

Summary Report
of
National Conference on
Factors of Poor Learning: Challenges, Opportunities and Practices
for Learning Improvement in Socially Diverse Elementary Schools of India
India International Centre, New Delhi
Sept 2-4, 2016

Deshkal Society and its partner organisations: Language and Learning Foundations, Save the Children, India, Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, PACS and Sulabh International Social Service Organisation organised the First National Conference on Factors of Poor Learning: Challenges, Opportunities and Practices for Learning Improvement in Socially Diverse Elementary Schools of India. The conference was held at Delhi's India International Centre, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi from Sept 2-4, 2016.

Hon'ble Shri. M. Hamid Ansari, Vice-President of India, inaugurated the conference. Dr. Subash Chandra Khuntia, Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India (GoI), Dr. Harish Khare, Editor-in-Chief, Dainik Tribune and Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, Founder, Sulabh International Social Service Organisation shared brief remarks on this occasion. Prof. Imtiaz Ahmad, Chairperson, Deshkal Society, presided over the inaugural session. Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Deshkal Society, presented Vote of Thanks at the Conference. Hon'ble Minister of State, MHRD, GoI, Shri. Upendra Kushwaha delivered the valedictory address. Mr. Dhir Jhigran, Founder Director, Language and Learning Foundation, presented the conference recommendations. **(The details of the program schedule can be accessed at <http://deshkalindia.com/docx-files/ProgrammeSchedule.pdf>)**

The conference collectively arrived at the understanding that the poor learning condition of the children, especially from socially and

economically marginalised communities, is due primarily to inadequate institutional, administrative and governance functioning and support.

In the light of this perspective the conference's outcomes endeavour at advocating meaningful changes in educational structure, context and processes to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality learning for all with a focus on socially and economically disadvantaged children of India's elementary schools.

During the three-day deliberations the conference discussed, examined and analysed the factors of poor learning that are influenced by social and cultural dynamics; critically assessed the challenges of pedagogical aptitude and ability of teachers to perform meaningfully in socially diverse classroom; examined and learnt from innovative inclusive classroom practices; and most importantly, structured and formulated policy recommendations.

On 2 September, 2016 during the inaugural session, Prof Imtiaz Ahmad observed that to obliterate, if not eliminate, the great divide between private and public schools which has emerged as a basis of a new stratification in society and to a large extent obstructs the goal of equality and social justice.

Dr. Harish Khare expressed his gratitude for the efforts and support of the organizers. He emphasised the need for scholars to share their suggestions and thoughts with the media: "The

dialogue of education among the poor cannot remain a conversation among a small group of people. The problem - as the concept note says - is the dominant ideology, it is evident itself on a number of frontages, on almost every front and for that reason academicians, scholars and social activists need to find ways to ensnaring the media into their concerns.”

Dr. Subash Chandra Khuntia presented brief statistics on accessibility, performances and achievements of quality of education, and lamented looming inequality among class, caste, tribe and gender. He pointed out that the problematic school environment; community participation and parental involvement, language versus medium of instruction factors are responsible for poor learning.

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak shared information on ‘Sulabh Model School’ which imparts equitable, inclusive and quality education to children especially from Dalit and oppressed community, and also promotes and encourages the practice of social democracy in students’ everyday life, learning and skills and social integration.

Hon’ble Shri. M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India, in his inaugural address stressed that an effort is being made to address some of these lacunae, as indicated in the 2014 Assessment Report and in the recently released document providing the direction and inputs for a new Educational policy with the promise that address issues of gender, social, cultural and regional disparities, with an emphasis on diversity, will be properly addressed in the curriculum that will also cover issues of social justice and harmony and legal measures in order to avoid social discrimination. Discussion on the document is in the public domain; the final shape of policy is awaited. In lieu with this the deliberations in the three days conference will be a valuable input. **(The full text of the speech of Hon’ble Vice President can be**

accessed at http://deshkalindia.com/docx-files/InauguralSpeech_Hon'bleVicePresident.pdf)

On 3- 4 September, 2016 during the second and third day of the conference, eleven engaging and productive sessions succeeded in bringing together

researchers, practitioners and policy makers from India and abroad for an in-depth dialogue on the broad objective of ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality learning elementary school children with a focus on children from marginalized communities.

The Conference received 30 quality papers and presentations on key themes. In addition to the paper presenters from abroad, there were representations from fourteen states across India, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

The conference established the value of collective effort and partnership between the members of the core group and leading National and International organisations, including Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, Save the Children, India, PACS, Language Learning Foundation and Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.

It is also significant that National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and a number of State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), namely, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh not only actively participated and made state specific presentations during the thematic session on Learning, Social Diversity and Teacher Education but also proposed future initiatives in addressing the issues on equitable, inclusive and quality of learning for socially diverse children.

In the concluding session the Conference formulated the long term follow-up course of actions to build and develop networks with key stakeholders to advocate and promote policy

recommendations and best possible approaches/ strategies towards improving learning achievements of socially diverse children, especially from SCs, STs, minorities and girl children in seven states.

It is highly pertinent and timely coincidence of interests that the conference could make recommendations and contribute to the debate on 'Some Input for Draft National Education Policy 2016', which is in the domain of public and policy discussions. Following the Conference of immediate action plan a delegation of representatives from Save the Children, India, PACS, Language and Learning Foundation, Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, Tata Trusts, Deshkal Society met Hon'ble Upendra Kushwaha, Minister of State, MHRD, GoI on September 28, 2016 and presented the Conference Policy Brief based on the recommendations of the conference. The Hon'ble minister assured to arrange a meeting with National Education Policy Draft Committee for the group to explain the rational, evidence and design behind the recommendations. **(The Policy Brief can be accessed at <http://deshkalindia.com/docx-files/PolicyBriefRecommendation.pdf>)**

To sum up, the conference helped in understanding and realising the factors behind poor learning, its conceptual underpinnings and a number of strategic and operational approaches that contribute to the level of learning as it is. In all eleven including an inaugural session, the participants presented their point of views in their respective fields and working experiences. A number of innovative approaches were also shared that have been successful in helping disadvantaged children to obtain learning levels that are remarkable and worth following. At the end of the Conference, the policy brief containing the resultant recommendations were formulated, which has been widely shared among all stakeholders, including MHRD Minister and officials. In continuation of this report and the policy brief, a roadmap for long term programme engagements is under preparation that will sustain and continually reinforce the advocacy agenda for quality learning and teaching for elementary school children, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.