SUMMARY

Strong alliances create wider impact and change. Oxfam and its partners have been working in coalitions, as they recognize that going it alone will not bring changes that they need and want, and more importantly are willing to make the effort and invest in building alliances.1

Oxfam India (OIN) has been part of a nation-wide process working towards issues of improvement in the delivery of public education system. It has engaged in working to influence the mainstream education by improving the space for community’s role in monitoring of government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and by reaching out to the most marginalised like Dalits, tribals, Muslims and girls. It has also been part of a national network to bring in larger policy reforms through a call for greater accountability of state and by building a constant pressure for an equitable Right to Education for all.

OIN has adopted a twin strategy i.e. strong grassroots backed movements to realize the potential of Right to Education Act and its rollout while also pushing for greater policy reforms at the state and national level for a more inclusive and equitable education system. It supports civil society alliances by joining voice and force of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) of India in their efforts to ensure effective implementation of the RTE (Right to Education) Act.

OIN has included civil society engagement in its Annual Operational Plan (2013-14) for ES- Education Programmes as one of the outcomes- ‘Schools functioning effectively with regular tracking of the implementation of existing provisions under the RTE Act, 2009’, under which linking of civil society organisations into collective fronts for action on the right to education, both nationally as well as in the focal states is an output.

Therefore in the above context, OIN supports the National RTE Forum and its affiliates State RTE Forums. These are platforms that connect willing, active and motivated CSOs and individuals into a single force working and advocating for the right to education for the children in country.

Some of the notable successes of these processes are:

- About 10,000 CSOs, networks, NGOs are members of the National RTE Forum. These are primarily non funded partnerships established across 20 states of the country.
- It has lead to formation of state level alliances in various states, which again has CSOs, networks and NGOs as its members. In some states, the state level alliances have further extended into district level alliances.
- Annual Stocktaking Convention [5 conventions till date] held nationally, taking stock of the implementation of the RTE Act, across the country. The conventions generally conclude with the RTE Forum submitting a Memorandum of Demands to the Government, urging and suggesting an effective road map for the implementation of the Act.
- The RTE state chapters hold similar stocktaking conventions across various states, where issues and challenges from the ground are brought forward to the state level.
- RTE Forum has been able to create spaces in policy making. It has part of important discussions and was consulted on important issues of education both at the National and State level. Some of its engagements has been with NAC, RTE NAC, Dept of Personnel & Training, RTE State Rules - drafting groups in 2 States, Tribal Policy Odisha, SAC UP, etc
- RTE Forum has established supportive collaboration with important stakeholders like All India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), which resulted in Bhubaneswar Declaration, bringing forth collective strength to demand certain non negotiables from the Government with regards to right to education.

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1 Building National Campaigns: Activists, Alliances, and How change happens, Oxfam Publication
INTRODUCTION

CIVIL SOCIETY

There is no one definition of civil society. It is understood and defined in various ways by different agencies. As per a World Health Organisation paper, it is stated that in the absence of common understanding or definition, civil society is usually understood as the social arena that exists between the state and the individual or household. It makes the distinction that civil society lacks the coercive or regulatory power of the state and the economic power of the market but provides the social power or influence of ordinary people.

It is under this social realm, that individuals and groups organize themselves into civil society organisations (CSOs) to pursue their collective interests and engage in activities of public importance. CSOs are broadly understood to be non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary organisations. The paper also cautions that there may be state or market links to CSOs that blur the borders between the non-state and not-for-profit aspects of these organisations.

INCREASING ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

During the recent times, CSOs have become more prominent, more visible and more diverse all over the world. One of the factors contributing to the growth and influence of CSOs has been the increased challenge to imbalances of power between state and its structures on the one hand and civil society on the other. The above mentioned paper further analyses that the increasing role of civil society in development processes is not simply a response to political lobbies or to an increased scale of organisation but it also emerges from a shift in the understanding of development processes. With shift in the development paradigm to more rights based approach to development, there is more space and legitimacy for the civil society in raising and asserting the rights and entitlements of different social groups especially the marginalized communities. Therefore, CSOs play a vital and significant role in the nation’s development.

