

EDUCATION FOR ALL – MID DECADE ASSESSMENT

**Reclaiming the Space for
Teachers to Address the UEE
Teaching-Learning Quality Deficit**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION
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Preface

The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal approved a comprehensive vision of Education for All (EFA) to be achieved by 2015 based on the six goals. The six goals relate to the areas of early childhood care and education, universalising primary education, gender, youth and adolescents, adult education and quality of education. The main focus is on 'reaching the unreached' for ensuring complete coverage of education. With this background the *Mid- Decade Assessment of Education for All* was initiated to take stock of the progress made with respect to EFA Goals. Corresponding to this exercise, a comprehensive review of the progress made with respect to Education for All in India was conducted jointly by Government of India and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA).

The present work which is a sequel to the National Report consists of a series of thematic and state review papers. There are nine thematic review papers covering all the six goals including three additional papers on three other themes, namely, Teacher and Teacher Education, Management Strategies for EFA and Financing of EFA in India. These thematic review papers are further followed by a series of analytical papers covering progress of EFA in twenty seven states of India. State reviews attempt to present a quick picture of the current level of progress in each state of India assessing the magnitude of the task involved in achieving EFA goals and projecting a realistic time frame as well as strategies needed to reach the goals. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review paper has been prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments.

The review papers along with the National Report present a comprehensive and disaggregated picture of the progress made towards EFA goals in the country. The papers are coming out at a very opportune time when the Parliament is engaged in debating the legislation to make education for all children a Fundamental Right. While the thematic papers highlight state of development of education with respect to different goals of EFA, the State papers present the diversity of the situation across the country. The whole series would serve as an invaluable independent documentation on various aspects of EFA ranging from early childhood care and education to universal elementary education and adult literacy programmes using authentic data sources accompanied by a review of relevant empirical research.

The whole Project involving the National Report along with the series of thematic and state analytical review papers were conceived and executed by Prof. R.

Govinda, NUEPA who led the entire exercise and would like to thank him profusely for his leadership. Dr. Mona Sedwal who as a part of the Project Team at NUEPA contributed immensely to the whole exercise also deserves appreciation. The Team immensely benefited by the advice given by the Technical Advisory Group set up under the Chairmanship of Professor A.K. Sharma for guiding the entire exercise. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Prof. A. K. Sharma for his invaluable guidance. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by UNICEF and UNESCO.

Ved Prakash
Vice Chancellor
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Editorial Note

Indian Constitution directs the State to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14. This goal has been pursued by the country for nearly six decades through successive development plans. The last two decades have witnessed significant improvements in children's participation in schooling, accompanied by substantial increase in investments. The recent effort to raise resources for the sector through imposition of an education cess is major effort in that direction. Even though school education has traditionally remained a subject for action by State Governments, Government of India has, during the last two decades following the National Policy on Education – 1986, begun to play a leading role. This culminated in the launching of the national programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001. Despite all these efforts, the final goal of providing quality education for all has eluded the country.

Urgency of reaching the goal has been heightened in recent years due to several national and international developments, including commitments made under the Dakar Framework for Action for providing quality Education for All by 2015, which not only covers primary education but also focus on literacy goals, gender equality and quality concerns. The Dakar Framework of Action listed the following six specific goals to be achieved by all countries.

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The National Plan of Action for Education for All (2002) in India reflects this sense of urgency felt within the country by proposing to reach the targets much ahead of the international dateline. At the national level, the Constitutional Amendment in 2002 declaring education in the age group 6-14 which corresponds to the elementary education stage of schooling a fundamental right has brought the issue of universal elementary education (UEE) to the centre stage of public discourse. The country is in the process of drawing up the legislation for effective implementation of the right for

translating the constitutional provision into reality. With the progress made in recent years the goal seems to be achievable by the international time frame of 2015. But this requires systematic assessment of the various goals the present exercise is one such effort.

UNESCO has been bringing out annual review of the progress made in moving towards the goal of EFA through the Global Monitoring Report. These assessments do not reflect an encouraging picture of the Indian scene. This is an issue of serious concern for the national leadership as one sixth of the world population lives in India. With around 65% adult literacy rate, there are more around 350 million adult illiterates in the country. This should not be taken to imply that no efforts are being made to meet the challenge of EFA. Besides, the national averages do not fully reflect the diverse reality characterizing educational progress in India. In fact, it is paradoxical that while certain pockets of the country are emerging as the international hub for creating a knowledge society, certain other regions and sections of the population continue to be deprived of even basic education. It is clear that in pursuing EFA goals, not all states and regions of the country are in the same league. The variety is too wide to draw any generalization. While some states have made remarkable progress in education, practically eradicating illiteracy and achieving near universal participation of children in elementary education, several other states continue to remain far from the final goal. What is needed to progress faster in moving towards the 2015 EFA deadline in all parts of the country? This obviously demands an analytical exercise - goalwise as well as statewise.

It is with this objective in view that the present exercise was taken up to make an independent assessment of the progress achieved in different states and with respect to different EFA goals. The present series of papers constitute the outcome of such a comprehensive exercise carried out by independent experts, in collaboration with Central and State Governments. The main purpose of the exercise is to place before policy makers, planners and the civil society as a whole an analytical picture of the progress made towards EFA goals and the challenges ahead for reaching the goals in a realistic fashion.

The exercise consisted of three parts. The first part consisted of presenting an overview of progress in the country with respect to six goals highlighted in the Dakar Declaration. This was largely based on the technical guidelines for assessment prepared by UNESCO. A national report entitled "Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment: Reaching the Unreached" has been prepared and published jointly by NUEPA and Government of India.

The Second Part consists of a series of nine thematic review papers dealing with different dimensions of 'Education for All' keeping in view the Indian context and priorities. These include: (i) Early Childhood Care and Education; (ii) Universal Elementary Education; (iii) Adult Education; (iv) Towards Gender Equality in Education; (v) Education of Adolescents and Young Adults; (vi) Quality of Education; (vii) teacher and teacher education; (viii) Management Strategies for EFA and (ix) Financing of EFA. Each of these papers has been prepared by an expert or experts

in the respective area. The papers were reviewed by another independent expert and revised based on the observations.

The third part consists of analytical papers covering all states of India. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review was prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments. The state level reviews are prepared on lines similar to what was followed for preparing the national review. Each of them deals with comprehensively on all six goals of EFA specified in the Dakar Declaration.

As the Education Commission 1964-66 pointed out, the destiny of the country is being shaped in the classrooms. And, it is the teachers who hold the key position in determining the course of transaction that takes place in schools and classrooms. Thus, the status of teachers and their professional preparation needs a closer analysis in the context of EFA. However, teacher recruitment policies and their inequitable deployment in primary schools have been the subject of critical analysis in recent years. Move to induct para teachers into schools on large scale and decentralizing recruitment and deployment policies have made the situation even more complex. 'Teacher and teacher education' does not appear as an independent goal in the Dakar Declaration. Yet no one can deny the central importance of this dimension for achieving the goal of EFA. The present paper by Poonam Batra not only focuses on the position of teacher supply and their preparation to meet the increasing demand for educational facilities in the country but also examines the quality of the provisions and processes related to teachers and teacher education.

This elaborate exercise of assessing the progress in EFA should be viewed in the context of repeated assertions by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on EFA that Indian is at the risk of not making the global targets with respect to several EFA goals. The findings of the review clearly points out that the situation across the country is very diverse. While some States have registered fast progress on all fronts, some others continue to lag behind. Also in general, access to schooling has improved every where even though much remains to be done with respect to other goals of EFA. It is hoped that the various volumes brought out through the exercise would together present a realistic analysis and a disaggregated picture of the Education for All process and achievements in the country.

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This comprehensive exercise of reviewing the progress of EFA has been done through active involvement and support of a large team of experts and officials from Government of India as well as various State Governments. The exercise was carried out under the constant guidance of the members of the Technical Advisory Group under the leadership of Professor A. K. Sharma. The task could not have been completed without the commitment and support of Professor Ved Prakash, Vice Chancellor, NUEPA. Special thanks are due to Smt. Anita Kaul, Joint Secretary, MHRD, Government of India who played a central role in conceiving and implementing the whole exercise. Financial support for the exercise came from UNICEF and UNESCO; in particular, thanks are due to Mr. Samphe Lhalungpa who took personal interest in ensuring that the Project is completed smoothly. We would like to record our appreciation for the technical support and cooperation given by the NUEPA Publication Unit and for printing and publishing the volumes.

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INDIA'S EXPANDING TEACHING-LEARNING QUALITY DEFICIT

The last decade and a half has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of elementary education in India. However, research indicates that the unaccomplished task of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) is huge, both in terms of overall magnitude and enabling equity and quality. The roll-out of the nationwide Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme has set ambitious UEE goals and targets in consonance with the Dakar Framework*. The Dakar Framework recognised India's achievement in adult literacy between 1991 and 2001, yet set a modest goal of reducing adult illiteracy levels by 50 percent between 2000 and 2015. It is nevertheless unclear whether India will be able to reach this level of adult literacy given the slow decline in school drop out rates and the poor learning achievement of those who stay in the system. The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) of making elementary education a fundamental right has added further urgency to UEE goals. Yet, according to recent estimates,[†] India has a larger illiterate population than its total population in 1947.

The 86th Constitutional Amendment to make elementary education a fundamental right has brought the question of elementary education financing into sharp focus. The imposition of a two percent cess to finance elementary education and the move to universalise the national Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Programme has generated both resources and a sharp debate on prioritization of public expenditure[‡]. The expectation in some quarters that privatisation could help mobilize substantial resources for EFA has added an additional dimension to this debate. Even though education and healthcare have been seen as essential to develop the "actual ability to achieve various valuable functionings as a part of living" (Sen, 1993: 30) and to ensure human rights and social justice (UNESCO, 2002), neo-liberal strategies across the world have focused on education largely for economic progress. Scholars have argued that the dominant global approach "culminates in the progressive liberalization of trade in education services instead of progressive realization of the right to

education” (Tomasevski 2003, cited in Mayo, 2005: 153).

Among the many issues identified that are crucial to achieving UEE in India, the issue of enabling equity with quality is foremost. The UEE goal has therefore to be seen along with the goal of achieving equality in educational participation of the most marginalised. The Dakar Framework recognizes that such equality in education should be viewed in a broader framework that covers elementary and other levels of education.

