

RECOUP Working Paper No. 35

Educational Exclusion and Inclusive Development in India

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Abstract

This working paper examines the record of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's first five years in power with regard to provisioning in the educational sector. The focus of the paper is to evaluate whether there was any distinctive shift under the UPA or whether these years simply witnessed a reassertion of programmes set out by previous governments. The paper begins with a review of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) where the UPA pledged to raise public spending in education to least 6% of GDP with at least half this amount being spent of primary and secondary sectors. It goes on to examine the specific educational programmes that were introduced by the UPA in relation to existing frameworks initiated by the previous NDA government. The paper finds that the first term of the UPA government was marked more by legislative and administrative changes rather than by programme achievements. The rather limited advances made in education indicate that while there was an intention to ensure social transformation through improving educational access, marginal groups continue to be excluded from education. This may become a major obstacle in achieving the inclusive development that the UPA has adopted as its distinctive policy objective, and it appears to indicate that the financial and policy promises of the CMP have yet to be kept. The paper concludes that the innovations in the legal and implementing frameworks will remain only a tantalizing possibility unless there is a far greater emphasis on institutional delivery.

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Introduction

Educational achievements in India remain wanting in the current century, after sixty odd years of independence. While the Indian constitution has deemed education to be a fundamental right the reality on the ground is that only 81.1 percent of youth and 62.8 percent of adults are deemed to be literate (UNESCO 2008).

The lacklustre educational profile of India provided by national statistics is further emphasised when placed in relation to the global goals endorsed at the end of the twentieth century. The commitment to Education for All (EFA), first enunciated at the Jomtien Declaration 1990, and the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) set out as a Millennium Development Goal to be achieved by 2015 appear to be unattainable within the context of the educational policies adopted by the Indian state (GoI 2005f).

Achieving education policy can be analysed in terms of both the consistency of the stated objectives as well as in relation to the financial outlays and administrative resources allocated to ensure the successful implementation of educational policy.¹ In this regard, the educational policies of the government of the United Progress Alliance (UPA), comprising the Congress party and its alliance with the Left parties, the Samajvadi Party, and the Bahujan Samaj Party, after the general elections of 2004 had set out its objectives in the Common Minimum Programme adopted on the 29th of May, 2004.

The main plank of the CMP was a political promise to reverse the communalization of the Indian education system that had been brought in by the previous government, the National Democratic Alliance, led by BJP. This objective was to be met by ensuring that all institutions of higher learning were able to 'retain their autonomy' as this was seen to be under threat during the previous regime. The reversal was also to be brought about through the appointment of a review committee of experts to ensure a removal of communalized aspects of the school syllabus that had been brought in by the NDA government. In relation to the school system the CMP identified the mid-day meal (MDM) scheme as the major programme to be introduced into primary and secondary school as a way to improve the performance of the educational sector. It additionally announced that it would work to universalize education in the primary sector and ensure full coverage of education for early years under the ICDS scheme. On the financial side, the CMP underlined that it would spend at least the recommended 6% of public spending on education and that at the very minimum half of this expenditure would be on the primary and secondary sectors. Additionally,

¹ The consistency of policy objectives has been an established criteria for assessment has been in place since the celebrated work of Jan Tinbergen in the 1960s.

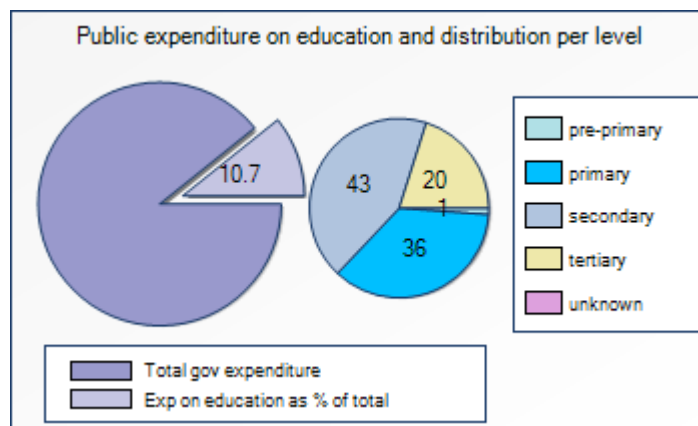
there was to be the introduction of a cess on all central taxes to finance the commitment to ensure Universal Basic Education.

These key components of the UPA's commitment need to be analysed in relation to both the relative success in implementing educational policy in furthering the agenda of Education for All as well as with regard to the ability of such an educational policy to ensure a socially transformative development process.