Besides trends at the local, national and global level reflect the changing relationship between the state and the civil society. There are growing demands on the governments for democracy, accountability, participation and compliance with human rights and international treaties and conventions. The growing presence and importance of CSOs at global and national levels has also motivated both national governments and global institutions to establish more formal mechanisms for listening to and responding to claims made from within civil society.²

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The education sector has had an active civil society presence over the years. Civil society organisations have actively raised issues ranging from implementation to advocacy. The World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in the year 2000, had put forward the challenge of an educational policy process that substantially involves civil society organisations as partners in policy (UNESCO 2000; Matsuura 2001). CSOs have actively taken up the challenge with ‘an increasing number of organisations [shifting] their focus from service provision to advocate and policy partner’ (Schnutgen and Khan 2004). This international official acknowledgement of CSOs’ important role in education policy can be attributed not only to the growing recognition of the wide-ranging contributions of civil society organisations to Education for All (EFA) (ICNGO/EFA 2000), but also to the shift in the discourses of development as mentioned above³.

Significant changes to national education policies and systems have been brought about by civil society involvement and advocacy across the world, from ensuring that the right to education is enshrined in national constitutions to the abolition of user fees⁴.

It is an established fact that civil society alliances are not only valuable and necessary for achieving education goals, but also in dispensible co-drivers in the process. Civil society alliances can best represent the voices of the larger, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable communities and act as a bridge between the community and the service providers.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN INDIA

During the last decade or more, civil society alliances in India (CSOs) have increasingly played a crucial role at the national, regional, and international levels in advocacy for education policies that enable access to quality education, especially for those are missing out on it. A key catalyst for this emerging role is the increased collaboration between national, regional, and international level CSOs, most noticeably through the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and Education for All movement⁵. Some of the key alliances formed around the issues of education are National Coalition for Education (NCE), People Campaign for Common School System (PCCSS), Campaign Against Child Labour (CACLI), National Alliance for Fundamental Right to

² Strategic alliances: The role of civil society in health- Discussion paper no 1

³ Changing the rules of the game: Building capacity for policy engagement and Asian-South Pacific CSOs in education A discussion paper, UNESCO

⁴ Civil Society Advocacy: Good practice case studies from Africa, Civil Society Education Fund June 2014

⁵ Persuading Powers: Stories from Education Coalitions in the Asia Pacific, Global Campaign for Education
quality Education and Equity (NAFRE). In addition to these alliances having state specific chapters, there are other affiliated and unaffiliated networks present at the state level across all the States.

Upala Devi, in an article\(^6\), published in 2002, mentions the two roles played by civil society initiatives in the Indian development scenario—

- The role of a catalyst, acting as lobby groups or pressure groups and demanding that policies be framed and implemented.
- The role of implementer of policies on the ground, playing time-bound roles in collaboration and participation with the Government

CSOs have been engaged in various ways to fulfill either or both these roles. The enactment of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 further opened new possibilities for the civil society to work for improving quality of school education in the country (RTE Forum, Vision Document).

Some of the broad contributions made by civil society alliances—

- Advocating for more inclusive approaches to planning and formulation of programmes, schemes, entitlements etc.
- Contributing to specific knowledge and understanding about the realities of the education sector, especially at the community level
- Carrying out research and analysis of specific provisions and proposing concrete solutions and recommendations
- Showcasing successful projects that are working in the field and that can influence national practice
- Amplifying voices and perspectives of different interest groups in society, especially the most disadvantaged, as well as teachers, parents and children.

\(^6\) Devi, U; Actualising the Right to Education: Participatory Civil Society-led Approaches to Educational Interventions for Girl Child Labourers in India, The Road Ahead; May 2002.
- Enhancing accountability by ensuring broad public awareness of government commitments and responsibilities, and mobilising wider civil society, community and stakeholder participation and buy-in.
- Enhancing accountability by engaging citizens in tracking performance and effectiveness of service delivery, especially at the local level.

LIMITATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

When working together in a coordinated and effective way, civil society can make a significant difference to the relevance and quality of education programmes. But bringing together a large and diverse group comes with its own set of challenges. One of the main limitations of the civil society is the limited participation of the very set of people whose voices it represents. Most civil society alliances have either nil or very less participation of the community, which could be an unintended effect. Moreover, other crucial factors like gender, caste and religion are sometimes not given the required attention in the working framework of the alliances. Leadership is another limitation, as there is a risk of it being dominated by few active members. These members, though work with the larger group, take decisions and plan the course of action for the alliances independently and sometimes based on their personal experiences. This has been one of the most contentious issues in most civil society alliances. Another limitation is influences of external factors and groups on the alliance, like political, economic and social. Though majority of the alliances operate in an independent and non-partisan framework, there could be a compulsion to be political correct or political neutral depending on the situation and context they are operating in. Last and one of most debated is the issue of funding. Can a civil society alliance function and work at a scale at which it needs to, without any source of funding, regardless of where it is coming from. There have examples of alliances mobilizing resources from the community and other active citizens, but where it was sufficient and served the purpose, cannot be answered affirmatively.

OXFAM INDIA’S SUPPORT TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY ALLIANCES

As mentioned in the summary, Oxfam India supports RTE Forum, a coalition of civil society organisations, NGOs, Activists, Academicians, Unions etc. The Right to Education Forum "is a collective national initiative of the civil society to form a just, inclusive and egalitarian society in consonance with the core values enshrined in the Indian constitution and several other international charters/Legal instruments on Human rights." It was formed after the RTE Act came into force in 2010 and it establishes a common platform bringing the different civil society organisations working in field of education, national education networks, teachers’ union, etc. at one place to strengthen the cause of education at both the State as well as the National level. It aims to both monitor as well as support the implementation of the Act at ground level.

Though the RTE Act, promises improvements and changes to the education system of the country and yet the implementation of the Act in totality seem distant. Therefore, the need for a “critical long term engagement” with the state system in an organized manner with a well-defined charter of mobilization was felt. The RTE Forum intends to fulfill this need. It "calls for a massive civil society intervention to hold the State accountable for ensuring fundamental right to education for all children in its totality."

NATIONAL RTE FORUM: COMPOSITION AND ROLE

It currently has about 10,000 NGOs under its umbrella. Oxfam India has been on its core team, with a former staff of Oxfam being on the founding member of the forum. The formation and working of the Forum has been one of the biggest achievements for Oxfam as it brings together like-minded groups and individuals working for the common cause and ensures that the strength, influence and impact of the movement increases manifold. This has ensured that different groups are not working in isolation, but instead learn and support each other. The Forum has now grown to become more than a collection of individual NGOs, and is not dominated by any one agency.

The process of formation of the Forum was, however, long and full of challenges. Initially started as an informal forum, it went through a process of organisational evolution that demanded consensus among a large number of members and stakeholders on issues relating to vision, mandate, outreach, membership, organisational structure and functions, and resource mobilization among others.


7 Vision Document, Right to Education Forum; p.3.
8 Vision Document, Right to Education Forum; p.4.
Christian Aid, VSO, Water Aid, Skill share International as members\(^9\). Centre for Social Development, one of the core collaborators of the Forum provides administrative and operational support and hosts the secretariat.

At present, the Forum has a large coverage although there is still a long way to go in terms of deeper engagement with organisations and issues. The forum members are aware of these challenges and apart from the advocacy activities; intensive efforts are made to strengthen the organisational structure, including the state chapters by the secretariat. However, state forums are independent in their own efforts at state level.

The Vision Document of the RTE Forum describes its roles and responsibilities as given below

- It will work towards bringing about a national system of education to ensure comparable quality to all children.
- It would define and defend its position on a host of issues relating to education in general and school education in particular.
- The Forum undertakes an educative responsibility and consequent task of wider dissemination of rights relating to education on the one hand and the responsibilities of state actors on the other.
- The Forum also seeks to address the issues of implementation on education at different levels from the national down to the schools. It especially works towards the implementation of the RTE Act for the vulnerable groups of the society (dalits, tribals, disabled, etc.)

#### SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE FORUM TO FULFILL THE ABOVE MENTIONED ROLES:

- **Social mobilization and broad based organisation building** – by initiating debate and dialogue, building a synergy with teachers, bringing together intellectuals and educationists who can support the Forum’s efforts, and also associating with different social groups to widen the agenda and acceptability of the Forum.

- **Advocacy** – through media sensitization and making people at various levels aware of the right to education, annually highlighting the status of RTE, advocating for the inclusion of right to education for children up to 18 years of age, and forming support groups inside the Parliament, state legislators and among policy makers at both centre and state level.

