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Information is also available on
http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/component/content/article/95-npise.html)

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Privatisation of public policy making

A national policy on "ICTs in school education system" (NPISE) is being managed by two private organizations, with close associations with big business (with obvious vested interests) and who have neither any understanding of the education domain nor any credibility for making policy. These organizations are organizing closed door consultations that exclude most of the domain experts and producing documents and outputs that are conflict with accepted national education policies. At stake is not only thousands of crores of rupees#, but the future of our children and our teachers.

The 11th five year plan has budgeted 5,000 crores of central government funds for ICTs in education, this is apart from other State Government sources. The budgetary support from both central and state government budgets is likely to increase rapidly over time and the size of the 'education ICT market' in India is estimated in excess of 40,000 crores.

Next section 'What is the issue?' has some more details

What is the Issue?

ICTs have the potential to transform any area they are used. In education, important goals such as enabling teachers and others in the large Indian education system to collaborate and generate local curriculum and digitize local and traditional knowledge, using free and open source software as tools to explore and reconstruct for meaningful and deeper learning, enabling greater transparency and accountability of the administration to the community etc can be achieved in significant measure. However for this to happen, there are two prerequisites, the policy should avoid falling prey to vested interests – Indian education system is perhaps the 'largest ICT market' in the world and the gains that technology vendors selling proprietary software or education content are potentially huge enough for them to subvert public interest. Secondly the policy can be beneficial only if it is made by those who understand the education domain and the Indian education context well, for the challenges and priorities are completely to do with education.

MHRD has ignored both canons by entrusting this policy making to two private organizations, (GeSCI and CSDMS), who have close association with technology vendors and have little education understanding, to facilitate making a national policy on ICTs in school education. These two organizations have been managing the policy making process over the last year through largely closed door consultations amongst technologists, technology vendors and education bureaucrats, consistently excluding a large body of Indian educationists. **Despite serious concerns and protests from educationists and other public spirited individuals and organizations, this process lacking legitimacy and credibility continues**. This creates the serious risk of having a policy that meets the market needs of vendors but would create severe problems for an already feeble and weakened Government school system in India.

Such brazen privatisation of policy making in India is a new low, though similar processes are beginning in the ICT policies in other domains as well e.g. e-Governance or e-Health where domain actors and those working in public interest have been completely ignored and private technological business entities given the prerogative of framing policy.

It is important to stop the process of privatised policy making by vested interests and to compel MHRD to have a public credible institution like NCERT take over policy making from Gesci/CSDMS and associate NGOs which have experience and expertise in Indian education.

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Who are the actors

The private entities making public policy

GeSCI
Global e-schools and communities initiative" was started by five countries – Canada, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland - in 2004. It is affiliated to the UN system

though not a formal part of it. It has a small office in Delhi.

GeSCI earlier worked with the Government of Rajasthan to create the 'Rajasthan Education Initiative' (REI), which had 'Public Private Parnerships' as a key goal. The other partners in REI are the World Economic Forum and the Confederation of Indian Industries. Under this initiative, the Rajasthan Government is reported to be handing over the management of 50 government schools to a foundation setup by Airtel.

<u>**CSDMS**</u>
Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies, an 'ICTD NGO' based in Delhi.

The policy group setup by GeSCI and CSDMS included Educomp, Intel, Microsoft, NIIT all large private monopolies in the IT sector (see next section). It receives significant financial support from many of these businesses.

Neither GeSCI nor CSDMS participated in a 2 day consultation organised by 8 organizations working in the education domain, on the NPISE held at NCERT on April 29, 30, inspite of repeated invitations and a confirmation from them that they would attend.

The Gesci website declares the goal is ".... to support and facilitate the common agenda of GeSCI and Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India to develop the Guiding Principles and formulation of the National Policy on ICT in School Education. CSDMS is the lead knowledge and implementation partner in India to support and facilitate the policy formulation with MHRD, and other key stakeholders while GeSCI plays the role of key facilitator". (source - http://www.GeSCI.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=114&Itemid=151)

The big businesses who have vested interests in this policy

Microsoft
Microsoft is the largest seller of proprietary software in the world and most if its
   revenues come from selling the popular office automation application – Microsoft
   Office which typically has a retail license fee of more than 10,000 rupees per license.