Section 1: Financing Education

There has been a longstanding demand for the provision of six percent of the national budget for education going back to the recommendations of the Kothari Commission Report of 1964. The percentage of India's GNP allocated to education in 2005-06 was 3.7 percent. This increase is marginally an improvement on the amount allocated to elementary education in 2003-04 of 1.8 percent (Tilak 2009). The latest statistics indicate that 10.7% of government spending went to education in 2007 and of this 36 percent went to the primary sector. It is clear that government expenditure is a far smaller amount than the Gross National Product and while the former figure shows that the share of spending is moving closer to 5 percent the latter figure remains close to 2 percent. Diagram 1 shows that the share of public expenditure going to education was 10.7 percent and not significantly different from the percentages spent under the NDA (Fennell 2006).

Diagram 1: India's public expenditure on education 2006-07



Source: UNESCO UIS statistics

On the other hand, while there has been a manifest inability to meet the expenditure levels recommended by previous commissions set up by the Indian government there has been an increase in the expenditure allocations for elementary education in recent plans: the 8th plan (1992-1997) allocated 406,00 (Rs. Million), there was 147,500 (Rs. Million) in the 9th Plan (1997-2002) and an allocation of 287,500 (Rs. Million) for the 10th Plan (2002-2007)² and 275,000 (Rs. Million) in the 11th Plan (2007-2013). The expenditure on education by both central and state education departments was 2.81 per cent of GDP in 2005-06, with half the amount going in elementary education (Tilak 2009). Additionally, while the revenue collected by the levy of the 2 per cent cess was Rs. 7,036 crores the budget outlay for elementary education was only over half that amount.

The outright failure of the UPA government to ensure that its own stated objective of ‘at least six percent of its GNP’ being allocated to education indicates its inability to make good its political promises.³ The contrast between the high political priority accorded to education in the CMP and the low level of additional finances made available for educational policies does beg the question of whether the UPA had given serious thought to devising a educational policy that be able to ensure universal elementary education (UEE).

To explore whether the financial shortfall was a consequence of merely inadequate resource mobilisation or more serious shortcomings in policy making we turn to an evaluation of educational policy during the UPA’s term in office.

Section 2: Situating the Education Policy of the UPA

The educational objectives set out in the CMP fall far short of a new framework for achieving national or international goals. The major objective of the CMP of removing the communal aspects of educational policy while an important political platform for the UPA does not set out any new policies, limiting itself to the establishment of a review panel of experts to rectify the communalization of the school syllabus. The only clear objective outlined in the CMP, with regard to the educational sector, was achieving the objective of universal basic education, largely through the greater coverage of the midday meal scheme in schools. The greater emphasis on a political agenda rather than the setting out of a clear cut educational

² Figs for the 8-10th plans from Colclough and De (2009).

³ Stewart (2009) points out that a state unable to ensure service delivery should be deemed to have failed. In this sense, the Indian state and consistently being unable to ensure educational outlays of the order of 6 percent of the GDP, and should be regarded as failing in some sense.

policy in the CMP appears to corroborate the view that Indian policy making is increasingly becoming more about gaining political legitimacy rather than ensuring financial resources (Mooij 2007).

The objective of achieving universal primary education set out in the CMP was not a definitive policy agenda in itself but rather a furthering of existing educational policies of previous governments to extend educational coverage, such as the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that was introduced in 1994 with the objectives of providing universal access to school.⁴ This programme was incorporated into a larger national level educational policy in 2000-01, covering all India's districts, under the aegis of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).⁵ The SSA had the ambitious objective of ensuring universal primary education by 2007⁶ and was initially based on an 85:15 financial outlay by central and state government during the period of the 10th plan.

The mid-term review of the MDGs indicate that India was moving towards UPE with 95 percent children enrolled in primary school but the retention levels till grade five are just 79 percent in 2005 (UNESCO 2008).⁷ While the overall objective of UPE might appear to be in sight there were concerns expressed regarding the meeting of associated Millennium goals of gender parity, as the Gender Parity Index (GPI)⁸ has not been attained, and the figure was 0.94 in 2005.⁹ The data does cast some doubt on the ability of the SSA to deliver educational policy at the local level, through the district and municipal authorities respectively, in rural and urban India. The tools of the SSA for ensuring complete enrolment and retention, as well as the target of gender parity, through specific programme interventions to target groups, as the poor households and the education of girls do not appear to have delivered adequately.¹⁰

⁴ Duflo, E., 2003. Scaling up and Evaluation. At http://econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/download_pdf.php?id=760 - points out that the methodological approach to selection and implementation within the DPEP programme make its difficult, if not impossible, to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the programme

⁵ Both the DPEP and SSA have been introduced within the larger political framework of decentralisation, whereby service delivery has been shifted from the central administration, to the individual districts who receive funds through the relevant state governments. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution, which granted the district, block and village institutions constitutional recognition and to urban municipalities and its constituent wards respectively, have been particularly important in placing the district at the centre of development policy, through their emphasis on Panchayati Raj institutions.

