



## ***Education for All: From Rhetoric to Reality***

It is now almost a decade since the National Policy on Education (1986) was formulated and a number of implementation strategies were outlined. A National System of Education was envisaged which would lay the greatest stress on elimination of disparities and promote the equality of women, with special attention to the needs of minorities and other disadvantaged sections, so that the system could “move towards the ideals enshrined in the Constitution”, Subsequently, a ‘dual track’ approach was posited to simultaneously focus on adult literacy and primary education, which, after the Jomtien World Conference in 1990, came to be reaffirmed by the collective emphasis on ‘Education for All’ (EFA). Article 1 of the ‘World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Needs’ states that:

“Every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools and basic learning content required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.”

The World Declaration lays stress on *universalizing access and promoting equity*, the two issues which also happen to be most crucial to our own basic agenda. It states that “basic education services of quality should be expanded, and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities”. Underserved groups—the poor; street and working children; girls and women; rural and remote populations; nomads and migrant workers; indigenous peoples; ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities; refugees—should not suffer any

discrimination in access to learning opportunities. More significantly, “whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development—for an individual or for society depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organised programmes and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable on assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential.” (Articles 3-4; emphasis as in the original)

Significantly, the Declaration views education as a means for human development, for development of the individual first and subsequently of society, and lays stress on the state being responsible to ensure that all human beings are allowed to develop their full capacities and are able to live and work in dignity. This is in contrast to the more ‘instrumental’ view, which obscures the individual and audits for systemic benefits only, perceiving education simply as a means to increase productivity. This trend is most crudely visible in the case made out for girls’ education, which is publicly propounded as a measure to reduce birth rates, to ensure enlightened motherhood, or even to create more conscious cooks for a healthy and better-nourished family. Indeed, such ‘messages’ have consistently been transmitted through our plans and strategies, which have often failed to couch upon the learning needs, concerns and aspirations of the majority of individuals who constitute our population. The MPHDR moves

from the purely instrumental view to focus, instead, on how 'Education for All' could be attempted as a means to achieve human development.

It might be useful at this point to play the 'devil's advocate', and articulate some very basic questions in order to convince ourselves that there is indeed a case for EF A in our country. To begin with, why has it become imperative to apparently change gear and speak of 'education for all'? After all, we cannot deal with all our problems at once, and we have all along been trying to focus on and enlarge our primary sector. Haven't we been continuously and consistently increasing our educational infrastructure, and found that our enrolment rates have indeed gone up? It is a gigantic task and our Constitution, though eminently well intentioned, had made an optimistic estimate when it first claimed that "the State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years." Perhaps, we shall manage by the turn of the century, or a few years later? Moreover, it is not as simple as getting hold of them and putting them into. Schools, since there are other 'socio-economic' factors at work which seem to keep them out. We might be able to deal with the 'supply' side of the problem but how can we possibly take on the 'demand' side as well?

This chapter will try to address these issues as we go along. To start with, we shall look at a few salient facts, some critical glimpses from the present scenario, that might help place these issues in an appropriate perspective.

## SHAPING A PERSPECTIVE: THE PRESENT SCENARIO

### *The 'efficient' filter?*

Our educational system effectively 'filters out', or should we say 'fails to retain', a majority of the children who enter it. According to generous estimates, out of 100 children of school-going age, about 70 actually enroll into class I, of whom 35 drop out even before completing primary school. Less than 10 may finish class VIII (the terminal stage for elementary school, at around the age of 14 years), while finally less than 5 students actually manage to finish high school. This is a national average estimate. For specific populations, such as the urban poor, those in rural schools, tribal areas, or even girls, the figures will naturally be more alarming. This may seem to indicate that the average 'efficiency' of our massive school system is less than 5 per cent.

Children who attend school are learning very little. A number of baseline studies and learning achievement tests conducted by NCERT and NIEP A in the last few years have shown that most children in classes IV and V are not able to read simple words or sentences and are unable to recognise numbers or perform simple arithmetical operations such as addition and multiplication. It is significant to note that the achievement levels of children in Kerala, which has achieved near universal enrolment, better school buildings and regular teacher attendance, are also 'depressingly' poor (Varghese 1994).

Incidentally, the results from Madhya Pradesh have tended to be among the lowest in the country. For instance, the Baseline Assessment Study conducted by NCERT (*Research Based Interventions in Primary*

*Education: The DPEP Strategy, 1994*) shows that 93 per cent and 74 per cent of the sample schools in Madhya Pradesh were unable to achieve an average score of 40 per cent in mathematics and language, respectively.

Almost one-third of the children who do not participate in elementary education are either 'not interested' in school or find 'studies too difficult'. The National Sample Survey (1989) and other recent studies have shown that socio-economic factors are not the only cause of children staying out of school. Boredom, fear, the unattractive environment of school, and the oppressive feeling of 'non-comprehension' are some significant causes of demotivation that have now lent a sense of urgency to the EFA call for a 'joyful, child centered and activity-based process of learning.'

The Yashpal Committee Report made a perceptive comment on the present situation: "a significant fraction of children who drop out may be those who refuse to compromise with non-comprehension—they are potentially superior to those who just memorise and do well in examinations, without comprehending very much!" (Learning Without Burden, 1993)

Access to or availability of a primary school is found to be often mismatched with enrolment figures. In over 20 per cent of the 441 districts analysed, high access to schooling showed only moderate or low enrolment. (EFA: The Indian Scene, 1993)

#### *Literacy campaigns create a demand for education*

The experience of the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) has shown that a successful decentralised and participatory model of adult education can generate a demand for primary education and also enhance enrolment rates. In fact, this demand was found to be greater in 'unexpected' quarters—in rural, educationally back ward and disadvantaged communities.

The rural female literacy rate for the country is 30 per cent (1991 Census), though there are many districts in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar where the rate is lower than 10 per cent. However, the TLCs, wherever they have ensured people's participation and mobilization in the true sense of the decentralized model, have shown that more rural women than men come forward as learners and even volunteers. Moreover, there have been a number of diverse positive spin-offs, such as the thrift and credit collectives, women's cooperatives, the anti-arrack movement, etc.

The post-literacy phase of the campaign has been much more challenging but less effective. However, a few districts in different parts of the country have, at the initiative of their own Zilla Saksharata Samitis (ZSS), tried to evolve meaningful convergences and generate developmental programmes that can help sustain literacy in the long run. Examples are, the 'land literacy' programme which interfaces with a watershed management action plan, 'literacy to health', or even 'ecoliteracy'. It is worth emphasising that such convergences can only be suggestive, and specific programmes must necessarily emerge from the districts themselves as a result of the momentum they have generated within their own TLC, instead of being dictated from above. Problems and conflicts have surfaced recently when the predominantly voluntary and participatory spirit behind an effective mobilization has been threatened by a bureaucratic order to the district directing it to dovetail certain developmental programmes to the TLC.