While meeting basic learning needs of the children is at the heart of all educational endeavours, merely expanding the number of schools and enrolling children carry no meaning if the quality of the educational processes is not satisfactory. The National Plan of Action for EFA (Gol., MHRD, 2000) elaborates the measures being taken in India to improve the quality of education. These include mechanisms for bridging social and gender gaps in access to schooling and revitalising processes of teaching-learning.

While several factors are likely to influence the quality of education, teachers hold a key position in determining the course of transaction that takes place in schools and classrooms and therefore quality in teaching-learning and learning outcomes. The status of teachers and

their professional preparation needs a closer analysis in the context of EFA. Teacher recruitment policies and their inequitable deployment in primary schools has been the subject of critical analysis in recent years. Moves to induct para-teachers on a large scale and decentralization of recruitment and deployment policies have made the situation even more complex.

This thematic review focuses on these issues and examines the position of teacher supply and teacher preparation to meet the demand for educational facilities in India. The main focus of this review is establishing a critical understanding of the potential role of teacher education reform in achieving UEE.

The Changing Educational Context

The rapid expansion of public education services in India over the past decade and a half has also been a period of great stress on the state school system. The shift of school-going population away from state to private schools in search of elusive quality;[§] the proliferation of a sub-standard and unregulated private school sector^{**}; a decline in the quality of teacher education^{††} and the increasing informalisation of the school system with the indiscriminate increase of an under-qualified cadre of para teachers^{‡‡} have all gained momentum.

At the same time, India has witnessed a remarkable growth in democratic participation and self-governance, following the implementation of Panchayati Raj^{§§}, and numerous advances made towards the recognition of human rights of the downtrodden and marginalized groups. The past decade has also been marked by important achievements in the sphere of women's rights and special provisions to overcome regional disparities. The SSA with its emphasis on elementary education since 2001 and now the GoI's proposed scheme for secondary education^{***} holds the promise of continued leadership being provided by the Centre for State government UEE initiatives.

In pursuit of the goals of EFA, the SSA claims to have made considerable progress^{†††} in increasing access and narrowing gender and social gaps. The financial allocations and expenditures of the SSA have rapidly increased with many States contributing more than their prescribed annual shares of 25 percent. The overall enrolment currently stands at 94 percent in the 6-14 age groups. The latest GER shows a remarkable improvement from 90 percent in 2003-04 to 98 percent in 2004-05. Similarly, the NER has risen from 72 percent to 82 percent during the same period. Yet, according to an earlier UNICEF survey (1999-2000), a lower NER compared with GER indicates a high incidence of repetition

and a higher proportion of over and under-age children in various grades.

While upper primary enrolment is increasing, drop-out rates are said to be declining. The number of out-of-school children (OOSC) is claimed to have reduced from 2.5 crore in 2003 to 1.34 crore in 2005 and is currently estimated to be less than 1 crore (representing less than 7 percent of the relevant age cohorts). In certain categories, however, the gap still persists - older children in the age group of 11-14 years (9 percent compared to 6 percent OOSC in 6-10 years age group) and rural children (8 percent vis-à-vis 4 percent in urban areas). The UEE challenge in 32 districts of Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa continues to be severe. Similarly, amongst the most marginalized groups of SC, ST, minority children and the urban poor, the number of out-of-school children is still very high. Five states^{†††} account for 69 percent of the total out-of-school children. Of the 134 lakh OOSC, 31 lakh are estimated to be SC children, 17 lakh are children from the ST, and 23 lakh are from Muslim communities.

While the NSSO and other data^{§§§} have consistently revealed a pattern of exclusion of children on caste and gender grounds, especially in rural areas, recent SSA reports indicate that several states have reached a Gender Parity Index (GPI) above 90 at the primary level and a GPI of 83 at the

upper primary level. The status of gender gaps in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chandigarh and Rajasthan however, remain a matter of concern despite targeted interventions such as National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), which focus on girls in the Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB). Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal in particular, reflect a gender-caste dynamic, with figures of children out of school being the lowest for rural girls.

The expansion in the number of teachers on the other hand, has been abysmally slow compared to the number of children enrolling for education. Researchers have observed that teacher recruitment in most states remained frozen for many years, leading to sub-optimal solutions such as hiring of para-teachers to override fiscal constraint (Govinda and Josephine, 2005; Mehrotra, 2006). Scholars have also argued that “while SSA officially affirmed the State’s commitment to universal elementary education, it simultaneously threatened the quality of schooling by reducing the minimum required number of teachers in a school from three in the 1992 Programme of Action, to two” (Srivastava, 2007: 145) and by extending the provision of para

teachers to the upper primary stage of education. Slow growth in teacher supply has resulted in overcrowded classrooms with serious implications for quality in teaching-learning processes. According to estimates from 2000, teacher-pupil ratios have been as high as 83 in Bihar and 53 in West Bengal with wide rural-urban disparities indicated by a ratio of 1: 61 in rural Uttar Pradesh vs. 1: 36 in urban Uttar Pradesh (NCERT, 2005).

Limited attention to the need for teacher recruitment is evident in the proportion of single or two teacher schools which range from 60 percent in Madhya Pradesh to 79 percent in Bihar (UNICEF 1999-2000). Average figures according to SSA reports indicate a recruitment of about 6 lakh additional teachers in the first four years of the implementation of SSA thereby bringing the teacher-pupil ratio to 1: 40. While averages may project an encouraging picture, they mask significant regional disparities across and within states. The current situation reveals a dire need to rationalize the deployment of teachers in the face of the growing cadre of untrained para teachers, which continues to pose a major challenge in the task of universalizing quality elementary education.

THE UEE: UNADDRESSED CHALLENGES

There still remains a wide range of challenges in forging an appropriate trajectory for UEE in India. A study^{****} undertaken to identify factors that pose a real challenge of UEE for the poorest groups shows that "...school participation status in terms of regular attendance across many states of India is much lower than enrolment...Only about 42 per cent of children in the 6-13 age group attend school regularly in rural areas, the proportion being as low as about 28 per cent for the very poor....out-of-school children mainly comprise girls, children belonging to disadvantageous social groups such as Dalits, Scheduled Tribes (STs), Muslims, and in some areas Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The situation in urban areas is similar with 59 per cent of the children in this age group attending school regularly" (Jha and Jhingran, 2005: 287.). According to NSSO and other available data^{****}, many districts in the educationally backward states appear to have reached a period of stagnation in primary school participation rates. It has been argued that deprivation is intimately linked to and negatively relates with school participation.

The assessment of children's participation undertaken by a citizen's initiative^{****} indicates that the actual number of children in the 6-14 age group who are not in school is approximately 14 million (which appear underestimated), constituting a relatively small share of roughly 7 per cent of the 6-14 year old population. However, only around 52 per cent of the enrolled children were reported to attend school regularly. The achievement levels of those who attend school present an even more dismal picture. According to the available data, close to 35 per cent of the children in the 7-14 year age group cannot read a simple paragraph and almost 60 per cent of the children cannot read a simple story. The figures for arithmetic achievement are even more alarming. About 41 per cent of the children in the age group of 7-14 are unable to succeed in either two-digit subtraction or division.

A parallel trend is emerging for the school going populations entering the upper primary stage of education. For the third year in a row, upper primary

enrollment has increased by more than 10 percent each year from 2003 to 2006. In response to this, the share of government expenditure on education for secondary education in Indian states is also increasing. Scholars have argued that public subsidization of free government schools at the secondary level, in a situation where primary education is far from universal, has adverse consequences for equity. The allocation of government spending to secondary education including diversion of resources to aided private schools is an important factor in the fiscal squeeze on elementary education.^{§§§§}

The same line of argument has been extended to explain how under-funding of State schools provides the opportunity for the private sector to fill gaps in provisioning. Data shows that while over 90 percent of rural schools are state schools; the share of urban elementary level enrolment in government schools is much lower, ranging from 75 percent in Assam to 49 percent in Uttar Pradesh.^{*****} It has also been observed that the private sector has in fact expanded in states where the government system is most dysfunctional. For instance, the private sector is very large in states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan which also have the largest number of out of school children. Studies indicate that Uttar Pradesh has the second highest

distribution of private school enrolments in elementary education in the country at 57 percent (Panchamukhi and Mehrotra, 2005). All these point to a continuous policy failure and misapplication of public resources with continuing impact on quality – in spite of considerable buoyancy in Government of India allocation for Elementary Education.

Quality: a Pre-requisite for Achieving UEE

While there is increasing recognition of the crucial role of the state as provider,^{††††} concerns about quality and relevance of education continue to remain unaddressed. As expressed in Action Aid review (Action Aid, 2002: 9), “a key determinant of demand for primary education is not so much the absence of schools but the fact that those which do exist do not function properly. In some cases schools have become the worst violators of children’s rights, containing, suppressing, intimidating and silencing children.”^{†††††} It is becoming more than evident that even though the improvement of infrastructure and access, provision of mid-day meals and an emphasis on a school curriculum that is ‘child-centered’ are critical elements of school reform, a concerted focus on quality with its wider individual and social dimensions is a pre-requisite for achieving UEE.

Three key factors broadly explain the failure to address quality concerns in education. The first factor is the increasing reliance on a 'two-tier' system of elementary education. Critics have argued how "no other country in the world, including poor developing countries has legally institutionalised a two-tier system to guarantee a child's right to education. Yet in India, these 'transitional' schools, along with 'regular' schools, form part of the 'approved' schools in the draft Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2004" (Balagopalan, 2005: 96). Although a large number of Education Guarantee Schools (EGS) and Alternative Innovative Schools (AIE) have been 'mainstreamed' giving an opportunity to many children to study in a 'regular' school, the functioning of these schools remains largely within the frame of a system that is unaccountable and unregulated. As observed by Jha (2007:132) "...what were non-formal arrangements earlier are formal arrangements now, parallel and inferior tracks within the public education system for the poor and the disadvantaged."

