



RIGHT TO EDUCATION, A LONG WAY TO GO!



Expert Panel in the inaugural session of the National RTE stocktaking in New Delhi on 3rd April, 2013

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came into force three years back on 1st April 2010. It introduced hope—hope that some of the changes necessary in the education system would finally happen. The country would finally do something about the huge shortages of teachers, our tendency to hire untrained “teachers” on less than the minimum wage, the absence of adequate classrooms and toilets for girls, the absence of meaningful structures and spaces for community participation. Above all, the education budget would sufficiently increase to ensure resources are available in order for all this to happen. It was unfortunate that few of these hopes have been fulfilled.

Three years later, some changes have indeed happened. The government says that 7 lakh additional teachers,

5 lakh toilets and 6.88 lakh additional classrooms have been sanctioned under SSA. However, 12 lakh teacher posts remain vacant, two children in three study in schools that exceeds the minimum norm of one teacher for thirty students and only 8% schools are RTE compliant in terms of infrastructure and teacher availability- the most tangible of indicators. The Centre and the States have spent the last three years blaming each other for the lack of progress instead of taking the steps that were needed to ensure it. Both parties have failed to live up to the hopes of India’s young citizens.

A process of stocktaking of the status of implementation of the Act was undertaken on 3rd April 2013 with delegates from over 20 States converging together under the umbrella of the RTE Forum. This was

preceded by a year long process of ascertaining the reality on the ground. This was preceded and followed by state level stocktakings in Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Karnataka and Odisha in the months of March and April, looking at the specific state level issues. Lot of the issues that were flagged nationally, also came up in the states. The entire process tapped into the collective strength of the Forum’s 10,000 NGOs. What emerged is a call for the government to develop a clear roadmap for the Act’s implementation. Such a roadmap would need to look at the following five issues:

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The Centre and the States have spent the last three years blaming each other for the lack of progress instead of taking the steps that were needed to ensure it. Both parties have failed to live up to the hopes of India’s young citizens.

1. Address the inadequate budget for implementation

If schools have to be built, teachers hired or infrastructure to be put into plus, money is needed. However, the budget allotted for RTE implementation is about half of what was calculated by the government as being essential for the Act's implementation. While the education budget has indeed increased, its far inadequate considering the extent of the problem. Thus, if 12 lakh teachers are needed, their salaries need to be budgeted for. If infrastructure has to be enhanced, money has to be found for it. Instead, there has been a decline in the budget for education as share of GDP from 3.6% in 2009-10 to 3.3% in 2012-13. Every government education policy and commission since the late 1960s has asked for 6% of GDP for education. While an education cess is being collected, this has been substitution, not addition to the existing education budgetary commitments. 60.3% of the education budget now coming from the cess. The neglect of the issues of education finance is also reflected in the fact that only 61% of the SSA budget has been spent. The government needs to put in place the accounts staff and streamline its financial systems to ensure that the funds released are spent. And if anyone says that India cannot afford to make this investment, if India can afford to grant a tax write-off of Rs.61,035 crore during 2012-13 to the gold and diamonds industry this year, surely it could allot more than the 27,258 crore it allotted for RTE/SSA in this year's budget.

2. Overhaul of the education system

The education system is currently functioning in a mode that can be described as "business as usual." There should be a fundamentally different way one implements a national legislation (RTE) compared to how one implements a scheme (SSA). The necessary change of mind-set has not really happened. There is a need for an overhaul of the administrative systems. As a start—the structures of the SSA and the State Education departments—that have often remained fairly parallel to each

other—need to converge. At the same time, if the recommendations of RTE need to be rolled out on the ground, the appropriate notifications and guidelines need to be thought through, notified and the necessary actions operationalized to address the known barriers of implementation. A critical concern related to the education system is the need for the creation of permanent teacher cadres and moving away from hiring teachers on contract.

3. Lack of mechanism for Grievance Redressal

There is a clear absence of accountability for delivery whereby no one is clearly responsible to ensure that commitments made are fulfilled. In the meantime, there is a massive number of issues on the ground, but no mechanism for parents' grievances to be redressed. Such a process can provide a framework for a bottom up process of applying pressure on the State to fulfill its commitments. This is unfortunately missing. The Right to Education Act provides for the formation of the State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (or transitional bodies called REPAs) to act as grievance redress bodies. However, 7 States still lack either and 4 have only REPAs. Furthermore, where they exist they often lack adequate resources to play the role expected. As a result, few complaints are being filed and the rate of their redress has been slow. Lastly, there is no clear mechanism whereby complaints flow from the school/village to the National and State levels.