The policy draft prepared by GeSCI and CSDMS has not even a single mention of Free
   software, which is an important alternative to the operating system (Windows) and
   Office automation (Microsoft Office) applications that Microsoft licenses. These Free
   software alternatives are widely used across the world, specially in public systems. In
   India, Kerala which has a widespread Computers in School program, has a policy that
   requires the use of Free software. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka too use these FOSS
   applications in their schools.

Microsoft also has exclusive arrangements with state Governments under its 'Project
   Shiksha' where it sets up computer training institutes for Government teachers where
   only its own technologies are taught and alternative technologies are not taught. Since
   the Government covers the logistical costs of this training, it implies that Government
   is funding a staff training program in which it has no say in curriculum design

The European Commission (EC) has severely fined Microsoft for anti-competitive
   business practices more than once.

Educomp
Educomp is the largest producer of 'education e-content' in India. Their content is
   typically licensed to schools who need to pay per license.

Educationists stress that real learning comes from 'doing' and not from 'absorbing
   information'. This suggests that students would learn far better if they were involved in
   the creation of digital content along with their teachers, rather then be passive
   receivers of content created in a centralized and decontextualised manner. New ICT
   lend themselves to being used as tools for creating digital resources and should be
   tapped in that manner. The Indian education system is large enough to itself be a
   source for enriching the public domain and decentralized digital resource creation will
   also help in bringing local and traditional knowledge into the public domain.

However the Educomp model of 'quality content' creation is endorsed in the policy draft,
   which completely ignores possibilities of collaborative local content creation. No
   wonder the business magazine Outlook Profit declared that Educomp was in an
   enviable position to tap into increased government allocations to the education sector

Intel
Intel is a near monopoly in producing the basic components of computers in the world.

Media reports have suggested that Intel strongly discouraged the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) program which offers a hardware solution much cheaper than the computers powered by Intel hardware, and has indulged in unfair trade practices against AMD, another company which has a much smaller part of the microprocessor market.

The policy draft does not even discuss hardware innovations such as OLPC, which are inexpensive alternatives to the computers using Intel hardware.

NIIT
NIIT is one of the largest IT training organizations in the world.

The policy making group created by GeSCI and CSDMS had some more IT businesses as members, for the entire list of participants, please visit

http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/National-level-consultation1.asp

The Policy draft declares that Public Private Partnership is 'fundamental to ICT in education policy' and has a pro-privatization tenor.

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Public Education institution with relevant mandate

NCERT is the apex national body tasked with framing curricular policy. It is an autonomous institution within MHRD. NCERT led nationwide consultations to formulate the National Curricular Framework 2005, a landmark curricular document.

India is also fortunate to have a large number of NGOs and CBOs that have been working with the public education system for decades.

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Who are protesting

Many of the people / organizations who have protested against the process have decades of experience working in the Indian Government school system.

The signatories to the letter to the Minister sent on March 2nd 2008, protesting against the process are available on

http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/component/content/article/95-npise.html?start=5

Please click on
http://www.itforchange.net/images/stories/files/NPISE/Participants_inNPISE_Consultations.pdf

Many of these organizations organized a two day consultations at NCERT on April 29 and 30, 2008, of educationists and other development actors, where the policy making process and its flaws, and alternative policy possibilities grounded in education perspectives was discussed in detail. The organisations include Azim Premji Foundation, Digantar, Educational Resource Unit, Ekalavya, IT for Change, Quest Alliance, SRF Foundation, Vidya Bhawan Society and Dr Padma Sarangapani, TISS.

The above page also has the list of participants of the 2 day consultations.

Many significant perspectives on design of ICTs in school education,based on educational perspectives, priorities and aims were discussed. These are available in the workshop report.