The second factor is the indiscriminate appointment of para-teachers across several states. It has been argued that the massive increase in the recruitment

of para-teachers has received impetus with the SSA as states are eligible to seek central assistance (Govinda and Josephine, 2005). The availability of cheap policy options has led states to either completely give up recruiting regular teachers (Madhya Pradesh) or replace pre-service programmes of teacher education with short-term in-service training (Bihar). Both policy measures continue to be justified on grounds of state fiscal deficit and constraints. However, with a substantive increase in the allocation of central government resources to the SSA, along with an educational cess, there is every possibility to move towards a series of long-term sustainable solutions to address issues of educational quality.

Understanding Quality Education

Quality education is centered on a quality curriculum, improving the teaching-learning environment in the classroom to bring every child into the fold of education, appropriate and adequate preparation of and incentives for teachers, a positive and an inclusive learning milieu for children (including proper nutrition), a psychologically safe, conducive and pedagogically sound environment along with family and social support. This is a challenge even for some of the best private schools in metropolitan cities. The missing link that

connects all these elements is the school teacher (Batra, 2005).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 with its focus on the concerns of the learner and the teacher provides a renewed opportunity to intervene in the otherwise neglected sector of teacher education. Connecting knowledge to life outside the school and enriching the curriculum by making it less textbook-centered are two important concerns of the NCF. In order to help children move away from rote learning, teachers will need to be prepared to give children the opportunity to derive meaning from what they read, see, hear and experience. This is possible only when teachers are able to play an active role in the design of learning material, and have the knowledge and skills to organize meaningful learning experiences and to use evaluation as a means to improve their own performance and children's learning. For this to happen, the teacher needs several support mechanisms, including a pool of learning resources to choose from, the skills to identify developmentally appropriate text materials, a critical and analytic mind and the opportunity to engage children with learning resources outside the classroom^{§§§§§}.

The rapid expansion of ICT in India, the development of an exclusive satellite

system (EDUSAT) to enable educational communication and the increasing use of methods such as tele-video-conferencing to network teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers are indications of revolutionary new opportunities. The real challenge lying ahead is to recognize and enhance the role of teachers in shaping the social transformation India is witnessing.

The Teacher: the missing link in delivering educational quality

Trade union organizations representing teachers and NGOs, while preparing for the Dakar conference (2000), had identified the 'failure to involve teachers in improving the quality of education' as a major factor that explained the failure to meet Jomtien (1990) targets (UNESCO (2001) cited in Marjorie Mayo, 2005: 159). Despite this, limited attention has been given post-Dakar, in India, towards the building of state, district and local institutional capacity to educate teachers and to provide academic leadership to support school reform. This has resulted in much of the available public resources being spent on 'motivating' poorly qualified and poorly equipped teachers through piecemeal in-service training without addressing the real needs of millions of classroom practitioners.

The recent spurt of interest and involvement of civil society and university academia in school curriculum via the NCF effort has created a renewed interest in an education that can empower children, their parents, and communities to change their lives in a way and at a pace that is meaningful to them. Yet the situation is “nuanced and complex, with most schoolteachers across the country being under-trained, mis-qualified, under-compensated, de-motivated instruments of a mechanical system of education that was initially conceived as a support to a colonial regime. Even today this system often prefers to strengthen rather than question the status quo on questions of caste, community and gender asymmetry” (Batra, 2005: 4347).

The primary challenges are to continue the momentum created by the provisioning of physical and social access to schooling; to open up the ‘space’ for dialogue to meet the challenges of translating many of the ideas espoused in the NCF, 2005 into reality; to mobilize communities to provide the appropriate social and psychological environment for children to learn; to provide the appropriate institutional environment and incentives for teachers to function as professionals and to reestablish the agency of

teachers through a concerted effort at revamping programmes of teacher education. This last intervention is the most critical component of reform of Indian public education, without which very little further progress can be made (Batra, 2005).

While on the surface there appears to be a policy consensus on these questions, there continues to be a tension between contemporary policy imperatives and the lived reality of school education in India. Issues of teacher training, new curricula and the (re)definition of knowledge, funding and school management, the system of inspection and learner assessment, and notions of accountability to the customer and free choice, which are implicit in proposals such as the ‘voucher system’, are continuing areas of contention and conflict. Contradictions between a formal commitment to quality education as a fundamental right and neo-liberal policies that promote marketisation of educational services have become pronounced. Issues of equality and social justice are being increasingly relegated to the periphery of contemporary educational priorities^{*****}. The urgent need to meet EFA targets has led to the gross neglect of the state schools, and an implicit silent support for the proliferation of private low fee paying schools (Leclercq, 2007).

Scholars have argued that “...increased marketisation and privatization targeted to groups with historically low participation rates in schooling necessitate examination in the context of EFA and quality provision, because they question the State’s fundamental responsibility of upholding children’s universal right to education” (Srivastava,

2007: 156). In this context systematic quality comparisons between state and the Low Fee Paying (LFP) schools⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ are crucial to understanding the real impact of EFA on closing social and gender gaps. The following section discusses how a gross neglect of Teacher Education has further accentuated the problem.

TEACHER AGENCY: UNARTICULATED AND UNADDRESSED CONCERN

The agency of the teacher, which ties together an appropriate school curriculum and an adequate teaching-learning environment, continues to be an unarticulated concern throughout the sector. This denial of the critical role of the teacher is reflected in recent developments in educational reform that have fostered the deployment of para-teachers who lack both the essential qualification and training to function as professional practitioners.†††††

Large scale programmes of intervention of the Central and State Governments had already set the trend, since the 1990s of relying on short-term training for teachers in service with a pretended deafness towards the need to revitalize pre-service teacher education.

Many states that continue to hold track records of poor achievement levels, high drop-out rates and out of school children have virtually abandoned the pre-service education of teachers as a necessary pre-requisite for becoming a school teacher. Those who advocate the need to focus on training teachers at the in-service level tend to view

teachers as mere implementers of a given curriculum. Even the NCF, 2005 projects school teachers "...as passive agents of the State who are expected to be 'persuaded and trained' to magically translate the vision of the NCF 2005 in schools...The NCF offers limited direction on how teachers could be prepared to include, excluded social narratives, experiences and voices and make them available in the classroom and more important to respond and resist attempts of short-term ideological persuasions of educational policy makers to intervene in the teaching-learning process^{§§§§§§}."

Teaching and Teacher Identity

There exists a wide variation in the status of teachers and the need for teachers at different levels of school education across the country. It is important to develop a broad framework that can address crucial issues common to teacher education across different levels with a view to enable states to respond to needs specific to their contexts. Moreover, diversity in the institutional arrangements for

elementary education in terms of alternative schools, government and private schools places its own demands and will also need to be addressed. Diversity also exists in the set of agencies that conduct teacher education programmes. These include state institutions, university-based institutions and private institutions that have grown in numbers in the recent past, contributing to the effective commercialization of teacher education. These need to be examined within the provisions of the NCTE Act.

School teaching in India has declined to the status of a least favoured profession over the last three decades. It has largely become a last resort of educated unemployed youth, part-time business people and young women seeking to find a part-time socially acceptable profession*****. Yet, the massive demand for teachers in both government and private schools almost guarantees a job to most participants of the better teacher education programmes. Government and non-government organisation-led educational school reforms have paid little attention to this reality and continue their focus on improving access to schooling and building a more convivial teaching-learning environment. In this context, it would be necessary to develop an informed understanding of who comes to be a school teacher at the elementary and secondary levels through the development of profiles of

the existing cadre of school teachers, their qualifications and training status.

While there is general paucity of research in this area, a few scholars have engaged with the subject since the late 1960s. For instance, Shukla (1968, quoted in Kale, 1970: 375) observed that “the teacher is not viewed as a scholar or an intellectual. Most of the student-teachers at training colleges hold bachelor's degrees with a third class. They are seen, therefore, as mediocre persons with college education but without any scholastic distinction, who, for want of another career, become teachers.” Kale (1970) has argued how a number of traditional aspects of the *Guru* image remain a significant part of the ‘contemporary teacher's ideology and claims’ even amongst those who regard themselves as ‘professionals’. While this image may be less persistent amongst many of the young teachers today, the contemporary Indian school teacher, as in colonial times, remains a ‘meek dictator’, with little decisive control over curricular and pedagogic matters. Denied the opportunity to exercise her educational judgment regarding a child's progress, (Dyer, 2001) teachers are perceived as ‘homogenous categories’ existing ‘in isolation of a socio-political context’, who need to be ‘trained and persuaded’ rather than empowered (Batra, 2005).

Feminist critique of the gendered roles of ‘teacher professionals’ reveals a

consonance between the nature of tasks associated with primary school teaching and ‘feminine’ qualities. “Women teachers are still constrained by what Arnot (1982) identified almost two decades ago as ‘dominated gender codes’ that are embedded in human interaction...What has also become clear is the manner in which an acceptance of the gender order as natural is manifest in, and aggravated by (such) mainstream conceptions in the field of teaching” and the “gendered nature of teacher education reform” (Dillabough, 1999: 390-391). The NCERT position paper on Gender (2006: 46) observes the limited opportunity provided in teacher training programmes for developing reflective practitioners and laments how “teachers and teacher educators who have never had the space or training to systematically think about the formation of their own identity will themselves be

unable to be transformed.”

Teacher Recruitment: a matter of gross neglect

The table below has been generated using the Census 2001 and 2006 figures and adjusted with the initial results of the NCERT 7th Educational Survey of 2002. Data indicates a strong skew in the supply of teachers at both the elementary and secondary stage of education. While 47 percent of teachers cater to 54 percent of the student population in rural elementary schools, 19 percent of the secondary teachers cater to a rural secondary school share of 19 percent. Thus, while there is apparent parity between the supply and demand for teachers within rural secondary schools, this is not so for elementary schools. There is an acute under supply of teachers for elementary schools in rural areas.

ALL INDIA SKEW IN TEACHERS vs. STUDENTS (2002)			
<i>Stage</i>	Rural	Urban	All
Teachers			
Elementary	47%	16%	63%
Secondary	19%	18%	37%
All	66%	34%	100%
Students			
Elementary	54%	19%	73%
Secondary	19%	08%	27%
All	73%	27%	100%
<i>Source: Census, 2001 & 2006 adjusted & initial results NCERT 7th Educational Survey 2005.</i>			

Figures for urban schools present a different picture. While there is a short supply of elementary level school teachers even in urban areas, there is a significant amount of over supply of secondary school teachers. 18 percent of all teachers cater to a secondary school going urban population of a mere 8 percent. There appears to be an over-supply of ~200 percent of secondary level teachers to urban schools. However, variations across states would be critical to examine to arrive at a more precise understanding of the situation and formulate appropriate policy responses.