4. Strengthen structures and processes for bottom up planning, monitoring and influencing

While the RTE Act provides for bottom up planning processes by parents and communities—this is not well operationalized. The supply of funds, infrastructure and facilities does not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. A one size fits all model of SSA may not necessarily address the diversity of concerns. At the same time, there is little thought to the processes of monitoring and support

to the system. Barely half the schools in India have received visits from school inspectors last year. The Cluster and Block resource centres that are expected to provide academic support to teachers are not functioning as expected. Only half the schools have head teachers that are permanent. While School Management Committees (bodies of parents formed under RTE Act) have been formed, they are not functioning as expected. What this translates into is a weak oversight over the functioning of schools and weak systems for support to teachers. These structures need to be strengthened.

5. A strategy to address educational inequality and social exclusion

Dalit, Muslim and tribal children are the most likely to be out of school and child labour remains a tragic reality. This calls for systematic action to address the social, economic and cultural barriers that deprive children from the marginalized communities and of the poor from the educational opportunities that they deserve. The 12th Five Year Plan identifies some of the steps that, if taken, could lead to improved quality of learning for these communities, however, steps would need to be taken to ensure that these are actually implemented with the sense of urgency that the issue deserves.

In conclusion, how can all this happen? What is needed is a bottom up process of change. If India has 13 lakh elementary schools and each school has a school management committee with at least 10 parents, imagine what a potential force for change 130 lakhs parents committed and empowered to the education of their children can make? At the same time, the government finally has to take charge and fix its own schools. The Prime Minister needs to intervene to fix the issues at hand—call the Chief Ministers of the States, convene the National Development Council and try to get them to agree on a roadmap so all this is addressed. India has waited long enough. We were promised education for all by 1960 at the time of the drafting of the Constitution. Surely it is time that India lived up to its promise.

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PRAVAH IN-‘TURN’-SHIPS—A JOURNEY FROM SELF TO SOCIETY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

It is not every day that you find an internship where the focus is as much on the intern’s personal growth and learning as on the organization’s agenda and need. But then Pravah’s SMILE (Students Mobilization Initiative for Learning through Exposure) In-turn-ship is not just like any other internship. The 4–6 week experience promises a journey from self to society and therefore an opportunity to transform one’s self while transforming the world. Then there are of course the change stories that come at the end of it.

In his first encounter with SMILE, Asrarul Haque Jeelani was honest enough to confess that one thing that bothered him about himself was, ‘I see problems in the world but I can’t do anything about them’. Just three months later when he is asked to define himself, he says, ‘I feel I can do something in life. I am constantly trying to build my abilities, prove myself so I can go back to my village and do something for it’.

Asrarul came to Delhi from Aligarh Muslim University two years ago to pursue bachelors in social work at Jamia Milia Islamia. Pressed for finances and a physical challenge (one of his legs is afflicted with polio), Asrarul had to face some initial challenges adjusting to a new college but eventually he became involved in the field. As he learned more about the field, his interest in education as a development strategy grew.

It was in November 2011 when the holidays were approaching, that Asrarul wanted to intern with a NGO working in education. Just then one of his friends attended ‘Inward Bound’ in his college and told Asrarul about Pravah. Asrarul then saw the poster for SMILE In-turn-ship in his college; he called and the process of in-turning began.

During his second interaction with his Pravah mentor, Asrarul shared how uncomfortable he felt talking to girls. Coming from a conservative family, Asrarul had little interaction with girls in his village and he continued to stay away from girls in college. After attending the orientation camp in Delhi with two other fellows, Asrarul left for his internship. He spent the next one month in Samavesh, an organization in Devas district in Madhya Pradesh that was set up in 2003 to work in the areas of development and governance. He describes the internship as a turning point in his life. Out of the many learnings and realizations that came in one month’s time, one that touched him the most was when he walked on the streets with his fellow interns; he realized the problems that girls go through in public spaces in society. Apart from exposure to the field of education and a new culture, it was the exposure of working with a girl that pushed Asrarul out of his comfort zone. He learned a lot about girls in general, appropriate behaviour with girls and most importantly he learned to be comfortable working with girls.