- **Campaign for Policy Changes** – the Forum also campaigns for greater regulation of private schools and ensuring the 25% reservation for the economically weaker and disadvantaged groups is implemented. Moreover, it opposes all forms of privatization and commercialization of education and brings out position papers with respect to these and other issues.

- **Implementation related Issues** – working towards the effective implementation of the RTE Act by the activation of SMCs, local structures and local government, promoting issues of marginalized groups, preparation of advocacy materials, resource materials and capacity building in response to felt needs at state or local levels.

- **Accountability Role** – the Forum tries to ensure accountability with regard to policy gaps and implementation of the Act. It has also undertaken a budget-analysis covering different aspects of the Act, to understand where the gaps are.

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9 RTE Forum’s official website: http://www.rteforumindia.org/contact
FEW SUCCESSES SO FAR HAVE BEEN

Within a very short time, the RTE Forum has succeeded in achieving certain notable successes in the in the education scenario of the country.

- Advocating for the implementation of 25 percent provision for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) - The private school lobby across the country was opposed to the implementation of the 25 per cent provision in the Act. The Forum representatives submitted a petition in the Supreme Court seeking protection of the interests of the children from marginalized sections who are the main beneficiaries under this provision. The Supreme Court on April 12, 2012 upheld the constitutional validity of the RTE Act, 2009, and mandated government/aided/non-minority unaided schools to reserve 25 per cent of the seats for the children belonging to weaker and disadvantaged sections of society.

- Similarly, the RTE Forum, after a round-table consultation had submitted a set of recommendations to National Advisory Committee, seeking a ban on all forms of child labour. The Union Cabinet on August 28, 2012 cleared a proposal to ban all work for children under the age of 14, and restrict non-hazardous work to adolescents between the age of 14 and 18. Further, the Minister of Human Resources Development Minister during the time Dr. Pallam Raju, after receiving a petition letter from the RTE Forum (with support from other networks) asked the State Education ministers during the 60th CABE meeting held in Nov 2012 to double the efforts to implement provisions of the RTE Act as per the time stipulated in the Act.10

- The Forum actively facilitated the formation of state level alliances in various states, which again has CSOs, networks and NGOs as it members. In some states, the state level alliances have further translated into district level alliances.

- Annual Stocktaking Conventions (4 conventions till date) were held nationally, undertaking a review of progress made in the implementation of RTE. A report taking stock of the progress made under the 6 board thematic areas of RTE Act is prepared and findings from which are presented and discussed during the convention. Discussions and issues emerging from the stocktaking are later incorporated into the report. The conventions generally conclude with the RTE Forum drawing up of Memorandum of Demands for submission to the Government, urging and suggesting an effective roadmap for the implementation of the Act. This year, 2013-14’s report relied on governmental sources, existing research, various reports generated by the State Chapters of the RTE Forum, ongoing research and evidence generated through action in the field and newspaper coverage. In addition, structured information on the progress made during the last year came together from the RTE State Forums across the country against consistent policy indicators.11

- The state chapters held similar stocktaking conventions across various states, where issues and challenges from the ground are brought forward to the state level. Organisations and Individuals working on issues of child rights and education came together to discuss and take stock of the progress under the RTE Act in the State. Similar to the National Stocktaking, a report is prepared documenting the progress and the gaps in the implementation off the RTE Act. Lead convener at the state level are primarily responsible to steer the process and bring together various stakeholders. A memorandum of demands highlighting the current crucial gaps on the ground and seeking an effective action plan to address the gaps are presented to the State government.

- Another important achievement has been the coming together of Teachers’ unions, civil society activists and educationists from 24 states in Bhubaneswar in December 2012, under the banner of the RTE Forum and AIPTF [All India Primary Teachers’ Federation] to discuss the challenges of school education and evolve a joint strategy to address the problems of education across the country. At the end of the meeting a Joint Declaration and common action plan was chalked out. This was a significant step as AIPTF is India’s largest teachers’ union with around thirty lakh registered members and this potential agreement on a few common issues would have considerable potential for strengthening the advocacy on education across the country, especially towards making education a political issue.

- RTE Forum has been able to create spaces in policy making. It has part of important discussions and was consulted on important issues of education both at the National and State level. Some of its engagements has been with NAC, RTE NAC, Dept of Personnel & Training, RTE State Rules - drafting groups in 2 States, Tribal Policy Odisha, SAC UP, etc

The above achievements have been made possible due to the Forum’s efforts and advocacy at both the national as well as the state level.