Assuming that one school has one section for each of the five primary classes, only a meager 15 percent schools in India have either an adequate number of teachers, i.e. one for each of the primary classes (6 percent schools), four teachers (9 percent), three teachers (17 percent) for four or five classes or more than five teachers (9 percent schools) which may reflect a larger number of sections in each of the primary classes rather than more than one teacher per class. About 44 percent of primary schools have only two teachers to cater to five of the primary classes. A total of 60 percent of schools have either no teachers in school (1 percent) or merely one (15 percent) or two (44 percent) teachers⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺. DISE data (NIEPA, 2004) estimates a figure of 19 percent

single teacher schools catering to a total of 12 percent of the total enrolment in primary classes. Statistics projected by NIEPA (2006⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺) reveals that “only about half (the schools) had more than two teachers or two classrooms. Only 40% of primary school teachers were graduates and 30% had not even completed Higher Secondary” (cited in Planning Commission, 2006: 58).

While the teacher- pupil ratio at the national level is reported to be 1:42 at the primary level and 1:34 at the upper primary level, there are vast variations across states. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and West Bengal report a pupil-teacher ratio of 1:83, 1:55, 1:59 and 1:53 at the primary level respectively. While in the case of Bihar and Jharkhand the teacher-pupil ratio improves only at the secondary and senior secondary levels, West Bengal continues to have a teacher-pupil ratio of 50 and above for each higher level of school education. In each case however, the pupil-teacher ratios indicate a wide disparity between rural and urban provisioning of teachers. Data reported by UNICEF (1999-2000)^{§§§§§§} of the most educationally challenged states reveal a considerable difference in the provision of teachers in rural and urban areas, with urban schools indicating a relatively larger share of teachers. Not only do figures indicate wide rural-urban disparities at the macro level but on scrutiny, micro

level data reveals that the most marginalized communities reflected in specific blocks indicate much higher percentage of single teacher schools as compared to a well developed block within the same district (Rana, 2006).

Large class sizes continue to impede the achievement of EFA goals. SSA should ensure that overly large class sizes become a time-bound solution (ILO-UNESCO, 2007).

NCTE APPROVED TEACHER TRAINING & TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (2006)				
<i>Stage</i>	<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Approved Seats</i>	<i>% Institutions</i>	<i>% Seats</i>
ECE	150	7,428	02%	01%
Elementary	3,148	191,131	43%	34%
Secondary	3,692	364,028	51%	64%
Potential 'Teacher Educators'	295	8,121	04%	01%
Total	7,285	570,708	100%	100%
<i>Source: NCTE Website, assessed in June, 2007</i>				

The table above, generated from data drawn from the NCTE website indicates that there are a total of 7,300 teacher training institutes approved by NCTE. Of these, 51 percent are engaged with the training of secondary school teachers and 43 percent train elementary level school teachers. The total number of seats in the 556 DIETs is approximately 37,000 which is a mere 6 percent of the total number of seats in all teacher training institutes (5.7 lakh) put together. Of the total of 5.7 lakh seats for pre-service teacher education that these

institutes have, 3.64 (64 percent) are for the training of secondary level teachers and 1.91 (34 percent) for the elementary level, compared to 27 percent of the students belonging to the secondary level and 73 percent to the primary level. The rest two percent offer courses to prepare Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers (1 percent) and teacher educators (1 percent).

According to estimates based on projected child populations, approximately 4 lakh teachers are

required per year for a school-going population between the ages of 6-18 years^{*****}. This is a conservative estimate keeping in mind the declining child population as per Census projections (Census, 2001). Estimates in the CAGE Report (2005) are close to this estimate of 6 lakhs. According to these estimates, there is need to train an incremental of 2.4 – 2.7 lakh *new* teachers at the *elementary* level and 0.9 – 1.2 lakh *new* teachers at the *secondary* level each year. NCTE has approved 1.9 lakh elementary level seats. Of these a mere 0.4 lakh are in the DIETs. This implies that mushrooming sub-standard teacher training institutes are expected to fill the unfilled demand of 1.5 lakh (79 percent) elementary school teachers. Another important fact is that only 0.2 lakh of the 3.7 lakh NCTE secondary level seats are university based.

Scaling the institutional capacity for pre-service teacher education is a huge task which if neglected further is bound to magnify existing challenges of UEE, making it that much more difficult to achieve even a semblance of quality education for the growing youth of India.

Data across states indicates that merely six states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Maharashtra together make

up 60 percent of the total requirement of teachers in India. Over the past half a decade about 5.9 lakh teachers have been appointed against a sanction on SSA of 7.76 lakhs. This has helped in improving average PTRs. The continued existence of single teacher schools and schools with very high PTR (83:1) however, remains a cause for concern. According to SSA figures, many States have not yet rationalised teacher placements. It is possible for instance, that newly appointed teachers recruited for specific schools with high PTRs are in fact getting transferred to urban and already privileged areas instead of reaching the unreached.

While part of the solution to the challenge of teacher deficits in many areas may lie in teacher rationalization and redeployment, recruitment and financial support to teachers is still a serious issue, especially in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where PTRs are high. Many states are continuing to appoint untrained and unqualified teachers and arrange for their training through varied modalities including distance education courses. This is the single most critical factor contributing to the severe decline in quality education. It is therefore essential to undertake a national evaluation of training programmes to get a clearer picture of existing gaps in quality.

CENTRALITY OF TEACHERS: A POLICY IMPERATIVE

Recognition of the need to prepare professionally qualified school teachers to enable quality education is not new. It has been articulated in various government reports and policy documents since the 1960s. Emphasising the crucial link between Universities and schools, the Kothari Commission (Gol.,1964-66: 622), recommended that teacher education be "...brought into the mainstream of the academic life of the Universities on the one hand and of school life and educational developments on the other." Pointing to the need to view the teacher as central to the process of change in school education, the Chattopadhyaya Commission (1983-85: 52, 63) noted, "...if school teachers are expected to bring about a revolution in their approach to teaching...that same revolution must precede and find a place in the College of Education..." what teachers need most "...is a change in the climate of schools, an atmosphere conducive to educational research and enquiry..." Even within the University system where most secondary teacher education takes place in Departments of Education, the training of teachers

remains an activity isolated from research. This precludes the larger academic debates on equity, gender and community; and their impact on curriculum and pedagogy to enter into the day-to-day discourse of teacher educators.

Despite repeated reiteration of the need to strengthen the active 'agency' of the teacher in policy documents and Commission reports over the last 30 years, teachers are still viewed as passive state agents; and teacher education institutes continue to exist as insular organizations systemically disengaged from centres of higher learning and research.

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education

Development and strengthening of teacher education institutions is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺ launched under the Seventh Plan as a sequel to the recommendations of the National Policy of Education (1986). The scheme seeks to improve the quality of teacher education with the

establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs); upgradation of select Secondary Teacher Education Institutions into Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs); establishing Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASEs) and strengthening SCERTs. During the VII, VIII, and IX Five Year Plans Central assistance was provided on a 50:50 basis between Centre and States, to DIETs, CTEs, IASEs and SCERTs. Under the X Plan almost all components of the scheme were implemented with 100 percent central government funding as a special case.

From the VII to the X Plan, 556 DIETs, 124 CTEs, 31 IASEs and 33 SCERTs and SIEs were sanctioned. Evaluation studies of DIETs, SCERTs, CTEs and IASEs have indicated that they have not realised the objectives for which most of them were upgraded and strengthened. Though the X Plan proposed to lay high emphasis on teacher education, the main focus of action has been on expanding facilities for the in-service training of teachers. Even though the National Policy on Education (1986/92) viewed pre-service and in-service training as inseparable processes, the education of teachers has not been a continuous process.

While the CTEs, IASEs, DIETs, SCERTs and now BRCs and CRCs are laudable efforts towards the institutionalisation of the system of

training and supporting elementary teachers, a clear vision and strategy to ensure relevant and need-based education for practicing teachers is yet to be articulated. It is being increasingly recognized that 'generic training packages' delivered through these institutions are not likely to meet the rapidly changing needs of primary school teachers and children. The practice and growth of in-service models of training are worth examining in order to understand why this is so.

In-service Teacher Education

Following the NPE 1986, in-service teacher education received Gol support to establish Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE) in select University Departments of Education and DIETs with a view to provide space for in-service courses for high school and elementary teachers. The DIETs had the additional mandate to work towards universalising and renewing elementary education through supporting innovation and strengthening field activity. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP, 1995-2003) instituted resource centres at the block and cluster level across the country with the explicit mandate to provide in-service training to primary school teachers in child-centred pedagogic methods and to provide on-site support to teachers. The attempt was to shift away from the idea of subject inspectors and inspectors of

schools towards an academic resource for the continuing professional development of teachers.

The SSA has also placed emphasis on continuous in-service teacher education requiring each teacher to receive 20 days of training every year. Teachers' involvement in textbook preparation and in the preparation of training modules has grown over the years. Teachers themselves have opportunities to work in Block and Cluster centres as well as to contribute to training as resource persons. Several important networks of teachers, such as the KSSP, BGVS, BJVJ, TNSF have contributed to their own professional development as well as directly to the benefit of children in and outside school. NGO initiatives such as the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) in Madhya Pradesh, the Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi of Uttaranchal, BVIER, Pune, and PRISM of the Homi Bhabha Centre in Mumbai, have developed and implemented models of teacher professional development and support in ways that attempt to impact the classroom directly.

On the whole, the SSA has concentrated on in-service and induction training with pre-service training not being included in its mandate. It has also had to deal with a wide diversity in the teacher cadre: regular teachers, para-teachers and contract teachers. Training provisions

under the SSA provide a 20 day in-service training, 30 day induction training and 60 day training for untrained teachers. Training under SSA, though conducted at the Block level, in most cases are executed via a standardised package developed at the state level.