⁶ The SSA initially set itself a near impossible goal of achieving UPE by 2003, which was subsequently moved to 2007.

⁷ The figures for 2002-03 were around 77 percent and 60 percent respectively (Fennell 2006)

⁸ Gender Parity is taken to be achieved with the gross enrolment rate for girls and boys is between .97 and 1.03.

⁹ The GPI in 2002-03 was just under 0.90 for India (Fennell 2006)

¹⁰ These targeted programmes, such as Mid-Days meals in schools and the provision of special girls's schools, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, that this flagship programme of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) have not yet yielded success in terms of retention or improvements in educational quality.

Furthermore, there was little attempt during the UPA term in office to devise a detailed financial plan for ensuring educational delivery. In particular, the additional financial outlays at state and local level to deliver these programmes were set out within the guidelines of the existing 10th plan, where educational provision was to be based on a financial sharing on a 50:50 basis between the centre and the states. This arrangement was based on a strict financial proviso, whereby the state governments could be denied annual plan funds if they failed to transfer their contributions to the State Implementation Committee for the previous year.¹¹ There was no indication in the CMP of 2004 that there would be any change in these financial arrangements to ensure that target of UPE, that was not achieved as originally envisaged by 2007, would now be achieved during its term of office. The only additional funds to be obtained was through the imposition of an educational cess of 2 percent on all central taxes to provide funds to help achieve the objective of universal primary education and this was to be put towards funding the MDM scheme in schools.¹²

Section 3: Mid-Day Meal Scheme as an educational programme

The MDM scheme announced by the UPA government in 2004 as its main initiative to attain universal primary education was not in itself a new policy. In fact, the scheme was the consequence of a court directive in response to a writ petition filed in the Supreme Court of India in 2001 to demand India's food stocks be used to prevent hunger.¹³ It was the interim order of the Court, on 28th November 2001, that directed all state governments to provide children in government and government assisted schools a prepared mid day meal as a measure to relieve 'classroom hunger' (Dreze and Goyal 2003).¹⁴ Throughout the following year, there were concerted attempts by NGOs to monitor the implementation of the MDM scheme which revealed that the initial financial outlay fell far short of the requirement to provide meals of an adequate quality. So rather than being a new focus, the MDM emerges from a set of legal and lobbying battles to ensure the 'right to food', and thereby to guarantee that Article 21 of the Indian Constitution on the 'right to life', as the driver for the MDM scheme (Khera 2005). There is little indication in the CMP that the MDM was to play a part in a larger educational policy framework to achieve national and international educational objectives.

¹¹ MHRD website.

¹² The CMP does not make any reference to other forms of financial resource mobilisation nor does it declare any new financial outlays.

¹³ This petition also heralded the start of a national Right to Food Campaign during 2002-03 across India by a coalition of NGOs.

¹⁴ 'classroom hunger' is a term that is used to explain why children from very poor families are unable to concentrate on lessons because they have come to school without eating anything. The implications of school meals is therefore not only to ensure increased enrolment in schools but also improve the quality of the educational learning that children experience.

Schemes such as the MDM act by providing incentives for parents to send their children to school (Jayaram 2008). The increased attraction of schools due to the provision of a hot cooked meal is particularly relevant for the most economically disadvantaged sectors, where malnourishment of children is an endemic condition. Consequently, a MDM scheme could ensure both increased enrolment in schools as well as improved attention of children from the most deprived sections of society. Improvement in both attendance and the increased socialisation at school are also achieved by incentive schemes such as the provision of free textbooks and the awarding of scholarships for girls.¹⁵

The evidence regarding the effectiveness of these schemes is mixed, with some studies pointing out that the universal schemes (e.g., mid-day meals and textbooks) perform better than targeted schemes (e.g. scholarships for girls).¹⁶ While the studies recognise that leakages do persist, they find evidence that these are considerably reduced through improved monitoring of the programme to ensure that the food does arrive at the school and is of an adequate quality (Samson, Noronha and De 2008). The research indicates that with increased transparency and awareness-raising measures put in place there could also be an improved attendance level in response to other school incentives such as uniforms and free text-books (Khera, Samson and De 2009).

The introduction of specific programmes that target the socially underprivileged and discriminated categories, such as gender, minority status, and disability have been applauded by international bodies (EFA GMR 2008). It is noteworthy, that in the case of India, universal programmes that cover all government and government aided schools, such as MDM, have also been effective when administered effectively by the school authorities though this might not reduce the gender gap, as both girls and boys appear to benefit equally for the programme (Jayaram 2008). The key seems to lie in the ability to make the explicit link between educational inputs, the process of educational service delivery and the type of educational outcome that results from such a programme (Pritchett and Pande 2006).¹⁷

¹⁵ The *Report to the People* released on the third anniversary of the UPA also emphasises the importance of targeted funds for improving the educational attainments of minority and deprived groups.