The State Open School has been registered and will soon start functioning. It would be "necessary to plan, in collaboration with the State Resource Centres, the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, the ZSSs, as well as the National Open School, a programme for meaningful continuing education for neo-literates. It is important

to ensure that the examination designed to impart class III 'equivalence' to neo-literates is carefully designed and conducted, and that it provides enough motivation to them to continue further.

*Where disparities create further disparity*

More than 60 per cent of the primary schools in India have either only a single teacher or at most two teachers to take care of all five classes (I-V). In Madhya Pradesh, 35 per cent schools have a single teacher and another 34 per cent have only two teachers (Fifth All India Educational Survey, 1991). Ironically, these 'impoverished' schools are located in the rural 'backward' regions serving the more 'deprived' sections of the population.

An exhaustive study regarding the quality of basic education in Madhya Pradesh (Govinda and Varghese 1991) had raised this issue about infrastructural 'disparities' which significantly affect learner achievement. Most under-staffed schools are in rural 'backward' areas, where children actually need more time and attention from the teacher, having no parental support and guidance. In their achievement test they found that schools where teachers were forced to adopt multi grade teaching had significantly lower mean scores of learners as compared to schools having one teacher for every grade.

This shows that the present policy of providing teachers according to the pupil-teacher ratio of 40: 1 needs to be reviewed, so that a differential approach can be posited for the deployment of teachers in backward areas which have fewer children per grade.

Incidentally, it is heartening to see that in Himachal Pradesh there exist primary schools with two teachers (and two rooms with a large verandah) for as few as 15 Children, in small remote habitations, often comprising of isolated cluster of a few families living at high altitudes.

## **VOLUNTARY EFFORTS FOR CONTROL OF DIARRHOEA IN DURG .**

### **Efforts to control diarrhoea**

A unique experiment to tap the voluntary culture (generated by the Literacy Mission) was conducted in the diarrhoea-affected blocks of Durg. In the months of May and June, when the availability of pure drinking water gets affected, villagers are forced to depend on unsafe sources of drinking water. Later, due to rains, water-logging and infection of sources of drinking water become the cause of diarrhoea and dysentery.

To pre-empt the threat, the District Literacy Committee identified 300 villages that get affected by water-borne diseases, and took preventive measures. Scripts were written and 70 artists were trained in 10 'kalajathas' to use folk mediums and highlight the importance of cleanliness, both at the personal and community levels, among 100,000 villagers of 217 villages of 5 blocks. The highlight of this programme was that the enlightened villagers, voluntary workers associated with the Literacy Mission, panchayat members, office-bearers of 'Mahila mandal' and field level health workers were called on the stage to be explained the use of CAS, and they were made to take a vow to be readily available in times of any emergency arising out of these diseases.

### **Relief work in the flood-affected villages**

Due to excessive rains, villages located on the banks of the Shivnath and Kharun rivers and their tributaries were severely affected by cholera, dysentery, diarrhoea, malaria, etc. The Collector, anticipating the spread of an epidemic, in co-ordination with the District Literacy Mission, constituted 130 'kalajathas', comprising of voluntary workers, akshar sainiks and volunteers of the National Service Scheme. Songs and dramas were written in the local dialect, underlining the problems arising out of floods. Pamphlets were distributed to spread awareness about cleanliness.

House-to-house distribution of chlorine tablets, OR , Bleaching powder, was also undertaken . Wells were cleaned and the sick were dispensed immediate relief .

These are models of genuine people's action for the achievement of their own social objectives, a people's programme in which the bureaucracy only played an enabling role, leaving the conception and implementation to the people. This can be seen as a bonus of the National Literacy Mission: The forces of voluntarism unleashed by the National Literacy Mission have ensured that the well beyond the seemingly helpless primer. the three Rs approach, or beyond what was continuously planned. This example lights a great beacon of hope, illuminating a whole new path which the poor can at least aspire and work towards gaining gradual control over the extremely difficult circumstances of their lives.

As the people discover their hidden 'participatory programmes' and through such sensitively nurturing the Panchayati Raj institutions, the critical imperative for 'all those who believe in the genuine empowerment of the people is to seize any such challenge which provides an opportunity , and build brick by brick a new charter of people's action. For its ideological sustenance, probably the richest legitimacy and inspiration would come from Gandhiji's social philosophy and vision for other concrete models of actions , we can look to examples of genuine people's governance of their own affairs in the organisations of village and tribal communities in ancient and medieval India, in the Chinese organization of rural health delivery systems, in the mass literacy campaigns of Latin America and Africa , in the intensely humane organization of social services in post-war Vietnam, in any voluntary agencies in Madhya Pradesh and so on ( based on a case study by Zilla Saksharta Samiti, Durg).

### *Alternative 'informal' schooling*

The large system of Non-Formal Education (NFE), with over 2.5 lakh centres, has only proved to serve as a poor substitute for a regular education. It exists today as a distinctly second-rate option, more dismal than the rural primary school, for those who actually need more affirmative educational inputs. The NFE had initially been envisaged as a more flexible system but the scheme of implementation has been overly rigid and constrained, in terms of time (two hours a day for only two years), poorly paid and often untrained 'instructors' (not teachers!), and ill equipped 'centres' .

Under the centrally sponsored scheme of NFE there are over 35,000 centres in Madhya Pradesh with roughly 7 lakh children enrolled. A detailed evaluation of the programme undertaken by the Bhopal Regional College of Education (1993) showed that while only half the centres were actually functioning tremendous difficulties are faced by the functionaries. Inadequate or no training for instructors, meager honorariums, inadequate supply of teaching/learning materials, lack of rapport with the community, poor supervision and no proper evaluation were some of the main problems cited. It was also noted that of all the children enrolled the percentage of children who passed the class V examination was only about 5 per cent for boys and 3 per cent for girls.

It was recommended that the honorarium must be raised to Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 for instructors and supervisors, respectively, and that DIETs must seriously take up the tasks of training and continuous evaluation.

Madhya Pradesh is currently trying to give shape to the

idea of 'Alternative Schooling' (in about 400 schools in DPEP districts), which could present a more flexible, meaningful and joyful option for those who cannot attend regular schools, while maintaining its broad 'equivalence' with the formal school.

It is proposed that a separate system of certification be evolved for Alternative Schooling (AS), which is more in consonance with its special character, and evaluates in a friendly manner children's creative and cognitive abilities in the context of their own life-activities, rather than compel them to regurgitate irrelevant facts. This will lend the AS system a legitimisation, and not forcibly dovetail it as a second-rate version of the formal system. Presently, pupils under NFE, who are expected – to cover the same unsuitable 'formal' curriculum as "a crash course in a shorter time period (two hours a day for only two years), under more constrained conditions, are also finally made to take the same grade V examination, which not many are able to clear.

