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Decentralisation, Community participation and Convergence

These are the most widely used principles/tenets and strategies for any development intervention. How well have these concepts been understood, absorbed and reflected in strategies? That needs to be explored further by development practitioners and educationists.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments provide an institutional framework for participative planning and management of education by local self-government bodies, called panchayats or panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). Under the Eleventh Schedule, education, including primary and secondary schools; adult and non-formal education and libraries are the responsibility of the panchayats. In addition, recent programmes of the government and NGOs have promoted a series of community based bodies, such as Village Education Committee, School Betterment and Management committee, Parent Teachers associations and so on. DPEP and NGO initiatives promote community-based organisations. There are also a host of other community-based groups that may exist in a village, for credit, enterprise, health, water and agriculture.

The scenario at the field looks complex. Who has the authority? Who is accountable? Who decides about location of schools? Who has control over funds? Are enough inputs being provided into making these bodies strong and responsive? Are there sufficient linkages between the PRIs and across the Community-based Organisations (CBOs, such as youth or women's groups)? And most important, is the school administration responsive to the community? These are questions that need to be explored further. Despite the acceptance of decentralisation and community participation, the outlook and perceptions of government functionaries has not changed.

The Steering Group Report for the Tenth Plan 2002-2007 calls for creating an enabling environment for "exercising voice and choice by the [local] community or group of beneficiaries and developing the human, organizational and management capacity to solve the problems as they arise in order to sustain the improvements".

Yet there are insufficient inputs and back up support

given to the community. The intensive efforts to make the processes work and the costs required for such an effort are not acknowledged, leave alone discussed. The strategies, processes, potential pitfalls, monitoring system need to be discussed, developed and tested. This is amply demonstrated by SSA. With its focus on community participation, SSA proposes a two-day training programme once a year for eight people in a village under the budget head of Community Mobilisation. For its Continuing Education programme, NLM proposes to make the community pay, irrespective of the quality of programmes.

Efforts towards decentralisation have also resulted in the setting up of resource institutions such as District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs), Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) at district and sub-district levels. But the expertise available at this level is fragile and their linkages with community based structures very weak. It is important to develop them into sound institutions that will continue to support the education processes once the specific programmes and interventions are over.

The country launched the National Literacy Mission, moved on to Primary Education and after some years, to Elementary Education. Both Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Post Literacy/Continuing Education are acknowledged as important areas, yet their various dimensions have not yet been fully explored and absorbed. DPEP built some pressure for elementary education and the SSA was launched. At the present juncture, shouldn't policy planners as well as activists be simultaneously looking at higher secondary education and the reforms needed therein?

Particularly after class eight, there is a need to provide the child with opportunities for 'multiple exit points'. Experience has shown that it takes two or even three generations for a family to achieve literacy. Unless there is an integrated package supporting the family through its journey, EFA will not be sustained.

Literacy is not woven into SSA. The management framework and implementation do not have any cohesion. The support institutions for both are different with no linkages whatsoever. In most states DIETs, BRCs, CRCs do not look at literacy at all. Can the 'educationally backward' states really achieve their targets without synergy between adult education (AE) and elementary education (EE)? Each stage of education bonds with the next; builds and sustains the inter

est and enthusiasm of the parents and the community.

One of the terms of reference for the working group for the Tenth Plan was to suggest measures for effective linkages of AE programmes with SSA. However no specific resources were suggested nor was any integration programme launched.

Within the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the linkages among various departments is limited even though their work may be closely related. The Department of Youth and the Department of Woman and Child Development and other divisions of education can enrich one other's programmes. The NLM has not been able to tap the micro credit and Self Help Group (SHG) programmes. In Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh efforts have been made to design and manage education programs in totality.

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