Sri Lanka in Progress towards "Education for All, by 2015": The Challenge of Broadening the Boundaries of Education while Maintaining the Quality of Learning

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1. Introduction

The Government of Sri Lanka published the Mid-Decade Assessment (MDA) Report in 2008 with the theme of "Education for All" (EFA), and the report includes a comprehensive study on the achievements and shortfalls of this programme in relation to EFA goals. The report points out that even though "Sri Lanka has succeed in ensuring a high level of access and a good coverage at the primary and secondary levels of education, the poor quality of education has become a major issue island-wide, and that the goals pertaining to the life skills of young children, youth and adults have been relatively neglected" (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2008). Considering the concluding statements of the above MDA report and focusing on challenges and collective statements in the South Asian regional declarations[1] towards EFA, the Government of Sri Lanka has been planning their activities for the 2015 target based on eight policy recommendations.

This paper looks at three main aspects of the EFA programme in Sri Lanka. First, the paper will talk about the **eight policy statements and proposed action plans** of the Sri Lankan Government to be implemented by 2015. Secondly, the paper looks at the importance of the **Policy Framework for Inclusive Education (PFIE)** developed in 2009 out of a dialog among relevant stakeholder groups in Sri Lanka. Finally it focuses on suggestions and recommendations with a special emphasis on the theme of **"Quality Primary Education for All by 2015"**.

2. What should be our priority?

The Government of Sri Lanka established a special Unit for EFA at the MoE in 2007, and the Unit is making an effort to coordinate all the activities which are being conducted by the stakeholders including related Ministries and NGO's. The Unit was able to publish the MDA report as a comprehensive document on EFA in Sri Lanka, after consulting a variety of stakeholder groups.

The eight policy recommendations that fall in line with the MDA Report are as follows:

1. National ECCE policy encompasses children aged between 0 – 8 years
2. Establishment of policy framework for out of School Children in Compulsory Cycle (6 – 14 ages)
3. Main streaming Inclusive approach based on the recognition of the rights of all children to receive quality education.
4. Ensure increased and rational allocation of financial resources for the un- reached groups and underserved on vertical equality basis.
5. Recommendation for enforcement of teacher deployment for quality education
6. Restructuring teacher development programs addressing inclusive education Concept
7. Strengthening the monitoring & evaluation capacity at all levels
8. Enhancing function literacy (MoE 2009)

Initiations, activities and strategies that are underway with the aim of achieving the EFA target under above

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[1] Dakar Framework for Action - April 2000, Katmandu Joint Statement - April 2001, Islamabad Declaration - May 2003, 19-point Dakar Declaration December 2009

recommendations are as follows:

a) Inclusive education approach has been accepted as a strategy to achieve EFA.

b) Enforcement of compulsory education regulations.

c) Improving the quality of learning with an emphasis on the development of essential learning competencies.

d) Provision of a range of subsidies; free text brooks, school uniform materials, scholarships, spectacles, transport subsidies.

e) Implementation of a school health and nutrition Program.

f) Developing school libraries.

g) Better schools in disadvantaged urban areas and rural areas; Novodya schools, Model Primary schools, Isuru schools.

h) Promotion of ICT in education.

i) Direct funds to schools.(MoE 2009)

Despite the political changes that have occurred in the country over the past decade, these activities and goals have remained more or less unchanged. There are huge challenges that the Government has to face in achieving the EFA goals. For instance, as mentioned in Activity (g), Navodya schools, Isuru schools, and model primary schools have been started with the aim of solving the longstanding unresolved issue of school categorization with significant gaps of education facilities. Further, the MoE has identified as "unreached groups: plantation children, children with disability, working children, children of migrant women workers, street children, orphaned, abandoned and destitute children within and outside children's homes, children with remand homes, detention centers and certified schools, internally displaced children, children in conflict affected areas and children in slums". The challenge is how far we will be successful in reaching the unreached. Ensuring the continuity of the above activities till 2015 would be much more desirable than just fulfilling one or two activities.