Indeed, we need to make the regular 'formal' school as flexible and 'informal' or 'child-friendly' as possible, especially in terms of timings, schedules and the environment, if a greater measure of retention is to be achieved. To change the school timings to suit the majority of children of the village, especially girls, is a small gesture, and has been found to make a significant difference to the level of attendance, but is yet to be implemented.

#### *The 'barefoot teacher'*

The concept of the 'barefoot teacher' or 'shiksha karmi', in consonance with the notion of a barefoot doctor or paramedic, who helped provide extensive coverage and efficacy to health care and management in China, can be effectively extended to the area of education. Rajasthan has shown that the Shiksha Karmi

Programme has worked well, especially in remote rural and tribal areas where regular qualified teachers do not wish to live. Village youth (with a minimum requirement of having passed class VIII for boys and class V for girls) have been carefully selected and intensively trained to teach in the village school. The success of the scheme has reflected in enhanced enrolment rates as well as higher achievement outcomes. Moreover, the accountability of shiksha karmis towards the village, their closer involvement with the community, and their initiation as a friend of the children more than as a 'teacher', have been found to have a marked positive effect.

Madhya Pradesh has made a similar attempt, though here it is limited to ensure 'local' recruitment of teachers, while the qualifications required are the same as for regular teachers. The process of selection needs to be made more thorough and the crucial input of effective training is totally missing. In Rajasthan the selection was done by a separate Shiksha Karmi Board, in collaboration with voluntary groups, in a few blocks at a time. In Madhya Pradesh the Janpad Panchayats are expected to do the recruitment of large numbers all over the state. It may be useful to set up a separate Shiksha Karmi Samiti specially for this purpose, to guide the Janpads and to organise intensive training with suitable resource persons at the district level. In addition, the present exercise is purely ad hoc and proper service rules and regulations would need to be drafted soon.

Incidentally, Madhya Pradesh is in the advantageous position of having a TLC in each of its 45 districts, as well as having completed the Panchayat elections. In addition, it also has a State Mission that coordinates work in all the TLCs as well as in primary education for the District Primary Education Programme (currently extended to 24 districts). It can attempt to meaningfully converge these efforts and plan for a

network of trained 'shiksha karmis', selected from amongst the active literacy activists, who work in tandem with the village education committees, through the Jan Shikshan Nilayams, to help realise the dream of 'Education for All, by All'.

#### *The question of resources*

Commitment towards human development through education must necessarily be commensurate with the budgetary allocations made for this purpose. While it is true that the percentage of plan expenditure allocated for elementary education (47 per cent of the total Eighth Plan outlay for education) and adult education (9 per cent) have increased significantly, our public expenditure on education is still 3.5 per cent of the GNP, a long way off from the cherished goal of 6 per cent of GNP.

While about half the states of the country allocate a share of between 20-30 per cent of their total budgeted expenditure (revenue) for education, Madhya Pradesh's expenditure on education (by the Education Department) was only 18.2 per cent of the total state budget of about Rs. 6600 crores (1993-94).

Moreover, of the Rs.1200 crores budgeted for education, about 62.5 percent, i.e. about Rs. 752 crores, was spent on elementary education (Budgetary Resources for Education, 1995). However, it is significant to note that most of the expenditure is on salaries (98.5 per cent) and a meager 1.5 per cent of the budget goes towards contingencies and other items.

It also turned out that per capita expenditure on education (1991-92) was Rs. 196, whereas in Punjab it was Rs. 315, in Gujarat Rs. 256 and in Himachal Pradesh Rs. 457. (EFA: A Graphic Presentation, 1993).

It has been estimated that increasing the per learner cost,

from the present norm of about Rs. 800 to a sum of Rs. 1,000, can bring a qualitative difference to the learning environment of the child, since this includes the expenses for all basic teaching-learning materials as well as the necessary teacher training and orientation camps required to change the present mode of classroom transaction.

Reallocation of state funds for education is important, especially to ensure that a higher component of 'non salary' funds are available for elementary education. Madhya Pradesh gets a large component of the external funds earmarked for the DPEP (District Primary Education Programme). While it is imperative to keep a strict vigil on the cost-effectiveness and efficient implementation of such externally funded programmes, since these normally attract the wrong kind of sociopolitical pressures, it is equally important to plan long-term state strategies independent of external grants or loans.

The Total Literacy Campaign model has been internationally acknowledged as a remarkable demonstration of how non-financial resources, namely, human resources, can be utilised in a cost-effective way. In fact, one of the salient features of this Campaign model is that the total cost per learner is kept very low, below Rs. 65, and millions of volunteers have been working willingly without any remuneration. However, such a model can serve only specific short-term and time bound programmes which demand a high level of mobilisation. Sustained educational programmes certainly require higher levels of sustained funding.

#### *A picture begins to emerge...*

We have thus far taken a glimpse at the present situation and suggested some possible directions, while also indicating some initiatives that deserve to be



reconsidered. We have seen that our present system is not designed 'for all' and ultimately caters to a very small percentage of our people. The school, the curriculum, the nature of its transaction, the teacher, the teacher's orientation and also 'status' within the educational administration, the role of the administration as well as the panchayats, resources available for education and the nature of the priority it enjoys—all these are crucial constituents of a complex structure. In addition, how do these relate to the child, her health and chances of survival; the community, its life concerns, its culture, language, values, and its aspirations? Education for All is impossible without sensitively interweaving all these inter-relationships. .

Mechanically enlarging the present system has not taken us very far. We may have opened schools (many without any basic facilities), but nor all children come; or they may come for a start but soon drop out; or they may even stay for a while but not learn very much. The few who manage to pass through the system do so at a heavy 'cost', such as tuitions and other financial inputs, parental support and pressures, mental anxiety, and often loss of their critical abilities, confidence and originality. The system has only become unwieldy, inefficient, and rigid. On the other hand, some carefully planned and sincerely implemented interventions have shown that, given an empathetic educational environment, learners and teachers can share an 'enabling' experience. Further, even the most disadvantaged communities, themselves struggling for survival, demand 'good quality' education for their children and themselves.

Clearly, if education is to move out of its current narrow confines, and meaningfully encompass 'all' our people, especially those who need it most to help them change their lives and somehow 'empower' them in their struggle against deprivation, we would need to basi-cally

restructure our system and remould the processes that have continued to give it its present shape.

## THE FRAMEWORK

In this section we shall take a closer look at some essential components of the education system, analyse the inherent constraints and suggest possible initiatives that could help restructure it.