10 Civil Society in Action: A brief report of RTE Forum, April to November 2012; Right to Education Forum.

11 Year 4 Stocktaking Report of RTE Forum
STATE RTE FORUMS

STATE CHAPTERS AND PROCESSES AT THE STATE LEVEL

The RTE forum has established state chapters in 12 states, and has a presence in 20 states across the country. The state chapters are also collective alliances of organisations and networks working for the child rights and for towards achieving equitable and quality education at the State level.

The state chapters are as follows:

- State Collective for Right to Education (SCORE), Uttar Pradesh
- Uttarakhand RTE Forum
- Rajasthan State Consortium
- Delhi RTE Forum
- Voluntary Forum for Education, Bihar
- Jharkhand RTE Forum
- Odisha RTE Forum
- West Bengal RTE Forum
- AP Action Group on RTE, Andhra Pradesh
- Chattisgarh RTE Forum
- Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry RTE Forum
- “People’s Alliance for Right to Education- PAFRE”, Karnataka: “People’s Alliance for Right to Education-PAFRE”, Karnataka:

State level forums primary role is to advocate for and to ensure the effective implementation of the Right to Education Act, at ground level. The state chapters have been successful in mobilizing support across varied sections of individuals, eminent educationists, scholars and practitioners.

In below sections, processes and experiences of four state chapters (Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and UP) have been highlighted in brief-

BIHAR

The Voluntary Forum for Education (VFE) based Bihar, is a network of civil society organisations and interested individuals of the state who are working in the field of education and are concerned about the equitable and quality delivery of education, especially primary education, to the children. It was formed in 2003 with more than 30 organisations attending the first meeting of the Forum held at Patna.

Currently, more than 100 NGOs in Bihar have joined the Forum, with members of the Forum are present in almost all the districts of the state.

The Secretariat of the Forum, and one of the founding members is the East and West Educational Society (EWES). Oxfam India’s support to Education project of EWES, has two focus areas- the implementation of the RTE Act 2009 as well as quality improvement of education of the children. This will be achieved through a State campaign level and by undertaking field level initiatives. Thus, although the field level intervention is restricted to the jurisdiction of two Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) in Bihta block of Patna district, the campaign covers the entire state of Bihar.

To fulfill the objectives of this campaign, EWES under their Education Project aims to strengthen the bonds between the active NGOs and networks, Teachers’ Associations and other agencies working on education and create conditions in the state for a pro-people implementation of the Act. EWES thus, in this regard, actively supports the functioning of the VFE, playing an important role in all its initiatives and taking the responsibility of secretariat of the Forum.

In January 2013, VFE held a meeting with different NGO’s, CSO’s, Core-Committee members of VFE and other state networks like BGVS, BMSS, PSSS, AISTA, Dalit Morcha etc. to strategize a future course of action and come up with a roadmap on RTE, which could then be presented to the state to demand action on it.

In addition, it had also organized a RTE stocktaking workshop on Implementation of RTE Act in the state of Bihar along with Oxfam India and other like-minded CSOs/NGOs/ teachers unions, SMC members including children, academicians and media. The discussions reviewed the status of the implementation with focus on mentioned provisions in the Act. It also included the sharing of field realities through teachers, ad-hoc SMC-mata samiti members as well children and few private school representatives. At the end of discussions, the need to share the status and ask the state to come up with a status report along with a clear roadmap on RTE Act in Bihar was expressed.
**JHARKHAND**

The Jharkhand RTE Forum (JRTEF), which has representation from across the entire state of Jharkhand (all 24 districts) has been successful in creating a model School Management Committee (SMC) and a model School Development Plan (SDP). The Forum is working towards its implementation and replication across all the schools that fall within the working areas of the member organisations. JRTEF also promotes the formation and functioning of SMC federations and has worked towards the capacity building of the community [especially the SMC and PRI members and the Gram Sabha members] with respect to the RTE Act.

Most importantly, the Forum is focused on ensuring that the mandated provisions under the RTE Act reaches the intended beneficiaries- for e.g., ensuring the 25 per cent reservation for EWS (Economically and Weaker sections) children in private schools, promoting an inclusive education system in the state that is free of discrimination with special attention to girl children and children with special needs (CWSN), etc. The Forum had also conducted stock-taking exercise to understand the status of realization of the RTE Act and demands for action from the Government accordingly.