3. Policy Framework for Inclusive Education (PFIE) in Sri Lanka.

The discussion on PFIE was started in 2007, and the proposal was finalized in 2009 with the assistance of a foreign consultant. The author was one of the committee members of this policy development process. My contribution was mainly in the area of teacher training and development. The document was formulated after several rounds of discussions and workshops involving a large number of persons consisting of educationalists, school teachers, officials from relevant ministries, social service personnel, etc. The PFIE consists of seven major themes, which are Provision of Education, Teacher Education, Education Delivering, School Management and Leadership, Children with Special Educational Needs, Non Formal and Emergency Education, and Systemic Support for Schools. This was formulated to "ensure that all children not only have access to schooling, but that they are provided with equal opportunities once at school and a learning environment in which they can achieve their full potential" (PFIE, 2009). This policy document could be used as a strategy to reach the above identified unreached groups. But the present Sri Lankan Education Act dates back to 1939 and measures have been taken to replace this obsolete Act with a new Act. Steps had been taken to include the PFIE in the new Act, but due to several strains, the National Education Commission (NEC) is unable to reach a workable solution leading to passing of the said Act.

4. Suggestions and Recommendation with a special Focus on the theme of "Quality Primary Education for All by 2015"

As MDA report points out, the quality development of primary education is an urgent need, and this issue has been

discussed since the beginning of this decade (MoE, 2004). It can be identified that even though several strategies have been proposed and several activities have been implemented (Eg. The concept of Child Friendly Schools) with the aim of providing quality education, there are constraints to continue those strategies and activities in a consistent manner.

Sri Lanka has been identified as "an early achiever" who "is in track to reach targets for primary school enrolment" (UNICEF 2009). If Sri Lanka intends to be an early achiever in providing quality primary education too, it has to ensure the proper implementation of identified activities in the field of primary education.

- As recommended by international declarations on EFA, the Government of Sri Lanka should pay more attention to raising awareness among the stakeholder groups and the general public regarding EFA.
- Making the proposed Education Act with a PFIE component a law.
- Working out a national level mechanism, which incorporates, in a more organized manner, existing activities with an EFA focus conducted by related institutions.
- Working out a non-discriminatory admission policy for primary education.
- Ensuring the proper implementation of the existing primary education curriculum, which has been designed in a child-centered manner.
- Reducing the gap between Policy (curriculum) and Practice!

References

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Content

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- What are the priorities as identified by the South Asia Regional Declaration?: Dhaka Declaration on EFA
- What should be our priority?: The Sri Lankan context.
- What is in progress and what should continue?
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- Suggestions and Recommendations

Dakar Framework for Action – 2000

Creation of South Asia EFA Forum (Kathmandu 2001)

Ministerial Meetings of South Asia EFA Forum

1st Forum - Islamabad Declaration

2nd Forum - 19-point Dhaka Declaration

3rd Forum - Will be held in New Delhi - 2011

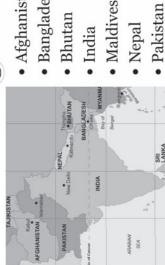## Sri Lanka in Progress towards "Education for All, by 2015":

The Challenge of Broadening the Boundaries of Education while Maintaining the Quality of Learning

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Sri Lanka and South Asia EFA Forum

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- India
- Maldives
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

SAARC

19-point Dhaka Declaration – Cont...

4.6 Review and reformulate education policies and practices to reach the un-reached;

4.7 Review/prepare necessary policies, strategies and practices for effective decentralization;

4.8 Strengthen institutional and organizational capacity for education planning and management;

4.9 Ensure participation of all stakeholders including community, media and civil society organizations in achieving EF A goals;

4.10 Establish effective monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms for measuring the outcomes;

4.11 Establish network and collaboration with other sectors contributing to EFA;

4.12 Undertake a comprehensive assessment of resource requirement for achieving EFA with specific reference to reaching the un-reached;

4.13 Allocate at least 6 percent of the GDP to education;

What should be our priority? Sri Lankan Context Eight Policy Recommendations

1. National ECCE policy encompasses children aged between 0 – 8 years

2. Establishment of policy framework for out of School Children in Compulsory Cycle (6 – 14 age)

3. Main streaming Inclusive approach based on the recognition of the rights of all children to receive quality education.

4. Ensure increased and rational allocation of financial resources for the un-reached groups and underserved on vertical equality basis.