### *The Curriculum*

The curriculum is a problem area. A number of attempts to effect a qualitative change have been made. However, till date these have remained unsatisfactory. Our policies have continued to call for a 'child-centered', joyful and activity-based curriculum. However, in this case, policy has often remained confined to rhetoric. This is because those who ultimately design the curriculum have outdated notions about what constitutes 'learning', are themselves far removed from a typical average child of this country, and are too inflexible to learn from village teachers and others who regularly interact with children. The system, at present, is highly monopolistic and rigid, and does not allow space for new ideas or creativity.

The elementary school curriculum has to be conceived as a package. At present the process of curriculum design is mechanical and fragmented. It begins with some 'experts' listing out a syllabus, followed by textbooks normally written by isolated authors, in a brief period of one or two months. As a formality these textbooks may get 'field-tested' by a different set of people from some academic institution, and finally these are thrust upon teachers to 'deliver' to their students. On the contrary, the entire process needs to be carried out as an integrated and participatory package.

The planning of the core syllabus, textbook preparation, its testing in a large sample of children and teachers, its reformulation, subsequent changes in teaching methodology and classroom practices, teacher training to motivate and orient teachers towards the curricular changes, and the design of the evaluation system—all these are necessarily linked components of any meaningful effort towards curriculum renewal.

#### *Inviting new field-based initiatives*

The Government of Madhya Pradesh has recently taken a laudable decision. Under the DPEP initiative it has decided that curricular change is to be conducted through intensive field trialling of the entire package of processes. Moreover, it has set up a Technical Resource Support Group to supervise, monitor and advise on technical matters related to curriculum renewal. Madhya Pradesh is also the first state to 'open its doors' to new initiatives in curriculum design. It invited a number of agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, with prior experience in primary education, to take up projects for trialling in different regions of the state.

It is hoped that this process of inviting different agencies, especially those working amongst rural communities, to contribute their experience and efforts towards curriculum improvement will continue beyond this initial exercise. It is also important to create for a where. Such agencies can meaningfully share their experiences and collectively work towards developing a good curriculum for a given region. It needs to be emphasised that developing a good curriculum is not a one-shot affair—it must incorporate inherent mechanisms which ensure that it receives continuous feedback from teachers and children and continues to evolve.

The Zilla Saksharata Samitis that have run good TICs

An innovative model of curriculum development for science in the middle (upper primary) school, on the lines suggested above, has been adopted by the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme, being run in Madhya Pradesh for over twenty years now. The programme currently runs in over 500 schools in 4 districts of the state and is spearheaded by the voluntary organisation Eklavya. The innovative curriculum has been designed collectively by academics from eminent science institutions, activists engaged in developmental work, and school teachers, and includes the entire package—the textbook, teacher training, an activity based 'discovery' learning methodology, mechanisms for regular follow-up and, most importantly, the congruent 'open book' examination system. A basic low-cost kit for experiments, integral to the teaching of the book, is provided, and intensive teacher training revolves around precisely how every chapter has to be transacted. On broadly similar lines, Eklavya has also developed two other curricula, one being run in primary schools and the other as the social studies programme in selected middle schools. One reason why it was possible to attract the best creative talents from across the country to contribute, in whatever possible manner, in this unique endeavor for curriculum development for rural schools in Madhya Pradesh was the 'openness' of the government, in the first place, in allowing a non-governmental organisation such freedom to innovate.

and have created a demand for education could be invited to work on specific programmes for universalisation of elementary education (DEE). They could also be strengthened academically to take on the task of developing suitable curricula both for primary schools and 'alternative schools', in collaboration with the DIETs.

### *Academic decentralisation*

For the curriculum to be conceived as a package and be made more relevant and closer to the child, the present 'centralised' model of academic and administrative implementation would require restructuring. As has been mentioned earlier, the present practice of assigning textbook writing, syllabus framing or even evaluation, piecemeal, to experts 'distant' from the majority of our population, has resulted in the inability of school education to address their life-concerns and rendered it irrelevant. This remote mode of centralised functioning naturally presents a distant perspective, so that even a concern displayed for the distant 'poor', 'rural' or 'tribal' person tends to assume a contrived and often patronising stance.

Clearly, this task of academic decentralisation is easier stated than done, and, to begin with, requires conviction and clarity of purpose. There have been earlier attempts at institutional 'decentralisation' in education, in the form of setting up new District Institutes of Educational Training (DIETs), but these have only been extensions of the SCERT, continuing to look up to it for detailed directives, and have never been envisaged as truly autonomous decentralised units in themselves.

The proposal for decentralisation of the curriculum somehow tends to raise a plethora of doubts and apprehensions. What does it mean? How can it be effected? How far 'down' can we take the process of decentralisation? Does it mean further decentralisation in terms of having separate

curricula for the urban and the rural, the tribal and the non-tribal? Is 'relevance' a limiting notion, effectively confining the 'less exposed' to the same small universe they currently occupy? How do we ensure 'equivalence', and what does equivalence really imply? What will happen to examinations, and would Boards need to be reconstituted? At this point it would suffice to say that a suitable model for academic decentralisation that takes us beyond the macro-level of the state to a more convenient unit offering greater proximity, is feasible and can indeed be worked out within the broad parameters of our given system. Moreover, such models are currently being used in many other countries.

A convenient unit to effect curricular decentralisation in our case would ultimately be the district. Ideally, materials and textbooks must be developed, designed and printed by each district, in conformity with a skeletal 'national core curriculum'. It must be the responsibility of the DIETs, in close collaboration with motivated teachers and other resource persons, to constructively weave in specific cultural themes, socio environmental conditions and life concerns of their own people.

At present, DIETs are academically inadequate, but a hands-on programme to upgrade their capacities and train personnel can be taken up in the coming years. Such capacity building of DIETs and facilitation of decentralisation should be the major future task of the state or national level Institutes. Selected DIETs can be strengthened first to make them serve as effective regional resource centres, in turn strengthening the other DIETs in their neighbourhood. This would imply radically restructuring the SCERT, the Textbook Corporation, the State Institute of Education, etc., not only academically, but also functionally,

managerially and financially as well. In fact, 'strengthening' of state-level institutes must certainly not mean mechanically adding more of the same, as is normally done –more posts, more buildings, more vehicles, more funds-leading to more centralisation of the same 'centralising' ethos.

It must be mentioned here that the decision of the National Literacy Mission in this regard was a landmark one in the history of Indian education. The NLM had allowed each district to prepare its own teaching-learning materials, in whichever language (or languages) they deemed fit, in order to cater to the specific needs of the majority of their learners. There is a restrictive clause in this allowance, where all such material is subject to clearance by a national-level committee. Though not all TLC districts have made use of this flexibility, there are many in different states which have formed district academic teams and developed very effective primers and post-literacy materials. It was important to repose faith in the people of a district that, with perhaps a little initial support from state or national resource persons, they can create their own teaching-learning materials, which could be far better than the ones made by distant experts. Moreover, the entire participatory process was crucial for all concerned—those who were creating the books felt greatly motivated, while the volunteers and learners felt a special sense of belonging when, for the first time, they saw in the books their own stories, puns and jokes, and histories of familiar ordinary people. 'Education for All' would require that this spirit of people's participation is carried over to the process of material preparation and curriculum development for primary schools.