It needs to be seen to what extent these packages are sensitive to local conditions in which teachers actually work, such as multi-grade situations, diverse entry levels and diverse language backgrounds. There is therefore a need to take a critical look at the teacher training programmes, including their content, duration, frequency, method of delivery and linkage with real classroom transactions and provision for hands-on experience. There is a growing concern that issues of quality and equity, teacher perceptions and attitudes towards children from diverse communities need to be addressed clearly in teacher training modules and programmes.

The SSA: Quality sans the Teacher

While a concerted effort has been made by the SSA to improve the provision and quality of school facilities and teaching-learning materials, little attention has been paid to pre-service teacher education. It is evident that learning levels will not significantly improve unless teachers themselves have mastered the knowledge-base and skills

that their students are expected to master by the end of five years of primary schooling.

Evidence from some states, as reported in the Joint Review Mission Reports (DPEP, 2004) has confirmed the suspicion that primary school teachers themselves do not have the basic knowledge-base and understanding that their students are expected to acquire. A study of the SSKs in Kolkata found that teachers regard "...the training as a space in which it was difficult to bring up the reality of their teaching environments because they were discursively positioned within it as individuals without adequate academic and teaching skills. The training programme constructed their primary identity as members of the 'community' other than as teachers and unsurprisingly, the transformation that the training programme comprised placed all intellectual agency in the hands of the trainers." (Balagopalan, 2005: 90)

The current hiring in large numbers of para-teachers, with low and diluted formal qualifications, can only add to this and further augment the problem arising out of a popular belief that primary teachers need not have a knowledge-base beyond the levels that they are expected to teach. This is one factor that has significantly contributed to the declining standards of government schools. Scholars have

even argued that "the neo-liberal (Indian) state has ingeniously distanced itself from this decline through discursively shifting the blame onto tenured teachers... (and) government teachers have come to embody the non-functioning of an entire system, thereby making self-evident (and even legitimate) the need for a new set of disciplinary mechanisms to secure the commitment of teachers" (Balagopalan, 2005: 91). This finds an echo in the current policy discourse of 'teacher absenteeism' and the more recent MHRD-UNICEF initiative of formulating 'standards for teacher performance' through ADEPTS.++++++

With heavy reliance on the model of short-term in-service training under the SSA, States with a very high PTR (Bihar, UP, Jharkhand and West Bengal) indicate a rate of over 90-95 percent of teachers as trained on paper. These are also the states where participation rates are poor and achievement levels of children are below average, reflecting a visible gender-caste dynamic. While West Bengal indicates that 67 percent of its primary teachers are trained, it is well known that West Bengal has persisted in keeping their pre-service training for the duration of only one year when the NCTE norms and the practice all over the country is duration of two years after +2. More recently, West Bengal has managed to achieve an amendment of the NCTE Act in order to accommodate

the recognition of a one year pre-service programme instead of the earlier NCTE norm of two years.

Surprisingly 95 percent of Bihar's primary school teachers are trained on paper even though the State Government has abandoned its pre-service training programme in the DIETs, in favour of an in-service programme for para-teachers. Bihar has recruited about one lakh para-teachers at the primary level, thus making the task of providing quality education even more complex with a cadre of under-qualified and untrained teachers. Even though Madhya Pradesh has no official figures of para-teachers as all its EGS schools have been accorded a formal status, only 65 percent of its teachers are trained as per the NCERT 7th Survey.

The paradox is now complete - many educationally challenged states have achieved impressive targets of training up to 95 percent of their teachers, yet, continue to struggle with poor participation rates and low levels of learning!

Teacher Recruitment: meeting targets through sub-optimal interventions

Appointments of teachers under the SSA are mostly on a contract basis, often at the village/panchayat or block level. Some states have formulated

policies to provide professional qualifications to newly recruited teachers so as to satisfy NCTE requirements. In many states recruitments are made only for a period of one year to be renewed each year. In such a situation it is not possible to implement programmes for upgradation of teachers' qualifications. This is a serious issue, since it means that these states will continue to have teachers without any pre-service training and no significant training during their period of service. In the absence of a clear policy perspective and measures to affect the arrest of the swelling number of para teachers at both the primary and upper primary levels, this 'two-tier' system is in effect institutionalizing inequities. Quick-fix solutions of achieving targets through crash training of teachers are eroding the very possibility of revitalizing the state school system to provide quality education. The SSA needs to take a more pro-active stand on this matter, to ensure that all newly recruited teachers have undergone appropriate training and have the required professional qualifications.

A recent ILO-UNESCO Report (2007: 12) on the status of teaching personnel noted that "many governments in developing countries have responded to shortages of teachers by adopting short-term, finance-driven measures relying heavily on increasing class sizes or engaging unqualified or poorly qualified teachers on a short-term contractual

basis. The recruitment of such unqualified personnel as teachers ... has now become a more persistent and widespread practice.” In a study in West Bengal, Tapas Majumdar (2006: 276) comments that in Sishu Shiksha Kendra (SSKs) “Protagonists claim that that tens of thousands of dedicated workers are prepared to teach at these salaries, and that many who have already joined the SSKs are in fact teaching the normal primary level courses very adequately” but he fears that “the reliance on SSKs should not reduce the recognition of the urgency of reforming and enhancing the main avenue of primary education, viz., primary schools.” Debates on the role of Alternative Schooling in promoting EFA goals remain unresolved. However, scholars have asserted how adopting such low-cost strategies is likely to lead to ‘rapid weakening and general dismantling of the structure of primary education’ (Kumar, 2001) and is likely to ‘seriously hamper the already poor quality of elementary education’ (Rani, 2006).

With the recruitment of para-teachers continuing unabated, there will soon be a situation where the number of schools with a para-teacher cadre will be more than trained teachers in the crucial educationally challenged States. It is not a mere coincidence that the largest number of para-teachers is in states with a high requirement of teachers, a high rate of out-of-school children, low participation rates and achievement

levels. While on the one hand there is indiscriminate increase in the appointment of para-teachers, there is a parallel concern about the professional competence of teachers, their knowledge-base and pedagogic skills. With the increasing state reliance on para-teachers, “investment in improving the capacity of teachers and organizing continuous resource support...has taken a back seat” (Ramachandran, 2003: 967). Moreover, this trend “has diluted the identity of a teacher as a professional and has led to considerable erosion in the faith of agency of the teacher in bringing about change...” (Batra, 2005: 4352) and an acceptance of the scheme of para-teachers amounts to an evasion of State responsibility of building a strong cadre of qualified teachers” (Pandey, 2006).

It is evident that the short term training of teachers through crash courses under the SSA has proved to be dysfunctional. States that boast of having achieved targets of training teachers up to 95 percent may have solved the problem on paper but ground realities tell a different story. Justifying the mass recruitment of para-teachers is ostensibly an economically viable option that holds the promise of providing quality education, without substantial investment on teacher training is well orchestrated subterfuge. This is borne out by the fact that States who have not compromised on either diluting the qualifications of their teachers or their

salaries indicate far better learning achievement levels^{§§§§§§§§§§}. On the other hand, poor performance of children from marginalised communities, characteristic of states with a large number of para-teachers, continue to be attributed to learners rather than to the gross neglect of teacher professional development – a classic case of blaming the victim.

Institutionalising Educational Inequity and Exclusion

Declining school standards, especially where marginalized communities are concerned, have prompted policy measures that threaten to deepen inequities rather than bridge them. For instance, high rates of failure in school mathematics and science of students from disadvantaged groups such as SC, ST, OBC and Muslim communities has prompted proposals on making these subjects optional at the secondary stage to help more students pass. Making mathematics optional at the secondary stage was discussed recently by the Maharashtra Board of Secondary Education.

The National Commission for Minority Education has suggested making both mathematics and science optional in Class X. While there is a critical need to review what is taught and evaluated at the secondary stage, piecemeal measures to make subjects optional to help, for example, more Scheduled

Caste students pass are not the solution to a colossal school failure. Such measures will only reinforce existing negative attitudes towards the already marginalized. “Instead we need to argue that if Scheduled Caste, Muslim and Scheduled Tribe students are provided with competent teachers and schools that function, they are as capable of excelling in these ‘difficult’ subjects as any other group of students” (Kurrien, 2007). What we need is a cadre of professionally qualified school teachers and the means to build it.

The NCF, 2005 attempts to project a critical role for the teacher, particularly at the primary stage, which goes far beyond an exclusive reliance on textbooks. This needs to be addressed through an appropriate redesign of training programmes for in-service teachers. There is also the need to view the provision for the education of teachers as connected: pre-service training, induction training, in-service training and on-site cluster level training needs to be envisioned as a continuum. The most appropriate academic support can come at the cluster level where the classroom concerns of teachers can be appropriately addressed. The capacities of these structures need to be built for productive peer interaction among teachers.

On the recommendation of the SSA Joint Review Mission Reports, most States have expressed the need for a

review of the impact of their teacher training programmes. In several States and UTs, the 20-day training is being implemented in a deeply ritualised manner. Each year, 20-25 lakh teachers receive 10-20 days of in-service training. According to SSA reports, in 2005-06, 3.53 lakh teachers received induction training against a target of 6.36 lakh. This is no mean achievement. It has however been observed that the duration of induction training programmes is also often less than the prescribed 30 days.

It is important to recognize that an annual training programme cannot bring about a change in the classroom teaching process unless it is followed up with consistent academic support. For instance, teacher competence at the upper primary level to teach Mathematics, Science and English need to be addressed as a matter of priority. Training needs to become more differentiated to be able to address identified needs and expressed concerns of teachers. Issues of multi-grade classrooms, language and cultural diversity and teacher perspective and attitudes need to find place in the training agenda based on specific conditions. It is well known that girls, Scheduled Caste and tribal children often face discrimination within the classroom. Several studies have indicated the deleterious effects of caste and community stereotypes (Anitha, 2000; Nambissan, 2007). Scholars have

also argued how pedagogical interactions in the classroom are mediated by texts and teachers who interpret these texts, giving it nuanced meanings that reinforce stereotypes (Kumar, 1989; Sarangapani, 2003; Batra, 2005).