Click here

http://www.itforchange.net/images/stories/files/NPISE/Draft_WKSH_Report_NPISE_Consultation_May2008.pdf

for the report.

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What has happened so far? (brief history)

Date	Event	Comments	Reference Documents
Jun06-Nov 06	GeSCI *offers its expertise* to the Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India in formulation of the National Policy on ICT in School Education (NPISE). Ministry invites and accepts a proposal from GeSCI for the same. GeSCI ropes in CSDMS and they work with the ministry in developing the background for the draft document on Policy	In order to assist in the lobbying for policy, GeSCI partnered with CSDMS in arranging sessions on a 'National Policy for ICT 'in schools in various ICTD workshops like eIndia 06 and eAsia 06. **The exclusion of educationists from their consultations begins here.**	http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/ict-in-school.asp
Jun 07 – Dec 07	GeSCI and CSDMS hold a series of consultations focussed on the national policy.	Papers and suggestions are called for during this time, **but many submissions that suggest collaborative and decentralized ICT related processes are not incorporated in the draft policy** that is circulated.	http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/pdf/GeSCI.pdf http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/pdf/recommendations.pdf
Feb 08	1st Inter Ministerial Consultation on the NPISE	Invites were sent out to a diverse list of close to 40 invitees, out of which only about 20 attended, with **over representation of private sector ICT vendors. Additionally, the draft policy document was not prepared with the attending group, but instead, was circulated in an already written form** to the group for comments.	http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/r-detail.asp
Mar 08	2nd Inter Ministerial Consultation on the NPISE	At the consultation, they announced that the **draft policy will be made public for feedback, however in a subsequent public communication on the UN sponsored solution exchange, they declared that there was NO policy draft.**	http://www.csdms.in/gesci/National-level-consultation1.asp and http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/forums/index.php?t=tree&th=21630&start=0&rid=12465&S=93e80539ce1501ace1371aae2

Apr 08	Two day consultation on NPISE at NCERT	Given that the Gesci / CSDMS process had consistently excluded educationists, a group of people/organizations working with the education system organized a 2 day consultation, the **discussions centred on Indian education context, critical challenges faced, and how ICTs could be adapted to meet education goals.** The consultation aimed to generate a set of policy directives based on educational perspectives as an input into the NPISE being formulated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)	http://www.itforchange.net/media/NPISE/Draft_WKSH_Report_NPISE_Consultation_May2008.pdf
Apr -08 Jul 08	GeSCI-CSDMS solicit inputs on certain themes for the NPISE, on the UN sponsored public discussion forum – Solutions Exchange	The solicitation receives critical feedback saying that the themes being suggested are technological rather educational (for eg infrastructure, connectivity, content etc). The over emphasis on PPP and the non-transparency of the process is also criticised. **However there is no response from CSDMS on the mailing list to the feedback.**	
Jul 08	Forming of a Drafting committee by HRD ministry.	**There is no official announcement from ministry about the drafting committee.** Only CSDMS site has an announcement**.** The terms of refernce, mandate and relationship of the drafting committee to the GeSCI/CSDMS process is not made public. GeSCI and CSDMS announce that they continue to lead the process.	http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI/
Sep 08	Gesci-CSDMS led Round table discussion on "capacity building of schools and teachers in ict" .This is a closed consultation arranged by GeSCI-CSDMS .	The consultation concept note declares that **"GeSCI with CSDMS under the aegis of MHRD will lead the process of collaboration, consultation and participation ,** bringing together the expertise and experiences of the community of practitioners, who have experimented with the development, delivery and integration of ICT in capacity building of schools and teachers". Most of the educationists working in the Teacher Education area are not invited.	http://www.CSDMS.in/GeSCI

Outputs of the present policy making process

GeSCI and CSDMS have prepared a policy draft based on consultations organized by them.

The draft conflicts significantly with existing education policies in India and betrays a lack of understanding of Indian education contexts, needs and priorities.