#### *The textbook*

The existing textbooks are grossly unsuitable for children and are, to a great extent, responsible for

their inability to learn. Even a cursory look at these books, especially those meant for grade III and upwards, shows that the print size, the density of the text on each page, the lack of visuals, often the absence of any human agency, the poor quality of whatever illustrations there may be, and, most significantly, the language, are alienating for a young child. A detailed analysis would, of course, show that the content too is highly inappropriate and does not take into account the natural cognitive development of a child. It is crucial to recognise that the process of textbook preparation must be a part of curriculum development, and must be bound by rigorous trialling in the field. Mechanisms for eliciting critical and constructive feedback from children and teachers would have to be worked out collaboratively by teachers and resource persons.

#### *Evaluation*

An integral and often the most crucial part of curriculum renewal is to change the system of examinations. However innovative the teaching-learning materials and methodology might be, they tend to become ineffective if the pattern of evaluation of children's achievement is not changed in consonance with the child centered philosophy. If the focus of assessment continues to be on recall and testing of memorised information reproduced in the formalised 'un-childlike' language of the textbook, or mechanically using predetermined algorithms only to produce 'correct' answers, then very little headway is possible in the desired direction. Child-friendly and non-threatening methods of evaluating children's diverse creative talents and critical abilities would have to be evolved. Conscious promotion of original responses, in the children's own style and language, would show that there is a 'premium' on

personal understanding. Designing tests which incorporate solving puzzles, playing a game, expressing visually through drawings, completing a story, performing a directed activity or simple experiment, etc., can make even an examination an enjoyable experience. Instituting 'open book' examinations at all levels can be a starting point, since the very format compels a change in the nature of the questions posed. Practical and simple systems of continuous evaluation on similar patterns would also be required.

A deeper problem is related to the evaluation of knowledge itself, and what constitutes 'knowledge' worth evaluating. For instance, when quizzed in concrete, familiar terms about what frogs' eggs look like and where one can look for them, or about the minute differences between a cicada and a cricket, or about how a field is actually prepared before sowing a particular crop and the various implements used, the rural child would be far more knowledgeable, having keenly observed and lived closer to the natural world. Similarly, the tribal child might learn from the treasure of empirical knowledge painstakingly accumulated by her community, details about metal casting, identification of medicinal herbs, or even about the much talked-of 'biodiversity' of her forests-all of which scientists today continue to marvel at, but which receives no legitimacy from school, in terms of being valuable or 'assessable' in any way.

### *The Teacher*

The 'sutradhaar' or protagonist of the entire educational programme is the teacher, who, ironically, happens to be the least important in terms of having a voice in decision-making. The rural primary school teacher occupies the most unenviable position in the highly hierarchical administrative structure, and

is normally expected to bear the burden of the crucial task of 'nation-building' in complete isolation, with hardly any support. She or he also serves as convenient scapegoat-all fingers get pointed at the teacher for all failures of the system. In addition, teaching seems to be only one of the many jobs of the teacher-often the least important as far as the administration is concerned. From the census to elections, from family planning programmes to the photo identity card, the teacher seems to be the sole multipurpose village functionary, expected to perform whatever function the government finds necessary at any given time. This problem becomes acute in the case of village schools which have only a single teacher, or at most two teachers-and almost 70 per cent of the primary schools in Madhya Pradesh fall under in this category. For days at a stretch the school may remain closed because the teacher has been called for some other 'duty', and this tends to further demotivate the children in these areas, who need much more regular attention and extra time.

### *Teacher motivation*

Lack of teacher motivation is a major hurdle in the achievement of desired goals. However, simple interventions which have focused on ensuring an 'empathetic environment' for teachers have found that they do respond favourably and are willing to work much beyond expectation. To begin with, it might take very little to keep the morale of the teacher high-smooth and timely payments of salary, prompt reimbursement of their (traveling or daily allowances (which' they often do not receive for years together), some autonomy in being able to purchase essential materials for teaching, a rational transfer policy which allows them to function unhindered and close to their homes, and,

most importantly, priority accorded to their teaching work by the local administrative officials.

The UNICEF-assisted Teacher Empowerment Project called 'Shikshak Samakhya' is a significant step in this direction. It has served as an initial mobilisation of teachers to enhance their self-esteem and motivation. Further sustained interactions on a planned long-term basis would be required to consolidate the gains from these efforts. The programme has also sought to improve the appearance of schools, to transform them into Bal Mitra Shalas.

The Government of Madhya Pradesh has announced a transfer policy based on teachers' options and domicile, but we have to see how effectively it will be implemented. Transfers have normally been the cause of much displacement and resentment (besides the 'business' interests they have served), and according to a recent research study, they have resulted in low job satisfaction, low motivation and low performance (Jangira et al, 1994).

Regular meetings at the block level, to discuss academic as well as administrative matters, have been found to serve an important function in relieving teachers of their sense of isolation, also allowing them to share with one another the problems they face in teaching, or the improvisations and innovations they may have tried. Persons from amongst them can be trained to conduct these meetings and the Block Educational Officer (BEO) must play a supportive role. It has been seen that an authoritarian hierarchical environment stifles teachers; it reduces their self-respect and brings early frustration. Therefore, all possible measures need to be taken to alleviate this burden. More autonomy and some avenues for leadership will have to be sought for teachers if we want to keep up their motivation.

#### *Performance-related incentives*

There are few performance-related rewards and incentives for teachers. There is no appropriate 'dignified' procedure for identifying and selecting good teachers for such rewards. The system of awards at present compels them to 'plead their own case'-to prepare a file of their own achievements, often with photographs or other evidence, and to collect recommendations and congratulatory 'certificates' from politicians or other eminent persons-a process which many find to be cumbersome, expensive and demeaning.

The panchayats and village education committees could be asked to nominate teachers for 'book awards' or even fellowships, which allow them to spend a few weeks with an educationist, at an educational institution or with a voluntary organisation working in a different state. There could also be inter-state teacher exchange camps, where each local teacher hosts a guest teacher from another state, and during the day they collectively teach one another games, activities and innovative classroom practices. Being invited by another state of the country is a great incentive for teachers, giving them a chance to see how others like them are doing in different situations. Trying to make sense of another language only adds to the excitement of being in a foreign land! In any case, teachers who are motivated must periodically be offered 'sammaan' or 'ceremonial respect' by the panchayats in order to make them more visible to the entire community.