Few other notable successes of the JRTEF have been ensuring timely delivery of books and other materials during the last academic year 2013; engagement with Teacher union, who have been mobilised to understand the RTE Act more positively; SMCs across the state have been mobilised at large scale with a state federation of SMCs promoted with representatives from 24 districts; a better coordination between organisations working on education, various stakeholders, state government, media etc; Elected representative like MLAs have been mobilized reinforcing a discussion on education within the state assembly; during the last general elections, ensured that the agenda of education figures in the manifestoes of the political parties.

**ODISHA**

The Odisha RTE Forum has representation across all its 30 districts with more than 100 member organisations. The members in addition to organisations and individuals working in education and child rights include politicians, educationists, women’s groups, teachers, SMC members, etc. The Forum had conducted two stocktaking consultations (since its inception four years ago) and had submitted a memorandum of demands to the Chief Minister, Minister, and Secretary -Schools and Mass Education Department, Government of Odisha. Prior to the stocktaking, a study on the status of implementation of RTE in Odisha covering 250 schools in the state. The findings from the study were shared at the Stocktaking organised by the Department of School and Mass Education and Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

While the state level forums collectivize common demands and concerns of the different organisations, the alliance also helps in strengthening the specific demands of the organisations by providing them with a wider platform and support system. For instance, the Convener of the Orissa RTE Forum, Anil Pradhan has been working on tribal education with his organisation Sikshasandhan and has been advocating for the last almost 20 years for the need for tribal-language teachers and curriculum and context sensitive syllabus in State. He has been a core member of the drafting committee on Multi Lingular Education Policy at the state.

Odisha RTE Forum has given Sikshasandhan the platform to concretise their advocacy effort with the government. As a result, the Odisha state government had passed a notification for the employment of 3500 tribal youth as teachers in the Government schools on a contractual basis for improved learning and retention of tribal children. This is the result of both the efforts of Sikshasandhan through the years at the field level and also their advocacy efforts under the ambit of Odisha RTE Forum.

Odisha RTE Forum had also organized a series of consultation on some of theimmerging issues in the state on RTE implementation including the issue of school closure, designation of the local authority, setting the agenda for education in the election 2014 etc. Public hearing on implementation of the RTE Act was organized at district level. District level RTE forums have been formed and strengthened in 6 districts across the state till now. Training of Trainers programmes have been organised to build capacity of different NGOs on RTE Act. Similarly during the second round formation of SMCs in the state, intense efforts were made with the government to influence a democratic and neutral process. Sikshasandhan, as the lead convenor has been at the forefront to steer the process in the state of Odisha.
UTTAR PRADESH

State Collective for Right to Education (SCORE-UP) had evolved as an outcome of the consultation held among organisations working on education such as ActionAid, Care India, Plan India, Oxfam India, Save The Children, America India Foundation, NEG FIRE, National Coalition for Education, BETI Foundation, Lokmitra, Vigyan Foundation. SCORE was constituted in August 2010 at Lucknow to steer the advocacy process and to influence the government towards implementation of RTE in the state to enable marginalized children access free and compulsory quality education.12

Prior to the formation of SCORE, civil society organisations of Uttar Pradesh had organized a fortnight long campaign “Million Lights for Education Rights” from April 1 to 14th, 2011. Campaign had been organized in 25 districts including public events such as Candle light vigils, public demonstration, signature campaign petition to elected public representatives of the state, protest music and likewise. The campaign events were covered widely by print and local electronic media in different parts of the state and brought out the issue of right to education to public and starting a dialogue between civil society and education department leading to the formation of Uttar Pradesh RTE State Rules on July 27, 2011.13

The primary objective of SCORE is to advocate and facilitate the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 and other legislation, schemes and policies impacting the Right to Education of Children in the state.