The common argument stated in favour of para-teachers is one of enabling a closer bonding between the teacher and children if the teacher is from within the same community. DPEP studies (1999) have however revealed how teachers from within the same community are not necessarily unbiased towards children in terms of gender and caste. For instance, in one village it was observed that in spite of being aware of social discrimination, para-teachers tended to reflect gender and caste stereotypes in their day-to-day practice. Teacher training programmes need to include in their content and pedagogy a stronger focus on equity issues and the needs of the most vulnerable children if at all we wish to bring them into the fold of education.

Convergence of quality initiatives under the SSA need to encourage, enable and empower the teacher to be able to exercise her role in steering children's learning. Enabling teachers to concentrate on their pedagogic responsibilities by minimizing their involvement in activities outside their sphere through appropriate policy stipulations would be critical. Ensuring

enabling conditions for teachers with an appropriate pupil teacher ratio, availability of learning resources, supplementary reading material, professional forums and space for group and individual activities is essential and integral to the notion of quality education.

Given the expected spurt in enrolment in the transition of UEE to the upper primary stage and the increasing focus on universalizing secondary education, the upgrading of school facilities, provision of teaching-learning resources and the availability of professionally qualified teachers needs to be addressed simultaneously. Issues of quality improvement will also need to include revision of curriculum, training of teachers, regular academic support and learner assessment which may be considerably different from that of the primary stage. These need to be addressed in the design of interventions and capacity building of academic and administrative personnel, if the goals of EFA are to be met within the stipulated targets.

Developing a Professional Cadre of Elementary Teacher Educators

On the recommendations of the Secondary Education Commission 1952-53, only teacher training institutes that trained future secondary school teachers got affiliated to universities. As observed by Sharma (2000: 3771), "...in this institutional framework, the paucity

of research in elementary education should hardly come as a surprise: for elementary teacher training institutes are not linked to universities and other research centres." It is further argued that this situation is "...aggravated by the fact that the academic faculty in DIETs in many states (are) simply secondary school teachers 'posted' to these institutes. They were selected neither for their interest in elementary education, nor for their skill as teacher educators."

Currently estimated to be about 556 across the country, DIETs are typically deprived of any systemic mechanisms for professional growth and development. The already under-staffed faculty of DIETs struggle in isolation, to respond to the needs of elementary education. Primarily trained in secondary education they have a less than desirable grasp of the pedagogic and curriculum concerns of elementary level school children. Recruitment policies, norms and procedures for the DIETs, largely based on promotional criteria for secondary school teachers further accentuate this problem. Postings based on routine government transfer procedures result in demotivated teacher educators who are usually bereft of the knowledge and professional skills required of a primary educator. The X Plan Mid-Term Review has drawn attention to several gaps, including the absence of a specialised cadre of teacher educators, the low

academic profile and academic capacity of current faculty across states and the typical intellectual isolation of DIET faculty from research and academic community due to the absence of linkages with institutes of higher education (Planning Commission, 2004).

Expansion of the elementary education system has resulted in an arbitrary increase in the student intake for pre-service teacher education courses. In many DIETs the annual intake of DED students was doubled without enhancement of faculty strength. The problem has been compounded with the mass-scale recruitment of para-teachers in many states. Several states have replaced the pre-service programmes by in-service programmes to train para teachers, thereby 'institutionalizing' the decline of quality education in the concerned states. There has been a massive increase in the number of private teacher training institutions creating an imbalance in favour of urban areas in the spread of teacher training facilities. This has adversely affected access of marginalized groups to teacher education in the relatively more rural and remote areas.

DIETs as institutions have never been integrated into large-scale government intervention programmes such as the DPEP. SSA with its emphasis on quality provides the space to work closely with the DIETs. This is however largely

limited to mechanical measures such as providing finances to BRCs and CRCs through DIETs. The overall thrust on teacher education, which is the key to achieving universal quality elementary education, needs to be made more central in the SSA. For this, the DIET needs to be viewed as a key institution for long-term sustainability. (NIAS, 2007).

The current institutional design of the DIET visualizes multiple tasks with different foci for its faculty. This has led DIETs in multiple directions with a lack of concerted focus. A core area of strength of the DIET is teacher professional development, both pre-service and in-service. These functions have to be brought together to create a mechanism of overall support to teacher practitioners. Renewal of elementary schools can be achieved through a concerted effort at linking in-service training with on-site support rather than through discrete one-time programmes of school intervention based on testing achievement levels of children. Other academic solutions include providing teacher fellowships, faculty exchange and attachments with other institutions within or outside the district.

However, building institutional capacity of DIETs remains a major challenge in the task of achieving UEE. Lack of coordination between multiple authorities such as the SCERT, DIETs, SSA, NCTE, CTEs and Universities

often lead to a clash of norms, leaving many crucial needs unaddressed. Case studies of DIETs indicate a need for a sharper conceptualization of institutional purpose and renewal; the need to recognise the specialized nature of elementary teaching and teacher education; the need to reform recruitment policies and procedures and the need to provide for continuous professional development of teacher educators (Dyer, 2004). Scholars have argued that genuine decentralization of teacher education and the translation of the DIET idea into successful practice can only happen if a greater focus on elementary education in universities would root the required knowledge and professional expertise among teacher educators and teachers (Dyer, 2004; Sharma, 2000).

The major recommendations of the X Plan Mid-Term Review were to establish a separate cadre of teacher educators with university-based designations in SCERT, CTEs and DIETs; modify policy guidelines to enable direct recruitment of teacher educators and fill vacant teacher educator posts across the state and district institutions in a time-bound manner as a matter of priority. It was also recommended that SCERTs and DIETs need to be restructured to enable hands-on training of school teachers and other practitioners such as the Block and Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators.

Networking and coordination mechanisms for national and state level teacher education institutes also need to be established along with professional development mechanisms for teacher educators. A recent national level consultation on the potential and possibilities of DIETs reaffirmed the idea that “an institution like the DIET, (taken along with the BRC and CRC structure) with an academic rather than administrative focus, is needed at the district level to strengthen school education is still convincing”. The report stresses the need to open up recruitment of DIET faculty “to allow more faculty renewal through cross-deployment across universities/NGOs/research institutions and personnel movements across DIETs based on professional merit (rather than transfers) are two important possibilities” for the revitalization of this key institution (NIAS,2007: 2-3).

Building Academic Support for the BRCs and CRCs

The unique infrastructure of more than 7,000 BRCs and 66,000 CRCs with over 1 lakh resource teachers can become the cutting edge for academic renewal as also regular academic support for elementary education. Yet, the performance of these institutions is extremely varied across the country. Where resource teachers have been carefully selected, intensive training has been organised, roles and

responsibilities are clearly defined for these institutions and a clear sense of direction or vision for change at the school level is shared, these institutions have been able to make some impact.

However, most BRCs and CRCs operate more in the nature of monitoring schools rather than providing academic support. In several states, BRCs and CRCs do not have adequate or appropriately selected staff and are mostly engaged in collection of data and acting as couriers for the administration. Arrangements to provide serious academic support at the upper primary level are particularly weak in several states. Some states are placing subject-wise teachers at the block level to help upper primary teachers in the teaching of Science, English and Maths. A lack of clarity on what brings desired quality in education and clear indicators of these add to the underutilisation of this precious resource. Research indicates that the BRCs and CRCs, although established with the purpose of providing on-site academic and professional support to teachers, rarely do so. In fact selected school teachers are recruited as resource persons and coordinators thus rendering their service to 'administer' rather than provide academic support to teachers (Leclercq,

2007).

A thorough state-specific review of the functioning of BRCs and CRCs will help arrive at clear recommendations for each state. This review could form the basis for a redefinition of these resource centres in terms of the personnel posted, their selection process, capacity building and mandate. These cannot be allowed to degenerate into additional hands for routine administrative work. Another major issue to be tackled is the linkage and synergy between BRC and CRC personnel and the regular academic supervision machinery. These two streams often work at cross purposes. There is also a demand that reporting structures of the BRCs and CRCs should be aligned with the DIET, primarily by routing salaries of these personnel through the DIET. Such financial arrangements may not help develop academic support mechanisms and provide institutional vision and leadership. Establishing a linkage between the DIET and the BRC-CRC needs to go beyond visualizing measures of control and monitoring. The DIET can provide a professional forum for mentoring and discussing the academic concerns and needs of BRCs and CRCs (NIAS, 2007).

REDESIGNING TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Improving school quality and furthering educational achievement is a fundamental imperative of EFA especially in its commitment to reach the marginalized. The EFA promises can be kept only if the centrality of the teacher is recognized and only professionally qualified elementary teachers are recruited by States. The primary instrument for this is a revamped XI Plan Teacher Education Scheme, which builds on a nationwide array of university-based, state and district-based teacher education institutions and SSA functionaries down to the Block and Cluster level, in order to create a new framework to develop an inclusive and empowered teacher and teacher educator community.

During the last few decades teacher education curricula have come under severe criticism (Kumar, 2001, 2002; Batra, 2005). Some educationists feel that they do not fully address the needs of contemporary Indian schools and society and they do not prepare teachers who can impart quality education in schools (Mahapatra, 2000).

Typically teacher education programmes have had a disempowering influence on the developing teacher. Inherent in this approach is the view of teachers as implementers of a given theory of knowledge and learning, often derived from western sources. It is taken for granted that teacher trainees will follow these instructional theories as taught by the generalist faculties of teacher training institutions. It is assumed for instance, that disciplinary knowledge 'given' through general education is independent of almost any professional training in pedagogy. This divide is reflected in the common belief, even among teacher educators that a primary school teacher of mathematics need not engage with the discipline of mathematics beyond the 'levels' required for the primary school (Batra, 2005).

The design and practice of the dominant teacher education programmes are typically based on assumptions which often impede the progress of ideation and the professional and personal growth of the teacher. Studies reveal

that there is a poor fit between the content and processes of teacher education and the context in which teachers serve. (Dyer and Choksi, 2004, Batra, 2005). Kumar points out that the knowledge of social reality that teachers bring to the classroom and their perception of the role of education are among the key determinants of how teachers teach. Teachers cannot be oriented towards new types of classroom interaction without being exposed to specific issues of social reality and the functioning of the school (Kumar, 1985; 2001).