#### *Career advancement*

A suitable promotion policy and opportunities for career advancement for primary school teachers need to be worked out. The present criteria for promotion depend on qualifications and years of

service with no consideration of the teacher's performance. More importantly, a policy with a channel for career advancement needs to be formulated so that good primary teachers can become master trainers, Block Education Officers, members of DIET faculties, and also join the SCERT or the Directorate of Education.

### *Representation and recruitment*

Madhya Pradesh has a large cadre of over 1,60,000 primary school teachers, of whom about 35,000 are women (Fifth All India Educational Survey 1991). However, this figure masks the alarmingly disproportionate representation of women in the service. A disaggregated view shows us that of the bulk of the 1,20,000 teachers in rural schools, women happen to constitute less than 10 per cent and the aggregate figure is pushed up only by the higher percentage (50 per cent) in Urban areas. To rectify this, the government has recently announced a recruitment policy reserving 30 per cent of the positions for women teachers. Moreover, there are very few women in the educational administration at the block and district levels and special efforts are needed to identify and train potential women for these positions.

Further disaggregation reveals that of the 1,20,000 rural primary school teachers, only 17,000 and 23,000 belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, respectively, while barely 7 per cent of them are women. Special steps must be taken soon to correct this imbalance; reservations need to be accompanied by special integrated courses to prepare women teachers in tribal areas, akin to those run by the Mahila Shikshan Kendras in some other states.

A pupil-teacher ratio of 40: 1 is the accepted norm for deployment of teachers in primary schools. However, in backward areas where the number

of children enrolled is low, most schools invariably end up having only a single or at most two teachers to teach all five grades. The government needs to review this policy and formulate a differential approach for the provision of teachers in such areas, especially in the interest of disadvantaged children.

Where there is an acute shortage of teachers there should also be provision for them to select and appoint on an ad-hoc basis a 'sahyogi' or 'sahyogini'-a youth from the same village-to assist them in classroom management. These could be from amongst the trained literacy volunteers of the village.

### *Training and continuous education*

A large segment (roughly 40 per cent) of teachers in rural schools of Madhya Pradesh are untrained, and there are no comprehensive policies to ensure good in-service training for them. As has been mentioned earlier in relation to the 'shiksha karmi', a good intensive training programme can make a significant difference to the performance of a teacher and to learners' achievement. Much needs to be done to improve the quality of our pre-service and in-service trainings. In brief, the DIETs have not been appropriately staffed to provide academic guidance, and do not function autonomously, as had been originally envisaged. There are no faculty members with any experience of teaching at the primary level. Moreover, in-service training programmes are few, generally uninspiring, and take the form of a series of lectures (or occasional demonstrations) delivered in a formal 'top down' fashion. Teachers are rarely encouraged to participate in stimulating discussions conducted democratically; they are not involved in creating materials and activities; and they are not actively guided in evolving strategies that can

transform their interactions with children to usher in a perceptible change in their classrooms.

In the DPEP districts, there is a plan to decentralise training through the Block Resource Centres (BRC) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRC). Clearly, this requires careful identification and selection of suitable personnel, and there is a need to insulate local recruitments from undue political pressures.

There are plans to form a competent state resource group of resource persons and master trainers, from amongst the DIET faculties as well as selected school teachers, which would provide academic leadership in a proposed statewide programme of teacher training throughout the year. The Regional Institute of Education, Eklavya and SCERT are together engaged in this massive endeavor, sponsored by the RGSM. It is hoped that as a result of this programme all teachers will be reached through cluster-level workshops, and trained to adopt learner-centered teaching practices that can address the creative abilities of 'all' children, to ensure that meaningful learning does take place.

The Kerala study on 'School Quality and Student Learning' (Varghese 1994) provides some interesting insights and raises important questions about the nature of teacher training. It shows that even in that exemplary state which has achieved almost universal enrolment where almost all schools have buildings and teachers who attend regularly, where multi-grade teaching is almost non-existent, and where more than half the primary school teachers are women-the level of learning achievement of children drops sharply in class III, and is very poor by the time they complete primary school. The study suggests that teachers are not qualified and trained to teach properly, and that "it is their resistance to change the mode of teaching which is one of the major problems in the Kerala situation", The content of

in-service training is weak and outdated, and teachers feel that these programmes do not equip them to do their job satisfactorily.

In addition to restructuring regular in-service programmes, we need to think of other flexible arrangements for continuous teacher training and education. Mobile teacher-educators have proved to be effective in some countries, especially to serve schools in remote or tribal areas, whereby a person stays in a village or cluster for a few weeks and conducts regular training sessions, while also guiding teachers in their own schools. This would especially benefit women teachers who are unable to leave their homes to attend trainings organised at the district level.

With regard to women teachers it must be stressed that suitable arrangements for temporary crèches for their infants must be made at every residential training course or workshop, and special care taken to ensure their regular participation.

The system of school inspection has proved to be quite ineffective, especially in providing academic guidance, and has at times even added to the teachers' burden of a 'harassing' hierarchy. It will be worthwhile to consider a policy to convert this large cadre of school inspectors into 'academic counselors', who are trained to provide essential support, especially to those isolated teachers serving in single or two-teacher schools.

The 'government order' is probably the only written material 'that ever reaches a primary school teacher. Important policy decisions and documents about primary education are not disseminated to those who are the protagonists of the system, It is essential for the DIETs to bring out district-level newsletters and teachers' bulletins with the participation of the teachers themselves.

### ***The School***

The present picture of a typical school is that of a gloomy, poorly lit room, crammed with children of



all five grades huddled together, squatting on the bare uneven floor, in passive postures of 'pin-drop' silence. The image is far from attractive—certainly not fit for a child—and the reality is often still harsher.

Madhya Pradesh has over 70,000 primary schools, and 76.5 percent of these are run by the government, through the School Education Department and the Tribal Welfare Department, which runs schools mostly in tribal areas. While 13 percent are nominally under the management of local bodies (through the teachers are government employees), 10 per cent are run by private bodies, some financially aided by the government.

According to available statistics, roughly half the schools are situated in non-pucca structures, and about half the schools (or sections therein) are without a blackboard. In fact, Madhya Pradesh ranks among the lowest in terms of provision of blackboards and other ancillary facilities in primary schools. Moreover, these aggregate figures tend to mask the real situation in a number of places. A disaggregated view of different districts having schools with pucca buildings, for instance, shows that in Bastar there are a mere 2 per cent, in Sidhi only 11 per cent, in Raigarh 15 per cent, in Shahdol only 27 percent and in Surguja 28 per cent (Fifth and Sixth Education Surveys). Similarly, the situation of schools coping without such basic facilities as a blackboard, chalk, or even drinking water, is alarming when viewed in a disaggregated fashion. One can only wonder how children and teachers in Daria rural schools with only 16 per cent of the sections having a usable blackboard, or in Bind district with only 22 per cent. These are in sharp contrast to Indore district, endowed with 88 per cent pucca schools having 87 per cent sections with usable blackboards, or Gwalior and Jhabua districts with 84 per cent and 79 per cent pucca buildings, respectively.