¹⁶ The recent PROBE study conducted in 2006 does show that midday meals were an important feature in increasing access and attendance (Samson 2008?). This finding is contradictory to the international financial institutions (IFI) view that targeted programmes are more effective as they focus on the most disadvantaged rather than providing a generalised subsidy (King et.al 1997)

¹⁷ The incentives are effective when they work through with by poor and marginalised groups to overcome obstacles to accessing education (See Fennell 2006 for an analysis of conditions within which gender based educational programmes were effective in South Asia).

The flipside of this finding is that it cannot be presumed that funding of an educational programme within the ongoing framework of the SSA, is an automatic guarantee for ensuring UPE. Achieving UPE requires an understanding of the process of educational delivery and its implication for the nature and extent of successful educational outcomes.¹⁸ Programmes to improve educational outcomes must consequently operate within a social context that favours children from more disadvantaged and discriminated groups attending and completing school. The provision for MDM and other school based incentives are therefore most effective where there is widespread community level support for all children being at school, i.e., full support for the principle of the ‘right to education’ (Khera, Samson and De 2009). If school programmes are undertaken in an environment where social stratification, particularly caste distinctions, then they are unlikely to be able to ensure equal treatment of all school children and their ‘right to education’.¹⁹

Despite contemporary evidence that institutional mechanisms should be based on every child’s right to education the CMP does not indicate that the programmatic aspects, such as MDM and ICDS, are working within such constitutional requirements for the provision of education. The absence of any explicit indication of how the legislative framework would be linked to the revised educational policy indicate that interrelations between institutional reform and programme implementation were not considered at the outset of UPA’s term in office.

This appears strange given the discernable shifts in public opinion on the ‘right to education’ following the awarding of landmark legal judgements in the 1990s (the most significant being *Unnikrishan, J.P., vs. the State of Andhra Pradesh*) with regard to the interpretation of the right to education as a constitutional right .²⁰ The legal judgement and the public interest that resulted led to the formation of a national coalition, National Association for the Fundamental Right to Education (NAFRE), and a campaign for the recognition of education as a fundamental right. The demands made by civil society organisations pushing for a bill in the Lok Sabha resulted in the passing of the 86th Constitutional Ammendment (Article 21A) in 2002 that required the state to provide free and compulsory education till the age of fourteen. Despite these major legal achievements in the preceeding years the CMP did not directly mention how it would

¹⁸ The DFID funded Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP) has been conducting research in four countries, Ghana, India, Kenya and Pakistan, between 2005-2010 to understand the educational experiences of individuals in poor communities, and its implications for personal identity, decision making, skills and employment. The research design and methodology used across six different projects has highlighted the need to link the process by which education was accessed, and how and in what manner teaching and learning occurs, within the social, political, economic and cultural context of the community that was critical in defining and evaluating educational outcomes. This is an area that has only recently become a subject of independent study in the field of education and development,

¹⁹ Ramachandran(2004) points out that schools often replicate the hierarchies in society at large.

²⁰ A.I.R. 1993 S.C. 2178

meet the additional costs of financing of ensuring such a legal obligation nor does it refer to the 'right to education' directly.

There was also no reference, in the CMP, to the particular design of an educational programme that would directly remedy the fallings of the SSA in achieving UPE. This further suggests that the UPA had not thought deep and hard about the specific educational outcomes that it wished to realise when it came to power in 2004. The UPA's willingness to focus solely on programmes, largely on the MDM, as a tool to accelerate universal primary education points to a lack of any premediated thinking on financial and administrative requirements to ensure improved educational outcomes.

The consequences of the limited remit of the UPA is also evident in its own *Report to the People* released at the third anniversary of the alliance's victory in the national polls which identifies its major objectives and achievements in the field of education. The report profiled the increase in the expenditure outlays as the pathway to success in moving towards education for all, particularly the achievement of 96% of habitations having access to a primary school and that the MDM was the biggest feeding programme in the world and covered 115 million children in primary and primary aided schools (GOI 2008). It did not make any reference to the method of financial provisioning for the final mile towards UPE. While the increased demographic coverage by educational programmes is a positive feature, this is in a context where India still accounted for 21 million of the 72 million out of school children in the world in 2008 (UNESCO GMR 2008) and yet there was no underlining of the need to place the legal responsibility of the state at the centre of educational provision despite the voluble discussion in the public sphere regarding the legal obligation to uphold the constitutional right to education.

Section 4: The institutional and legal processes in education

The central message emerging from the CMF was the need to remedy the saffronisation of education that took place under the NDA government. It was in pursuance of this objective that the UPA government reconstituted the Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE) on the 6th of July 2004. Authorising the CABE to review and make recommendations thorough key committees put into motion a number of processes by which the legal, institutional and curricular aspects of educational policy would come into play.²¹

²¹ The CABE was established in 1920 as the highest advisory body to the government on educational policy with the power to engage in public consultation. It was dissolved in 1923 on account of financial difficulties first by the government. The institution was revived in 1938 and continued to be active till 1994, when its membership was not renewed at the end of its term of office.