Few notable success of SCORE have been, two core group members, Ms. Sehba Hussain (BETI Foundation) and Ms. Priya Bharti (Lokmitra) were included in the State Advisory Board on RTE implementation; Lokmitra, partner of SCORE led a successful campaign during Panchayat election and Vidhan Sabha election and reached out to approximately 3000 Gram Panchayat through Basic Shiksha Manch to include education as an important agenda in their political manifestos; a successful campaign was led between August, 2013 to January, 2014 for democratic formation of second phase of SMCs in more than 50 districts of UP; one of the successful outcomes of this has been the inclusion of one woman member in the leadership position of SMCs in the second phase of election; a few SCORE members have been chosen as district level resource person for providing training of SMC members; SCORE had contributed to the drafting of and revision of SMC training module “Jan Pehal” being used by SSA, UP to train SMC members and most importantly a State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR), was constituted in UP, due the continuous demand and pressure built by SCORE on the state government.

CONCLUSION AND LEARNING

The processes, activities and achievements of different alliances of civil society organisations discussed above, and the support these alliances have garnered over the years demonstrate the need and importance of having a unified civil society working for education. Though there is no such thing as a uniform civil society across the country and it is challenging for them to play a single role, however it is possible for them to have a common vision and mission, i.e., to work towards ensuring equitable and quality education for all children in the country.

The Forum representatives do realize the need to bring in structural changes in the way education system functions, to achieve sustainable impact under education in India. Further, the weak grievance redress system offsets the transparency and accountability of the system, making the implementation of the provisions on education even bleaker. Moreover there is the need to view and engage

12 National RTE Forum website  
13 SCORE UP website
teachers as equal partners in the education system, instead of merely looking at them as providers in the system. It is crucial to engage with Teachers Unions, who still remain an untapped force at the state level. It is important to recognize Teachers as an interface between community and the system, taking them on as allies and bring to attention their genuine concerns and issues. The Forum representatives, find the limited authority and power of the NCPCR and SCPCR, which are only advisory bodies with no official power to take any action, as challenging and discouraging.

As the convergence that has occurred at the National level has steadily progressed to the States, it is imperative to take the process forward at the districts and further to the community, the primary stakeholders. Community members are a huge source of information and ideas and they need to have adequate representation in these alliances to make them people centric and sustainable. The community can also play the role of a watchdog, offering concrete suggestions for improvement in the implementation of RTE Act. Thus, the vision of creating convergence of all stakeholders can be accomplished.

Some of the areas of improvement and capacities need to be built are-

- Competence for advocacy, campaign and lobbying to be enhanced
- Understanding and addressing the larger governance issues is needed
- Engagement with teachers and teacher unions is important.
- Understanding budgets and the financial allocations to take up budget advocacy.
- Bringing the focus back on marginalised communities- Dalit, tribal, Muslim, migrant, urban poor etc and ensuring their participation in the process.
- Engaging with youth and making them an active participant in the process.
- Bringing in the gender lens/perspective in all activities and initiatives. Special focus on girl children and on children from marginalised communities.
- Building backward and forward linkages by including a clear focus on early childhood education and secondary education, going beyond the RTE Act.
- Taking up as the issue of grievance redress and ensuring that there is a clear understanding of the system in place.

Civil society as understood from the above discussion has an important role to play in the process of realization of education for all children in the country. Some of the key roles it has played are-
Holding the State accountable to deliver on its promises and commitments, by tracking the deadlines, reviewing the progress etc.

Working towards transparency and accountability in the education system. Ensuring that the State acknowledges its duties towards rights and entitlements enshrined in the constitution.

Mobilizing communities towards a movement to address the core issues plaguing the education system in the country.

Striving for larger policy changes, building momentum towards common school system, discrimination free schools etc.

It also important to highlight here that civil society is not an alternative to the State. It cannot and should not take on the role of the State but rather play the role of a facilitator and a catalyst in taking forward the development agenda.

The RTE Forum should create spaces for its own review in terms of organisational structure, functioning, outreach, strengths and weaknesses. While there has been a definite expansion of the forum, both in terms of geography and mandate, it is also important to reflect upon the level of engagement the Forum shares with its state chapters and the extent to which individuals and organisational members find the State and National forums accessible. The idea of alliance is based on the principle of representation and participation, therefore it is essential all members get an equal opportunity to take up leadership role and steer the process forward.

Lastly, the RTE Forum should continue its current engagement with the education networks and continue to play a mentoring and supporting role. Most importantly, it combines the different individual voices and organisations voices into one common stronger and more forceful voice demanding equitable and quality education for all children of the country regardless of gender, class, caste, religion etc.

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