and smooth flow of funds. These bodies also provide for partnership between central and state governments as well as between the voluntary sector and educational experts.

Necessitated by this orientation and integral to DPEP is a regular system of monitoring and evaluation. This system provides continuous and timely information required to fine tune the programme. A Project Management Information System has been developed.

Supervision missions are mounted frequently. Subject specialists' and experts visit states, districts and field level institutions in all DPEP areas to get a first hand view of the progress and support the implementation.

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