The first meeting of the reconstituted CAGE was held in August 2004 and its members, drawn from both houses of parliament as well as experts for the worlds of academia and public life, identified key areas that needed ‘detailed deliberations’ and the setting up of the specific committees to deal with these areas.²² The MHRD provided a detailed term of reference for each committee,²³ and reports were submitted by each committee with the key policy recommendations that were required to ensure the achievement of each objective (MHRD 2004, 2005).

The committee reports examine the relationship of education policy with development, both in relation to economic success as well as social justice. The recommendations of the committees indicate that very careful consideration was given to both academic arguments as well as legal judgements regarding the position of education in India’s development. Nor were the individual committees averse to expanding their individual remit, and the Committee for girls’s education recommended that

‘alongside the 86th Amendment the Government of India bring in another Act to protect the fundamental right to life of the child in the form of the right to live in a civil society with full provision by the state of both primary health needs and early educational care for children up to 6 years.’ (GOI 2005b: 9)

The principle that the provision of education should be based on the principle of social justice and ensure equality for all children was evident in the recommendations of the committee on girls’ education and inclusion. The report repeatedly underlined the necessity for a common school system that was both state-funded and state-led if the education system was to ensure the inclusion of all children.

‘Pursuing the common school system as the key strategy that can prevent commercialism and exploitation of education as making good quality education available to all students in all schools at affordable fees is a primary commitment of the Common School system.’ (GOI 2005b: 40).

²² The following seven committees were set up subsequent to the meeting in August: (i) Free and Compulsory education Bill and other issues related to Elementary Education, (ii) Girls Education and the Common School System, (iii) Universalisation of Secondary Education, (iv) Autonomy of Higher Education Institution, (v) Integration of Culture Education in the School Curriculum, (vi) Regulatory Mechanism for the Text Books and parallel text books taught in schools outside the Government system, and (vii) Financing of Higher and Technical Education. <http://www.edu.nic.in/cabe/cabeorder7.htm> Accessed

²³ The committee on free and compulsory education was required to ‘suggest a draft of legislation envisaged in Article 21-A of the constitution’ and to examine matters relating ‘to achieving free and compulsory education’.

The reports of the individual committees reveal they regarded their TORs as being part of a larger exercise of reviewing the educational system. Consequently, they indicated the benefit of working alongside the recommendations of other committees, and the synergy that might arise from conjoining policy guidelines is evident in their reports.

‘We take note of two other committees constituted by CAGE whose Terms of Reference overlap the task of this Committee. One of these committees is drafting Free and Compulsory Education Bill in pursuance of the 86th Amendment to the Constitution and looking into other issues related to elementary education. The second of these committees is deliberating upon the subject of girls’ education and the Common School System. The recommendations of both of these committees shall have a direct bearing upon the blueprint of Universal Secondary Education that is engaging our attention.’

(GOI 2005c: 12)

The members of the committees, both in their individual and collective capacity, considered their remit in its fullest sense and engaged with the process of reviewing educational policy to ensure that education was available to all children. Each committee enunciated this core principle and reiterated that the CAGE had the responsibility of advising on educational policy. It is also clear that individual committees felt it was appropriate to reflect of recommendations of previous government committees on the institutions appropriate for ensuring education, with a particular regret being expressed about the inability to implement the Common School Policy, regarded as as the ‘bedrock of educational quality, social cohesion and national integration’ (GOI 2005d: 1).

The interpretation of these committees went considerably beyond the primary objective set out for the reconstituted CAGE of overhauling the school syllabus with a view to remedying the ‘saffronisation’ of textbooks that had taken place under the previous government. The committee recommendations, while recognising the importance of reinstating the autonomy of the educational system, go beyond to focus on the larger question of creating an institutional process to ensure that education is finally made available to all children and to ensure that they are equal citizens who can participate fully in all avenues of life.

This objective was abundantly evident in the recommendations of the committee on the regulation of textbooks which took a wide-angle view of the role played by textbooks and recommended that their content was reviewed by an expert and independent body. Their major directive was that educational curriculum needed to be reviewed by a an institutional process that ensured independent monitoring.

‘there is an urgent need to set up an institutional facility to keep an eye on textbooks. Research on textbooks is an essential feature of a healthy education system, but in the context of the challenges we face research must take the form of inquiry into specific problems relating to the quality of textbooks and the values they convey. The institutional structure to perform this task needs to be independent of any organization, which is involved in textbook preparation.’