5. Recommendation for enforcement of teacher deployment for quality education

6. Restructuring teacher development programs addressing inclusive education Concept

7. Strengthening the monitoring & evaluation capacity at all levels

8. Enhancing function literacy (MoE 2009)

What is the 19-point Dhaka Declaration? Collective statement

Collectively affirm and commit in the context of Reaching the Un-reached to:

4.1 Enforce the right to education for all effectively, if needed through amendment or fresh legislation to make it justifiable;

4.2 Examine the main causes of exclusion and barriers to -education for the un- reached;

4.3 Identify the un-reached groups;

4.4 Prepare a disaggregated database;

4.5 Review/enact law for decentralization of formal and non formal education planning and management;

19-point Dhaka Declaration – Cont...

4.14 Avail all opportunities for mobilizing internal collaborative fund;

4.15 Determine the gap between the required and internally available resources;

4.16 Mobilize resources through external funding;

4.17 Ensure better coordination and cooperation among the countries of South Asia for resource mobilization;

4.18 Determine the gap in the availability of human resource and create adequate infrastructure for its development;

4.19 Urge the Development Partners and corporate sector to increase/provide funding to ensure realization of EFA goals by 2015;

Strategies to achieving the EFA – Sri Lanka

a) Inclusive education approach has been accepted as a strategy to achieve EFA.

b) Enforcement of compulsory education regulations.

c) Improving the quality of learning with an emphasis on the development of essential learning competencies.

d) Provision of a range of subsidies; free text brooks, school uniform materials, scholarships, spectacles, transport subsidies.

e) Implementation of a school health and nutrition Program.

f) Developing school libraries.

g) Better schools in disadvantaged urban areas and rural areas; Novodya schools, Model Primary schools, Isuru schools.

h) Promotion of ICT in education.

i) Direct funds to schools. (MoE 2009)

What is in progress and what should continue?

Identified Un-reached Groups

- Plantation children,
- Children with disability,
- Working children,
- Children of migrant women workers,
- Street children, orphaned,
- Abandoned and destitute children within and outside children's homes,
- Children with remand homes,
- Detention centers and certified schools,
- Internally displaced children,
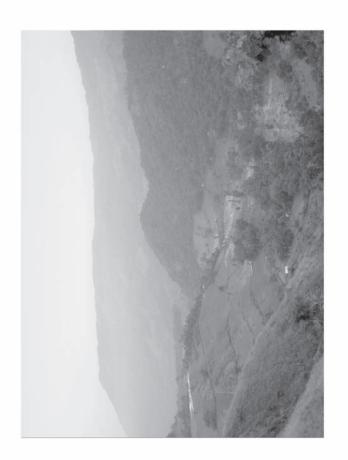- Children in conflict affected areas and children in slums.

Policy Framework for Inclusive Education (PFIE)

The Main Principal of PFIE

'schools should accommodate **all children** regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups'

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994, restated in the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action 2000

Participatory process of consultation with all groups of stakeholders (PFIE)

- Ministry of Education (MoE)
- National Institute of Education (NIE)
- Ministry of Social Welfare
- Ministry of Human Rights
- Child Protection Authority
- Local ECCD Authorities
- Provincial Education Authorities
- UNESCO
- NNICFE
- GTZ
- International NGO's SCF.
- Local NGO's (Sarvodaya)
- University of Peradeniya
- Open University of Sri Lanka
- Teacher Training Colleges
- School teachers. etc

Suggestions and Recommendations to Reach the 2015 Goal

As recommended by international declarations on EFA, the Government of Sri Lanka should pay more attention to raising awareness among the stakeholder groups and the general public regarding EFA.

Making the proposed Education Act with a PFIE component a law.

Working out a national level mechanism, which incorporates, in a more organized manner, existing activities with an EFA focus conducted by related institutions.

Working out a non-discriminatory admission policy for primary education.

Ensuring the proper implementation of the existing primary education curriculum, which has been designed in a child-centered manner.

Reducing the gap between Policy (curriculum) and Practice!

PFIE Content in summery

- Provision of Education
- Teacher Development
- Education Delivery
- School Management and Leadership
- Children with special Educational Needs
- Non Formal and Emergency Education
- Systematic Support for Schools

Thank you