The low knowledge base of elementary school teachers is known to impact negatively on the performance of teachers in various ways (Avalos, 1991^{*****} cited in Dyer, 1999). For instance, “the teacher is not supposed to say, ‘I do not know’ ”(Kumar, 1991: 93), hence teachers are less likely to invite questions from students as they are unsure of themselves. In most Indian classrooms which are authoritarian, children learn the power of adult authority through ‘punishment regimes’. The issue of punishment is closely associated with the self-image of the teacher as one who needs to be ‘in control’ in order to be an effective teacher. This idea of control manifests in the popular conception of education which is to ‘socialise’ children in ‘desirable ways’ of ‘sitting’ in a formal class, ‘behaving’ in school, ‘following instructions’ from the teacher, talking

only when asked to and finishing tasks on time. In most Indian classrooms values of punctuality and discipline have acquired ‘hegemonic status’ expected to be best achieved by ‘home-makers’, a role naturalized in women who are also projected to make ‘good’ elementary school teachers.

The growing attitude of doubt and resignation towards the utility of pre-service teacher training (Sen, 2002; Mehrotra, 2000⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺) needs to be countered by evidence based arguments in favour of investing in the professional development of elementary teachers. Transnational scholars have asserted a positive correlation between length of training and quality of teachers (Avalos, 1991; Lockheed and Verspoor⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺, 1991, cited in Dyer, 1999). In an attempt to identify parameters of quality education, Govinda and Verghese (1992) observed that a trained teacher makes a considerable difference in terms of teaching style and classroom management. Kingdon’s study (2003) reveals how certain teacher characteristics produce improved student achievement, notably quality teacher education and to a lesser extent teachers’ educational level.

However, the centralized, bureaucratic control of Indian elementary education tends to lay down everything for the teacher. This along with a rigidly defined curriculum and textbook leads to a

system that does not treat the teacher as a professional educator with her own initiative, but as a government employee who teaches (Dyer, 1999) and an 'agent of the state' (Batra, 2005).

Donor funded programmes of school intervention across developing countries have observed that most teachers are "poorly educated in the deficient public education system (with) little or no teacher education and training (and have) limited and often no contact with books, technology and science." The majority of these untrained and under-trained teachers work in rural areas where the poorest and the most deprived schools are situated...teachers, themselves products of the poor education system are seen as obstacles in educational change rather than as key human resource (SIDA, 2000: 15).

Pre-service training of teachers is considered to be the most crucial phase of teacher development that determines the future core identity of teachers. It has been asserted that qualitative improvement of elementary education will become possible only with a very robust programme for pre-service training (Batra, 2006; NIAS, 2007). It is evident that the current curriculum and pedagogic approaches followed in teacher education programmes do not equip trainees with a professional understanding and skills needed to work with children from diverse social milieu,

especially first generation learners. Their approach to planning of teaching is ritualized along the archetype of a BEd lesson plan centered on textbooks.

The culture of most teacher education institutions is "hierarchical and paternal", instilling in the teacher trainees "norms of obedience, learning by rote and teaching to the textbook rather than encouraging healthy debate and developing individual identities as teachers" (NIAS, 2007). There is need to integrate meaningful engagement with subject content along with pedagogic approaches. Another area requiring attention is the need to develop sound conceptual reading materials for teacher trainees and teacher educators. Research reveals that there are plethora of such factors that mediate through the agency of the teacher which affect issues of quality, equity and access.

Teacher education institutes suffer from isolation at two levels: the school as well as from centres of higher learning, a concern well articulated in Policy (Gol, 1966; 1985). The method, curricula and various other requirements are often different in schools from those advocated and implemented in teacher education institutes. As a result schools consider teacher education institutes as alien and not a space for 'realistic' professional teacher development. Teacher education institutes on the other hand, merely fulfill the formality of

completing the prescribed number of 'lesson plans' with little concern for preparing teachers for constant demands of fluid classroom situations. The rapid commercial mushrooming of private 'teacher education shops' has further accentuated such divides.

The XI Plan Approach Paper observes that the "one cause for poor quality of teaching is the shortage of teachers reflected in a large number of vacancies. The quality, accountability, and motivation of existing teachers are also low...teacher training is both inadequate and of poor quality and needs to be expanded and improved...For a large proportion of our children, school is (therefore) an ill-lit classroom with more than one class being taught together by someone who may not have completed her own schooling" (Planning Commission, 2006: 58-59).

The quality of teacher education is poor due to poor inputs, lack of resources and a series of cadre and institutional constraints; private BEs are sub-standard but continue to operate in spite of existing NCTE regulation as it lacks manpower, resources and capacity to monitor and regulate standards. With the NCTE norms focusing on infrastructural and quantitative inputs rather than quality of curriculum and pedagogic approaches, existing graduates, even from Central Universities are poorly prepared for

teaching. The bulk of the teacher education faculty is isolated from the national and international community of interdisciplinary researchers and educators leading to a major lag in initiating teacher education reforms. Teaching in teacher education institutes is based largely on traditional lecture methods which are inappropriate for a new generation of students with access and skills to new ICTs.

Unable to draw talent into teacher education courses, school teaching remains a least preferred option. Research also indicates that many students join teacher education courses only as a last resort (MACESE, 2001). Even after joining, student teachers are inclined to look for more lucrative opportunities within the profession of teaching or other than school teaching. It has been noted that "increasing globalization effects have led to an unprecedented level of migration of both schoolteachers and higher education personnel across a wide range of countries" (ILO-UNESCO, 2007: 13). This larger reality and the rigid design and content of conventional teacher education programmes, tend to create inertia and maintain status-quo in school practices (Batra, 2005). This coupled with the dilution of an emphasis on public investment in pre-service teacher education has, since the early 1990s, led to the promotion of several alternative measures of teacher recruitment and training. It is important

to build the conviction that there can be no substitute for quality pre-service education in reviving our public education system.

A long-standing need has been to provide opportunities and to promote the entry of appropriate talent in the field of teacher education, through a series of structural and process intervention. One of the key challenges with India's elementary education system is the complete lack of a cadre of teacher educators trained in elementary education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment reasserts the political commitment of the State towards the education of the masses of India. However, the challenges of UEE remain only partially addressed so long as the Government of India hesitates to focus its energies on revitalizing the teacher education sector.

Promoting Plurality and Alternative Models for Teacher Education

Pre-service secondary teacher education programmes are largely located in Universities or with State Government Agencies to educate primary school teachers. More recently private agencies have entered in the sector in a big way to meet the increasing demand for qualified teachers. Scholars have argued that the best practices of school teaching and curriculum development have actually emerged from a series of innovations

initiated by non-governmental organizations (Batra, 2006). Given the need to prepare quality teachers for different contexts, levels and content, certain flexibility in terms of involving NGOs in meeting this challenge needs to be seriously considered. Institutional arrangements and organizational structures enabling such an involvement of multiple players will need to be worked out. Similarly, the enormous need for trained teachers to the growing number of schools would require an examination of the possibility of alternate models of teacher education. Since the stipulation of one-year duration for the dominant model of teacher education is more a notional than empirical stance, a longer duration for pre-service teacher education is a distinct need (NCERT, 2006).

Furthering Quality via School-Higher Education Linkages

The Constitutional commitment towards UEE, further strengthened by the 86th CA provides the basis for concerted focus on preparing teachers adequately to address the growing demand for quality education. The professional education of teachers not only facilitates improvement of school education, but also functions as a bridge between school and higher education. Mechanisms that can help create a cadre of professional school practitioners who teach in schools but also develop further to become teacher

educators can only be developed when school teaching has an intimate link with higher education. Some Indian Universities have played an important institutional role in educating teachers and in the development of Education as an interdisciplinary rather than a generalist area of knowledge^{ssssssss}. The critical role of centres of higher learning in generating this new knowledge, imply that links between Universities and centres for elementary, secondary and higher secondary education, need to be strengthened across India.

The power of this idea can be seen from the impact of the engagement of university-based academics and professionals in the articulation of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, and NCERT's new school textbooks. Academics from multiple disciplines in Central and State Universities, shoulder-to-shoulder with school practitioners have participated in this mammoth exercise covering the development of over a hundred textbooks across fifteen subject areas and twelve grades.

Building on these initiatives, an interdisciplinary platform for teacher education, educational research and practice needs to be established through structures that make provision for widening the base for the intake of teacher educators and teacher trainees. This can be done through a focus on

entry at the +2, undergraduate levels and lateral disciplinary entry in courses on education especially in areas of critical current deficit in both number and quality in the social sciences, sciences, mathematics and languages. Specialised national Institutes of excellence (e.g. IISc and the IIMs) can be drawn upon to help fill some of these critical areas and school leadership and management, which are increasingly being taken over by the private sector. Inter-disciplinary postgraduate programmes of study with specialisation in curriculum studies, pedagogic studies and assessment need to be developed so that university students can opt for credit courses in these areas, based in their parent departments. . This would help develop a cadre of professionals - curriculum developers, pedagogues in sciences, social sciences, languages and mathematics; to facilitate students to engage with critical areas of applied study and, thereby in time creating a body of Indian relevant knowledge.

Reclaiming the 'Space' for Teachers

An earlier measure that ensured a regular supply of schoolteachers was training through the distance mode. This was widely found to lead to a sharp decline in teacher quality. The NCTE, in one of its stronger acts of regulation, closed this down in the late 1990s. It was however powerless to arrest the growing para-teacher cadre which continues to impact education quality so

seriously. The demographic pressure of the UEE and a growing demand for educated workers in the rapidly growing service economy, has put considerable 'market pressure' on the training of teachers. This in-turn has led to the growth of a large number of sub-standard private teacher education institutions, further shrinking the space for professionalizing teacher education and finding a viable means of addressing the quality question in India's schools.

The typically poor performance of conventional teacher education programmes coupled with the low emphasis on public investment in school education in the early 1990s led to the promotion of several alternative measures of teacher recruitment and training – which have been justified on pragmatic economic and bureaucratic grounds, with little reference to the reality of the Indian classroom. Large-scale recruitment of para-teachers within the formal school system and an attitude of resignation towards pre-service programmes have become an integral part of state provisioning for elementary education.

Such measures threaten to ensure that inequity of access and quality is institutionalised in the Indian state education system, making it virtually impossible for education to serve a full role in the process of social change. This has significant political implications,

which no government can ignore - with the demand for quality education being articulated even by hitherto excluded communities and educationally backward states, especially in an era of a dedicated Central cess for Elementary Education and buoyant public revenues.