(GOI 2005a: 2)

Regarding education as a goal in itself and one that should not be regarded narrowly as contributory factor to national development was also emphasised by the various committees of the CAGE.²⁴ The committees deliberating universal education, girls’ education and inclusion, secondary education, were also committed to a government system of school, particularly the CSS, to ensure that universal elementary education should not place the poor at a disadvantage. It was with the view to ensuring equality and social justice that there was an emphasis on keeping out private, and thereby commercial profit making, schools, that would require payment of fees for education by the most disadvantaged.²⁵

While the CAGE and its constituent committees were drawing on public consultation with experts through structures such as the Public Study Group (PSG), the UPA government also initiated the design of the National Curricular Framework (NCF) in 2004 under the aegis of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The consequence of simultaneously setting into play both a review panel at the highest level (i.e., the CAGE) and the review by an existing educational institution, (i.e., the NCERT) led to mutually irreconcilable recommendations with the CAGE committee on textbooks censoring the NCERT for proceeding to review textbooks as there was a conflict of interest in a body, such as the NCERT, that produced books undertaking such a review.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 brought out by the NCERT was the subject of considerable controversy, and particularly subjected to criticism by the CAGE for being an elite formulation of education that did not address the needs of the Common School System adequately

²⁴ The committee on girls’ education recorded its strong disapproval of regarding girls’ education as a merely a contributory factor to a narrow growth perspective. Its first recommendation was that an ‘Instrumentalist approach i.e. girls’ education for fertility control, better health care, decreased expenses on health care and decreased infant mortality rate etc. needs to be vehemently opposed’ (GOI 2005 :).

²⁵ The longstanding opposition to the entry of commercial organizations into education that was evident within these expert bodies was in relation to the imposition of fees rather than in relation to their ability or inability to provide quality education. There is considerable evidence that there are already a considerable number of non-state providers in education in India who are changing the terrain of Indian education (Fennell 2007).

(Sadgopal 2005, Kumar 2007). There were concerns raised that the new NCF which focussed on ensuring that children from diverse regional backgrounds, located in both urban and rural environments could participate in classroom learning did not take into account the conditions on the ground across India. The major objections raised were that the NCF was focussing its recommendations based on an ideal conception of education rather than setting out an operational policy that would ensure that all children were going to school. Most vociferous were critics that the framework was elitist, and that its focus on a wide range of resources to ensure child-centred teaching did not take into account the very limited resources in government schools across the country (Sadgopal 2005b). There were also concerns regarding a large part of the framework being based on a move from focusing on textbooks to drawing on local knowledge that would result in the teaching of 'obscurantist' ideas (Habib 2005, Ganesh 2005).

While the controversy was itself noteworthy, what is of particular importance is the reasons for such a spirited public response on the matter of educational policy. One contributory factor was the opening up of the educational field by the reconstitution of the CBE. Among the most significant features of this process, was the very creation of the Public Study Group (PSG) to advise the CBE on various aspects of educational policy. The 100-member PSG was drawn widely from across India, and included academics, intellectuals, social and political activists, to respond to policy initiatives, suggest changes and ensure transparency of the process.

While the creation of a public body for consultation was laudable it was not supported by a consultative policy environment within which the PSG could operate. Consequently, there was a little sustained engagement at the various public meetings and an increasing predominance of the political agenda that tended to overwhelm the educational dimension (Raina 2008, Sadgopal 2005). The lack of procedure in the making of policy in India appears to have stymied additional rounds of review and undermining the possibility of reaching a consensus on educational policy.

An unfortunate victim of the truncated nature of consultation that ensued over the NCF recommendations of 2005 was the important pedagogic feature of placing children at the centre of schools through child-centred learning methods remained inadequately debated.

The lack of consensus on educational policy at this juncture bequeathed a considerable advance in public debate on the merits and demerits of adopting a rights-based approach to learning and its implications for equality for children in disadvantaged or deprived areas of the country but denied the possibility of any reconciliation of oppositional views. Such a response was particularly regrettable given new findings in Indian education that children from different economic, linguistic and gendered backgrounds acquire

knowledge through their own particular social context so that any CSS must have teaching and learning methods that work within rather than in disregard of these social constructions (Sarangapani 2003).

The frustration of not moving forward to construct a more effective educational policy that was driven by clear principles based on the recommendations of seven important national committees became clearly evident in 2006. In contrast, with the earlier anticipation that the UPA government would build on the minimal formulation for the educational sector in the first parliamentary session there were now mounting concerns that the opportunity of reforming educational policy was slipping away before the very eyes of the CAGE and its committees.