Operation Blackboard was meant to overcome such gross deficiencies in schools and to provide some basic minimum facilities. However, its centralised mode of implementation had a limited chance of success, and even when some materials managed to reach the schools, teachers failed to make use of them for lack of proper training, storage space, and their suitable integration with the curriculum. With the present call for decentralisation and increased accountability of the local administration, through village education committees and panchayats, it might become possible to ensure that funds meant to change the dismal shape of schools are indeed appropriately utilised. An initiative taken by Surguja district, for instance, has shown that the basic appearance of schools can be improved and brightened up. The 'School Chalo Abhiyan', initiated by the Shiksha Mission through the panchayats to increase enrolment, would need to also focus on transforming the present shape of schools and enlist as much community support as possible.

The uninviting image of the school and poor infrastructural facilities combine with the low demand for education in less developed rural areas, and act as likely disincentives for children there. The least we could do is to ensure a reasonably pleasant and comfortable place for the child, a structure that is capable of sustaining a 'learning environment'.

#### *A learning environment*

'A school with a learning environment would have to offer more than just the basic facilities—a teacher for every grade, classroom space, chalk, blackboards, desks to sit on, drinking water, coils, etc. It must provide teachers trained to actively engage children, sufficient space for them to perform such learning activities, and some basic

reaching-learning materials, such as paper, colours, card sheets, children's maps, a simple science kit, etc. In addition, it is necessary to have a small library of children's books, which are used as essential complementary materials for language learning, along with appropriate storage facilities.

#### *A pre-school*

An attached pre-school or 'play school', provided free of cost, must take care of the younger siblings of school going children, especially girls, and provide them with a stimulating environment essential for early learning. It has been seen that pre-school education, especially for disadvantaged children, not only compensates for the lack of such opportunities at home, but also reduces the chances of their dropping out of school early. However, the pre-school should be meant for promoting the child's development through play, stories and other creative activities and not for any 'formal' teaching, as is increasingly being done in private nursery schools.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) has taken such an initiative under the scheme to open Shishu Shiksha Kendras.

#### *The mid-day meal*

It has been seen that schools covered by the mid-day meal (MOM) programmes in different states have had higher enrolments as well as better nutritional status among children. Tamil Nadu has run an exemplary noon meal scheme, providing hot cooked food to all 74 lakh children studying in classes I-X, at a total cost of about Rs. 185 crores. It has used an extensive network of functionaries and organisation at over 68,000 noon meal centres. It is now recognized that providing essential nutritional support to education is not only

important to improve the health status of children in school but is a major incentive in the context of universalisation of education. The Report of the Committee on Mid-Day Meals (1995), set up in April to operationalise the decision of the Government of India to extend the scheme to cover all states, has made very useful recommendations. It has suggested that though the hot meal option would be the most satisfying, states could opt for either pre-cooked meals or for provision of food grains to each child with minimum 80 per cent attendance in school. It has also recommended that blocks under the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and having low female literacy could be chosen initially to cover children in primary schools, though the programme should ultimately aim to cover all children in elementary schools (classes I-VIII).

From October 2, 1995, the Government of Madhya Pradesh will scheme in 297 EAS blocks, though only in 174 tribal blocks will there be provision of hot cooked meals. Since cooking of food requires an additional input (GOI is providing only the food grains), the state has decided to cover the cost of about Rs. 25 crores for only the tribal blocks; providing cooked food to all 297 EAS blocks would have required an input of at least Rs. 40 crores. While it is true that arranging to provide hot cooked meals is a more taxing task and would require an extensive and effective mechanism, it is recommended that the scheme of cooked meals be introduced in all 297 EAS blocks this year, and soon expanded to cover all 479 blocks of the state.

#### *On monitoring and management*

Statistics on schools and facilities available therein are cited in this section, more to show relative disparities than to present complete indicators of the real situation. Indeed, questions are often raised about the degree of 'reliability' of the vast amount

of data routinely generated around educational statistics. Reliability of data assumes special significance in the context of this Report, since it is an effort aimed at an honest understanding of the problems inherent in the present practices of data collection and a sincere attempt to suggest alternative measures. Clearly, detailed disaggregated data which reliably reflect reality in every pocket of this large state would go a long way in ensuring more realistic and effective planning.

Supervision and monitoring of government schools is done entirely by the Assistant District Inspector of Schools (ADIS), who is normally assigned between 80-100 schools in a specified area. The Inspector is expected to regularly visit each school, inspect records, assess the quality of the teaching-learning process, provide necessary guidance to the school, and recommend any action to be taken by the higher authorities. However, remote village schools requiring greater attention are rarely visited by any official. In addition, in tribal areas there is a dual problem owing to the divided responsibility of the Tribal Welfare Department and the Education Department-while maintenance of schools and recruitment of teachers is looked after by the former, academic supervision and monitoring comes under the latter. According to the study done by Govinda and Varghese(1993), “the existing inspectorial arrangements for monitoring school quality of government schools is unable to meet the burgeoning demands of the system. The resources available for this purpose are not commensurate with the work involved. Further, external monitoring from long distances, as it happens with the Departmental Inspection system, can hardly create the necessary environment that can ensure the daily functioning of schools in an efficient manner.” It has also been pointed out that the nature of the monitoring mechanisms make a large difference to the functional efficiency of the two sectors-the government and the private.

The network of about 1,500 school inspectors and Block Educational Officers (BEO) spanning the entire state are academically inadequate to perform the crucial task of monitoring the quality of education. While on the one hand there is an urgent need to academically orient and transform inspectors into ‘counselors’, there is also now a need to reorient BEOs to perform professional managerial roles in close collaboration with the panchayats. For instance, the proposed State Institute for Educational Management and Training (SIEMT) could take up the task of training BEOs in the areas of micro-planning, collation and analysis of educational data at the block level, etc., so that they can in turn provide professional support to the panchayats in their endeavor towards Education for All. This could also help in generating more personal involvement in the process and create more academic interest in educational data, thus ensuring greater reliability.

### *The Community*

The education system has failed to perform satisfactorily because mechanisms of feedback, supervision and monitoring have either not existed or have proved ineffective. One of the largest bodies of government functionaries and structures, it has continued to ingest substantial inputs with very poor output and hardly any public accountability. In fact, the community has remained at the peripheral, receiving end, somehow trying to cope with the burden of failure this system continues to thrust upon it. If children find studies difficult or school uninteresting, if they drop Out, fail, play truant, or resort to ‘unfair’ means in examinations, it is always they and their parents who are to blame, with no questions asked of the system. To effect a change in the role of the

community is a complex but essential task, especially in the context of EFA.