After coming back from the internship, Asrarul expressed a desire to take on the journey of a Youth Facilitator. While charting out his YF journey, Shraddha (the Pravah facilitator) connected his interest in education, his ideas around volunteering for the cause and SMILE’s community action volunteering programme. What came out of this churning and a lot of perseverance was the ABC campaign. The campaign is an initiative to teach young canteen workers and children of construction workers in college.

Of course there were challenges; it is difficult to coordinate with volunteers with varying degrees of motivation and to deal with absentee students but, ‘I have learned to be patient...now I don’t get hassled if I don’t see a volunteer 10 minutes before class timing, I keep my cool,’ says Asrarul. He has also learned to motivate



More confident Asrarul after the internship

volunteers, to coordinate with them and to manage a campaign. Recently, he rewarded some of his volunteers with titles. He has also understood that it is important to collaborate with people/institutions and build a strong support system for an initiative; trying to do everything independently is not smart.

After the SMILE In-turn-ship, Asrarul participated in a youth adda on understanding personality types and in Get Real-deep self awareness workshop. He feels that all these processes have helped him understand himself better. ‘Now I feel confident. I have learned to inspire people, not just from the ABC campaign but also to come for SMILE programme,’ says he. Asrarul is like the pied piper, in three months at least 10 of his friends have participated in workshops/exposures. After listening to his experience, 10 of his friends wish to go for internship in summers.

Asrarul now wants to make the ABC campaign a sustainable project at Jamia. ‘As of now, we are only working in one construction site; I wish to expand it to the remaining two,’ he says. He also wants to enhance the Jamia-Pravah partnership so that more students can learn and grow with SMILE. He feels thrilled by developmental initiatives and looks forward to mobilizing support during natural disasters. Lastly, he wants to do something for his own village. ‘Hardly any girl studies beyond 10th, I want to educate people in my village. I am trying to gain some good experience, do something concrete here to gain the trust of my village folks and then I will work in my village,’ he says.

Asrarul’s previous feelings of not being able to do anything himself to bring about change has completely transformed into a new feeling of empowerment and “refl-action” (reflection + action).

Asrarul is just one among many young people who have undertaken such powerful transformational journeys. None of these SMILE journeys would have been possible without Oxfam India. Oxfam India has been supporting Pravah’s initiative to engage young people on a transformative journey from ‘Self to Society’ since 2009. With continued support from Oxfam India and Misereor, Pravah is looking to send 100 young people on SMILE In-turn-ships this summer.

Neha Buch, CEO, Pravah

Pravah is a non-government organization based in New Delhi. Pravah has been working with young people to build leadership for social change and inspiring active citizenship.

DONOR SPEAKS

KIRAN SALI

Assistant, Technical Department
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I have been associated with Oxfam India for the past few years. I support the organization as it is making a great effort to bring smiles to the poor children in India. I want to involve myself further with its work.

Oxfam India is doing noble work by helping those who are deprived. I strongly recommend contributions to Oxfam India's work towards social empowerment of all people. I am happy that Oxfam India has commenced their operations in Indore also. I wish all the very best to everyone in the Oxfam India fraternity.

DR DEEPAK CHOUHAN

MBBS, MD
Director, Shri Nidaan Hospital
Jaipur



I have been associated with Oxfam India for the past few years. I am really impressed with Oxfam India's work in the area of girl-child education, humanitarian issues and their other activities for the underprivileged.

Oxfam India has actually shown the way in not just creating social awareness but also working extensively towards addressing the issue at the grassroots level.

I am proud to be associated with Oxfam India and consider it my privilege to be able to contribute in my own small way to its priceless endeavour of lighting up so many lives.



YES, I WANT TO MAKE A CHANGE TODAY!



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया
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India

Enclosed is my first donation of

Rs. 6000/- towards providing learning material for 5 children.

Rs. 4000/- towards empowerment of 5 women belonging to poor and marginalised communities and to ensure a violence free lives for them.

Rs. 3000/- to provide emergency survival material and rehabilitation to 3 families affected by a natural calamity.

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I wish to donate by Cheque/DD (favouring Oxfam India)

Enclosed is my cheque/DD for Rs.

All donations are exempted from income tax under 80G of IT Act

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