Secondly, there appeared to be reluctance on the part of the government to respond to the critical scrutiny of the model bill by the academic, policy and activist communities, or the serious suggestions made regarding areas of review. The biggest cause for decrying the bill was its limited conception of the role of education, particularly with the delimiting of education to the age group five to fourteen years. This exclusion was particularly iniquitous as it was the poorest socio-economic groups that were least able to meet the costs of nursery and other organized forms of pre-schooling.²⁶ When it became apparent that the UPA government was not addressing the limitations of the model bill, nor was it redrafting the inherent contradictions between the primary objective of 'free and compulsory education' and the limitation in years of free education to five to fourteen years, so that there were hidden costs that were retrogressive in incidence there was a series of public representations undertaken by NGOs, and alliances such as NAFRE.

The backtracking by the UPA on the earlier commitment to the Common School System, and the increasing evidence of a lack of serious regard for social justice, was even more irksome when it came to light that the CAGE committee on higher education was recommending a greater role for the private sector in education (Raina 2008).²⁷ Furthermore, there was evidence that the government was not intending to create any financial instruments other than the educational cess to ensure the necessary expenditure (which is in the order of Rs.40,000 crores per year over and above the current expenditure) for implementing a full fledged common school system, (Tilak 2009).

²⁶ The exclusion of this group was also inexplicable given the commitment to early years indicated through the highlighting of the ICDS programme in the CMP.

²⁷ The introduction of private providers, taken to mean the corporate sector, in India has been a contentious matter. Educationalists are opposed to it on the grounds that this would emphasise the profit motive which goes against the principle of providing education to the poorest and the most disadvantaged. The government's consideration of the private sector appears to be driven by its own financial limitations and consequent inability to provide an adequate number of educational institutions to meet demand in the tertiary sector.

The upshot of these events was that the growing public perception that the UPA government was not serious about linking existing programmes to the recommendations of individual CAGE committees to create a comprehensive education policy. A consequence of a flawed policy making process was the generation of more heat than light on educational policy and precluded firm commitment to any framework, current or revised, that could have gone beyond political agendas (Mooij 2007).

Additionally, there was a growing view that the UPA governments' reluctance to reformulate of the model bill was, at least in part, due to their concern of the greater financial outlays that would be needed to make good the recommendations of the committees. While the members of the expert committees, and the public study groups were focussing on the renegeing of the primary principle of equality and social justice in the period 2006-2008, economists were beginning to discern that the government was orchestrating a distancing process away from the committee recommendations due to its manifest inability to garner the necessary resources (Tilak 2009, Jha et. al. 2008).²⁸

By the summer of 2008, it was clear that the government was moving away from any further reformulation or adoption of the recommendations of the various committees of CAGE to a position where it was indicating that the model bill should be adopted in its current form by state governments, and that the majority of the financial burden be shouldered by them as well.²⁹ The seeming intransigence of the UPA government indicates both weaknesses in policy making, particularly with regard to laying out procedures for negotiation and consensus building, as well as in relation to accrual of financial resources for the provision of agreed public goods. The limitations in procedure and as well as in public finance resulted in considerable disenchantment with the UPA record in education and growing doubt being cast on its ability to put in place in an effective education policy that will ensure the goal of universal elementary education. Thus while the individual programmes, such as the MDM, were varyingly reviewed by critics there was unanimous agreement that there was nothing new in relation to the process by which educational policy was to be delivered during the UPA first term in office.

Section 5: Achieving UEE and the Agenda of Inclusive Development.

²⁸ DiJohn has shown that the governments that consistently underresource education display a sign of failure of accountability. The importance of being able to meet policy objectives by an adequate amount of public expenditure is, on the other hand, an example of an fully functional state institution.

²⁹ The shift from 50:50 to 15:85 share of expenditure envisaged in the 11th plan was to proceed with, notwithstanding the new policy requirements. This is very similar to the ongoing use made of allocations made under the 10th plan. There appears to be little appetite in the government to make distinctive changes in expenditure outlays, and the educational cess went a very small way to provide additional funds, most of it being entirely absorbed by the MDM scheme during the 10th plan.

The limitations of policy and finance that have figured prominently as reasons for the lack of a fully fledged educational policy do not only mar the educational objectives of the UPA government but also cast doubts on the ability of the government to pursue a distinctive pattern of development. This is particularly the case as the UPA has made a series of public statements regarding its intention to set out a new and more socially transformative path to development, than that followed by previous governments.

The Prime Ministers' Independence Day speech in 2006 emphasised the need to send all children to school and reiterated that the SSA and the MDM would be the government's initiatives to achieve this objective.

'The expanded Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will ensure that all our children go to school. Under the universal Mid-day Meal Programme, almost 12 crore children are getting a nutritious meal at school. Through these two programmes, we will ensure that all our children complete basic schooling.'³⁰

The almost identical language in the CMP of 2004 and the speech of 2006, without any mention of a new directive, and no allusion to changes in educational policy beg the question of why there was no evidence of responses to the vociferous public debates in the preceding years. The absence is also surprising given the importance accorded to the empowering aspect of education in the UPA agenda.