Elementary school teachers in particular, continue to remain severed from centres of higher learning and are typically intellectually isolated – challenging India's aspiration to be a global knowledge power in the next few decades. As a result, mechanisms from within the teacher community to counter the recent spate of ideological experiments to capture curriculum development have largely ceased to exist. This is the long-term consequence of a systematic exclusion of research and academic support to schoolteachers.

An important constraint to this is the lack of adequate scholarship on the pedagogy of teacher education and its relationship to contemporary social, economic and political processes and movements, including the women's movement. There is need to break the isolation of India's Colleges of education through institutional networking and establishing Centres of excellence in all Central universities and leading State Universities.

It is evident that the problem of the huge undersupply of professionally trained

teachers cannot be met by the private sector which has primarily promoted the proliferation of sub-standard institutions across the country, facilitated by the weak regulatory regime provided by NCTE.

This demand needs to be addressed on a priority basis and can be met only through a systemic involvement of the higher education system. With a significant step-up in investment in higher education in the XI Plan, the final links in University-School education link can be forged, based on the experience of multiple initiatives across the country ranging from the textbook creation initiative of NCERT, to the BEIEd of Delhi University and the dual mode MA (Elementary Education) Programme of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, that are now starting to be recognized as international benchmarks. As a first step, systemic linkages need to be forged between existing institutes such as the DIETs, SCERTs and Universities in order to redesign programmes of teacher education and academic support.

Apart from strengthening and restructuring existing institutions and revamping the content and pedagogy of teacher education programmes offered by them, there is need to establish new institutional arrangements that will ensure breaking the isolation of elementary school teacher development and practice. Select Universities and

Institutes of higher education need to be identified to establish Schools of Education to help develop education as an interdisciplinary enterprise. These Schools of Education could be envisaged to include several centres that would undertake in-depth work in neglected areas of school education. These include concerted research and material development in areas of curriculum studies, pedagogic studies, assessment and evaluation apart from their core function of educating teachers and teacher educators.

The other critical link is between the DIETs and Block and Cluster Resource Centres. The establishment of the DIET-BRC-CRC structure has been the most significant institutional development in Elementary Education over the past decade. There is a need to build capacities of these institutions based on support from Universities and other Institutes of Higher Education. The mere upgrading of DIETs into undergraduate colleges may not be the answer, except on paper. Through instituted mechanisms of fellowships, faculty exchange and research programmes, the DIET faculty can be supported to assume a mentoring role for the Coordinators of BRCs and CRCs. Block and District resource center capacities need to be augmented and facilitated towards the strengthening of cluster level processes.

While there is an acceptance of the fact

that there is a serious nationwide problem of the quality of the teaching-learning process, the risk is that piecemeal solutions are becoming widespread. For example, remedial teaching for students with poor performance is being extensively funded under SSA (a target of 54 lakh students in 2006-07). A variety of learning enhancement programmes that include student assessment are becoming the norm rather than developing professional capacities of teachers. Reaching out for 'low-hanging fruit' should not detract from the imminent need to develop teachers' professional skills and capacity to change classroom processes that could address the diverse backgrounds and learning potential of India's children.

As an immediate first step, the recruitment of contract and para-teachers will have to be arrested. If this is not done, the early gains of physical and social access of the SSA and the UEE initiative will cease to yield results, in probably less than a decade because of the gross neglect of quality education and the migration of increasing numbers of dissatisfied children to LFP schools. The current cadre of para-teachers will need to be professionally re-trained in a time-bound programme under the SSA with a commitment to completely stop any further such recruitment. The rigour of training and certification for existing para-teachers should bring them at par with the qualifications of regularly

trained teachers. There is "an urgent need to develop and implement policies ... within stipulated time lines to provide for continued professional development of contract or unqualified teachers and to integrate all teachers into a single, regular teaching force after attainment of requisite professional qualifications. ...present short-term, stop-gap or palliative strategies (will)...need to be replaced by policies and long-term plans for pre-service and in-service training programmes designed to produce adequately qualified teachers..." and existing living standards and the working conditions of teachers need to be elevated in order to render teaching careers attractive to young persons and to retain qualified teachers (ILO-UNESCO, 2007: ix).

Schools need to be equipped with basic facilities including empowered teachers, usable space for each child, textbooks and learning resources, appropriate furniture for students and a library. A basic learning condition is the regular functioning of the school for the required number of days and hours each day. This would imply minimizing teacher time on non-academic work for which firm policy stipulations will need to be instituted. A comprehensive academic renewal involving teachers and schools in the process of change; rather than ill-informed, uniform, centrally conceived and managed short-term programmes of teacher-training linked to the large-scale testing of children, is the need of

the hour.

It is expected that the recently revised Draft Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCERT-NCTE, 2006)***** along with the promise of the Right to Education Bill will provide the necessary vision and space for a convergence between school curriculum and the education of teachers. The

challenge lies in enabling an appropriate institutional response for the concrete realization of this new vision through the current and future Five Year Plans, which includes proactive regulation of both public and private services in this sector to ensure that India's Elementary Education quality deficit can be addressed in a decade or less.

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ENDNOTES

* The Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals, (UNESCO, 2000) reaffirmed the commitment to achieve universal provision and access to primary schooling of good quality and added a target year: 2015.

† See Mehrotra, Santosh (2006) What Ails the Educationally Backward States? The Challenges of Public Finance, Private Provision and Household Costs in Santosh Mehrotra (Ed) (2006).

‡ The XI Plan Approach Paper recommends that “school health programmes must be revived and converged with MDMS and MDMS itself merged with the SSA at an appropriate time”, Planning Commission, 2006, pp. 64.

§ See De, Anuradha et al. (2003)

** See Mehrotra, Santosh (2006)

†† See Batra, Poonam (2005)

‡‡ See Govinda, R and Y. Josephine (2005)

§§ The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments and the institutionalized statutory space they provide for local community to participate in decision-making in education for their children are important developments.

*** A CABE committee on secondary education deliberated on how the nation needs to prepare for an increasing number of children entering secondary level of education. There is also a working group report of the XI Plan on Secondary Education.

††† Figures presented are taken from the SSA Fourth Joint Review Mission, Aide Memoire 2006b.

††† States of UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal as indicated in the XI Plan Working Group Report on Elementary Education (SSA and Girls Education), MHRD, GoI., 2006.

§§§ Other data includes the UNICEF survey (1999-2000), analysed and discussed in Santosh Mehrotra (ed) (2006) The Economics of Elementary Education in India, Sage, New Delhi, and Census 2001.

**** See Jyotsna Jha and Dhir Jhingran (2005).

†††† See NSSO, 1998 and Y. Aggarwal, 2001.

†††† ASER, 2006.

§§§§ See Tilak, JBG (2006).

***** Roger Jeffery observes that ‘during the 1990s, UP’s fiscal crisis resulted in reduced state expenditure on education, whilst education entrepreneurship has flourished and various forms of de-facto privatization of the education sector have taken place despite the absence of clear policy statements favouring privatization’. Quoted in the Introduction: hearts minds and pockets, Radhika Chopra and Patricia Jeffrey (Eds) Educational Regimes in Contemporary India, 2005, Sage, India.

††††† Amartya Sen emphasized that there is no alternative to the state in providing school education in a public lecture delivered at Delhi University, 18 December 2007.

††††† Recent observational studies of select Indian classrooms, undertaken by the Institute of Dalit Studies (IDS) reveal discriminatory practices against Dalit and other marginalized children, a pattern that does not appear to have changed much, Geetha Nambissan, Exclusion, Inclusion and Education: Perspectives and Experiences of Dalit Children, IIDS-UNICEF Seminar, 19 December 2007.

§§§§§ See Batra, Poonam (2006)

***** See Kumar, Krishna and Padma Sarangapani, (2004)

†††††† For a detailed analysis of the LFP sector in UP in the context of EFA debates in India, see Prachi Srivastava (2007) Low-fee Private Schooling: challenging an era of education for all and quality provision? (pp 138-161) in Gajendra K Verma et al. (eds) (2007).

††††† See Jha, Praveen (2005); JBG Tilak (2004).

§§§§§ See Batra, Poonam (2005: 4349.)

***** See Feasibility Study undertaken by MACESE (2001)

†††††† Statistics based on NCERT 7th Survey, 2005

††††††† Elementary Education in India, Analytical Report, NIEPA 2006 cited in Planning Commission (2006).

§§§§§§ See Santosh Mehrotra (2006)

***** Projections based on Census, 2001 and NCERT 7th Survey, 2005.

†††††††† See Government of India (1987) *Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education*, Educational Consultants India Ltd, New Delhi, November, 1987

†††††††† Advancement of Educational Performance through Teacher Support (ADEPTS) is an MHRD-UNICEF initiative undertaken under the SSA, June 2006-January 2007.

§§§§§§§§ Learning achievement levels consistently indicate the differentiated performance of children in northern States where the induction of para-teachers in the school system has become routine as compared to some southern States where this sub-optimal option has not been exercised indiscriminately.

***** See Beatrice Avalos (1991) *Approaches to Teacher Education: Initial Teacher Training*, Published by Commonwealth Secretariat, 1991

†††††††† Using the framework of a comparative international perspective, it has been asserted that teacher costs can be significantly reduced “by employing unqualified personnel and still achieve good quality learning, (with) much of the savings invested in development of curricula and support materials and in in-service training.” This has been justified on the ground that suggests “that in-service programmes using a combination of distance and contact education are far more cost effective than institutional pre-service training...” For a detailed analysis of strategies for managing teacher costs, see Santosh Mehrotra, Peter Buckland, 2000.

†††††††† See Marlaine E. Lockheed and Adriaan Verspoor (1991) *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*, Oxford University Press, 1992

§§§§§§§§ The BEIEd is one example of an interdisciplinary Elementary Teacher Education Programme offered by undergraduate Colleges of the University of Delhi, Delhi. Other examples include the ‘Anweshana Experience’, a Participative Teacher Education Programme offered at the Department of Education, Banasthali Vidyapith in Rajasthan and the Secondary Teacher Education Programme: Vedchi in Maharashtra.

***** A Draft Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education was prepared by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in collaboration with National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 2006.