To make village education committees functional and to place control in the hands of panchayats would be the first crucial step. This must necessarily be followed by extensive mobilisation, through campaigns, conventions, public meetings, media coverage, jathas, etc. For the kind of 'Education for All' we envisage. The community must first have faith in its own learning capabilities, believe that it is the responsibility of the system to impart an enabling education, have faith that the system will now positively address 'all' its children, that the village school can acquire a different look to sustain a learning environment, and, finally, that it must necessarily exercise control over all this.

### *Tribal communities*

The question of tribal education assumes special importance in Madhya Pradesh since almost one-fourth of the population is constituted of Scheduled Tribes (over 1.5 crores out of a total of 6.6 crores, according to the 1991 Census). Apart from the inevitable nexus between the existing low demand for education, low infrastructural facilities (including inadequate teachers) in schools, and disadvantaged family backgrounds, another factor which begs attention is the alienating nature of the education imparted to them.

A number of studies have pointed out that the reasons for this alienation can be traced to the following.

- The language of the teacher and the textbook is very different from (and insensitive to) the children's spoken language.
  - The curriculum does not address their social and cultural values and may even portray them as 'oddities'.
  - The majority of non-tribal teachers have biased and unsympathetic attitudes, which also reflects their low expectations of tribal children and can negatively influence children's performance.
- The special DPEP study in Madhya Pradesh has recommended that local tribal teachers should be appointed in these areas, and that the curriculum needs to be redesigned to make it attractive for tribal children in the context of their own culture while also linking it to their economic activities. This latter can only be strongly reiterated, though it needs to be pointed out that the process of developing a suitable curriculum necessarily requires a sensitive and decentralised approach.
- The present practice of allowing the Tribal Welfare Department to run schools in tribal areas needs to be reviewed. Since this department has many other tasks and schemes to implement, it is possible that education gets a low priority. In addition, the 'welfare' approach to education is not responsive to the local and community requirements and responses. The division of responsibilities between the two departments running government schools in tribal areas, in terms of academic and administrative functions, often creates further problems.
- The issue of language is most crucial and also quite complicated. While language is central to the tribal identity and most communities would want to preserve it as an integral part of their culture, almost as a measure of their own survival, they are also acutely aware of the 'market' value of the dominant language. Moreover, tribals who regularly interact with non-tribals are often bilingual. Therefore, it is proposed that education must begin with the mother tongue, in this case the specific tribal dialect, and the Devanagari script (or the prevalent script of that region) be used to write what the child already knows as a spoken language. The child can continue to learn bilingually and gradually, perhaps by the end of the

second year, switch to Hindi (or the dominant regional language). However, it must be noted that the present form of sanskritised Hindi taught to even non-tribal children is alien from the familiar form used in everyday communication, and seriously inhibits their learning capabilities.

*Continuing education for the community: an expanded vision*

The World Declaration on Education for All has laid stress on providing educational opportunities designed to meet the basic learning needs of every citizen-child, youth and adult. It needs more than are-commitment to basic education as it now exists, “an ‘expanded vision’ that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems, while building on the best in current practices” (Article 2; emphasis as in the original).

As long as we have a limited notion of ‘Education for All’ as confined only to enrolling children into schools, and of ‘mass adult education’ as passively receiving patronising messages from above, it would be impossible to move towards a ‘learning’ environment in society. We require a truly expanded vision, to allow ourselves to dream of all possible scenarios and then proceed to shape them into realisable plans.

For various reasons related to urban life-patterns, the TLCs in urban areas have had limited success. Will it be possible for us to ensure that every factory or industrial institution runs its own adult schools to continuously provide opportunities for its workers or employees to be able to upgrade their educational skills) Or can we have city centres which run short popular courses on art appreciation, architecture or even astronomy? In Bhopal, for instance, there are institutions with tremendous infrastructural capacity that remains

unutilised after office hours. Why can we not make use of these to run popular educational and enrichment courses? In rural areas, can we not have creatively designed courses closely related to people’s occupations, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fish farming, leather tanning, etc.? These courses will have to go beyond the simplistic message-driven ‘dos and don’ts’ to engage in critical thinking about ‘how and why’, and also suggest how better ‘appropriate technologies’ could improve production processes. A beginning in this direction could be made by the Technology Missions of the state.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

Clearly, the task is immense and complex, and requires some bold initiatives to reshape the existing system of education. This chapter of the MPHDR has critically looked at some broad areas and suggested possible measures. A few priority interventions are either reiterated or specially highlighted in this concluding section.

- Textbooks should be made free for all children in primary schools, and for girls up to class VIII. All girls up to class VIII must be provided free uniforms.
- School timings must be fixed to suit the majority of children of a locality, especially girls, and the weekly holiday may be rescheduled according to the weekly marker. The zilla panchayats have recently been asked to determine school timings.
- A school health scheme needs to be implemented, which could innovatively try to involve older children to conduct an annual health check-up for the school. The Arunima scheme needs to be reviewed and reactivated,

- The mid-day meal scheme providing cooked meals to all children in primary schools must be introduced in all blocks of the state.
- Schools in tribal and other remote rural areas must receive priority attention in terms of basic infrastructural facilities, It is crucial that teacher deployment in such schools must follow a different approach, not confined to the simple ratio of one teacher to forty students.
- The educational administration must accord top priority to teaching among the various functions expected of a teacher.
- Performance-related criteria for promotion of primary teachers need to be worked out; a channel for career advancement must allow motivated teachers to get selected as head-teachers, BEOs, DIET faculty, SCERT faculty, etc
- A policy needs to be formulated to review the system of school inspection and to convert inspectors or ADIS's into a cadre of 'academic counselors'.
- Careful selection of shiksha karmis' followed by intensive training is essential, and there must be ways to ensure that at least 30 per cent of them are women. Suitable service rules need to be drafted soon.
- Steps should be taken to specially identify, train and ensure that a larger number of women are paced in local educational administrative positions, as BEOs, coordinators of CRCs and BRCs, head-teachers, etc.
- The government must continue to invite more field based initiatives for decentralised curriculum development, including preparation of teaching-learning materials.
- A State Committee for Examination Reform, comprising national resource persons engaged in designing innovative evaluation systems, must be constituted to review the present system of examinations at all levels, and to suggest changes in consonance with an effective pupil-centered philosophy.
- Restructuring and genuine decentralisation of state level institutes, such as the SCERT, the TBC and the SIE, needs to be taken up soon.
- Community control of primary schools and increased accountability of the system must be actively promoted.
- Concerted efforts are required to avoid bureaucratization of TLCs and to ensure the participatory character of the programme through genuine people's committees.
- Sustained post-literacy programmes, such as establishing rural libraries, starring vocation-linked adult education courses, ere, need to be undertaken.
- Most importantly, the government will have to ensure higher allocation of budgeted funds for elementary education, especially the non-salary component, to be able to provide a better quality of education for all.