On the third anniversary of the UPA government, May 22nd 2007, the Prime Minister stated that a strategy of development that was based on 'inclusive growth', was superior to following a purely growth oriented strategy as it combined empowerment, with entitlement and investment. The major contribution to be made by the provision of public goods through public investment was spelt out of very clearly in this statement.

'Education empowers, improved health care empowers, employment guarantee entitles, fulfilling quota obligations entitles. Through a combination of offering entitlement, ensuring empowerment and stepping up public investment, our Government has sought to make the growth process more inclusive.'³¹

There is a stark contrast between the vision conjured up by these words of an education policy that would ensure that all children are getting a quality education and inability to realise the objective of Universal

³⁰ Independence Day Speech 2006.

³¹ Downloaded from India Newslines at <http://www.news.indiamart.com/news.../-inclusive-growth-ke-15755.html> on 6th May 2010.

Elementary Education as the financing of education continues to fall short of the required level of six percent of GDP. Furthermore, an adequate financial outlay might not be a sufficient condition for ensuring universal primary education, even though it is a necessary condition (Alston and Bhuna 2005). Thirdly, the programmes that have been successful in increasing enrolment and retention, such as MDM, do not by themselves ensure the delivery of a quality education and are successful only in environments where institutional mechanisms are based on tenets of equality and social justice.³² These shortcomings in meeting the UPA's own objective of UPE are not explicitly recognised in the 11th plan.

The 11th plan documents do trace a linkage between the UPA's development strategy of 'inclusive growth', the major plank for government planning between 2007-2012, and the objectives of the CMP announced by the UPA during the course of the 10th plan.³³ However, there does not appear to be any new and distinctive educational policy emerging from the objectives of the CMP. If education is to have a central role in relation to achieving 'inclusive growth' there needs to be a fundamental rethinking on the provisioning of education. In particular, there must be a commitment that the legal responsibility of the state is to be met with adequate financial resources to ensure (a) that right to education is made available to all children as demanded by the courts and (b) the greater consideration to taken of importance of both content of education and context within which education is provided as recommended by expert committees of the CAGE.

The new development paradigm of inclusive growth cannot be met by incremental increases in individual programmes alone. If empowerment through education is to be the way forward then considerable financial resources need to be expended on the educational sector (at the very least the six percent that has been a long standing recommendation). These resources must also firmly linked to an educational policy that has an established set of procedures for public consultation which will result in negotiation and consensus of the principles and processes to ensure UEE and other national educational goals.

The power of education cannot be unleashed if there is dissipation of human energies, those of expert bodies, public figures, professionals and civil society organisations, on account of a lack of institutional processes to harness the best of civil society initiatives and government legislation. Educational exclusion

³² In the RECOUP research on the provision of schools in poor communities a common finding that has emerged across all research sites is that the poorest and most marginalised families are unable to get adequate education from the state system and 'dropping out' is the most common way of registering their discontent.

³³ The 11th plan document is entitled 'Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth' and sets out a new paradigm that ensures that growth is broad-based, by bringing expenditure on education, health and infrastructure to the foreground. The outcomes that the plan envisages from such investment is through empowering the disadvantaged, those who have been excluded on the basis of caste, religion, gender and disability.

will continue as a social mechanisms unless there is the embedding of a set of institutional practices that work with social norms and community practices (Fennell 2010) to ensure that children complete education in inclusive school environments.

Conclusion

The rather limited advances made by the UPA in education indicate that while there was an intention to ensure social transformation through improving educational access the reality is that marginal groups continue to be excluded from education. This stumbling block could become a major obstacle in achieving the desired objective of inclusive development that the UPA has adopted as its distinctive policy.

The CMP and the educational reform agenda set out under the CABE were received by the government as recommendations for remedying the earlier excesses of the NDA government rather than a requirement to put in place both a more comprehensive policy and greater financial wherewithal to achieve the objective. The debates on the nature of educational policy, its remit, pedagogy and financing, raised by the individual committees of the CABE were highly pertinent and showed that public consultation did create positive inputs into the policy process. It also became clear that individual programmes, such as the MDM, were important for ensuring universal primary elementary education. However, these improvements cannot become institutionalised without setting out procedures to design a coherent educational policy that outlines how individual programmes will work to achieve quality education for all children.

There have continued to be severe shortcomings in the creation of financial mechanisms for resource mobilisation throughout the UPA's term in office. The shortfall is particularly worrying as it appears to indicate that the financial and policy promises of the CMP have yet to be kept. Consequently, the political imperative appears to have been the only victor rather than a permanent improvement in the provision of education. Educational exclusion continues to be a major blot on the terrain of educational provision and with the potential to annul any advances in strategies of inclusive development, as the marginalised and excluded are pushed to adversarial and, often violent, movements in retaliation against well-intentioned but weakly institutionalised and poorly implemented policies.

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