For e.g. the draft declares that

"Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) **have made a huge impact on Education in most countries in the World"**

and that the mission of the policy is

"development of an efficient workforce which can contribute effectively to the global knowledge economy"

Click on

http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/dis/edu-ict/74-other/187-ict-in-school-education-policy-document.html

for the Policy draft prepared by GeSCI and CSDMS, a 3 pager with some highlights of the policy draft as well as the the Policy draft with comments.

Some experiences of similar countries

Many countries have developed ICT in education policies. The policies of some of the leading developing countries such as Brazil and South Africa prioritise their own contexts as the base to design the policy. Principles of public information creation, enhancement and use through collaborative processes within the education system are emphasised in these documents. Some of these documents also emphasise that benefits from ICTs cannot be taken for granted and detailed design and planning by domain experts is a pre-requisite for meaningful design.

What attempts have been made to address this issue?

Many of us have made several attempts to communicate and discuss these concerns to MHRD as follows:

Letter to Minister, MHRD - 2nd March 2008

a) A letter was sent to Hon'ble Minister, MHRD with copy to Secretary, Joint Secretary MHRD on 2nd March 2008, expressing concerns of several educationists about the process and the policy draft (Click http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/dis/edu-ict/74-other/189-npise.htmlfor letter to Minister and list of signatories)

Invitation to MHRD to participate in consultations held at NCERT in April 29, 30 2008

b) MHRD was invited to participate in consultations amongst educationists on this issue, at NCERT on 29 and 30 April 2008, accompanied by a concept note explaining our concerns. The "Workshop Report" from these consultations, covering the views of participants on the process of policy making and on possible policy directions was shared with MHRD in May 2008

Though MHRD, GeSCI and CSDMS were invited to these consultations, none of them participated in the meeting, the latter two after confirming that they would.

Click here
http://www.itforchange.net/media/NPISE/Draft_WKSH_Report_NPISE_Consultation_May2008.pdf
 for the

Workshop Report

Discussions with the Joint Secretary MHRD – May 19th 2008

c) A letter to Joint Secretary MHRD, with copy to Hon'ble Minister and Secretary, MHRD seeking a meeting to discuss these concerns. Discussions held with Joint Secretary MHRD on 19th May by a representative group at his office which was minuted by us and shared back with him.

During these discussions, the Joint Secretary was clearly told about the central issue – that national education policy cannot be made by private parties. The minutes of these discussions prepared and shared by us with the Joint Secretary state that, "**MHRD will consider the suggestions by the delegates and explore appointing a credible public institution to coordinate and come up with necessary policy within the terms of reference made".**

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Substantive contributions by educationists

Indian education system is fortunate to have a large body of individuals and institutions working with the public education system for decades. Many of them are keenly aware of the potential as well as the downsides of ICTs (while technology enthusiasts usually emphasise the former and ignore the latter - the policy draft prepared by GeSCI and CSDMS begins with the line " Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have made a huge impact on Education in most countries in the World.'), and have engaged with both the design and applications of ICTs to school education as well as with the current policy issue.

While most educationists have been ignored by the consultations organized by GeSCI and CSDMS, many of them organized a two day workshop at NCERT on april 29 and 30. The two day consultations were full of discussions on education issues and aims and how ICTs could fit in (instead of the discussions on infrastructure and connectivity which fill discussions organized by ICTD organizations). Many wrote out 'short discussion papers' before the consultations and the workshop discussions were highlighted in a workshop report.

The short papers are available in http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/dis/edu-ict/124-sdp-npise.html

and the report is available in http://www.itforchange.net/media/NPISE/Draft_WKSH_Report_NPISE_Consultation_May2008.pdf

and these documents provide significant inputs for ICT in school education policy.

This busts one of the myths propagated that 'since educationists (traditional domain actors) are not interested in ICTs, we need to involve technologists or ICTD enthusiasts in making ICT policies in that domain'. On the contrary, in the current policy process, the contributions of the domain actors are being ignored by the policy process.

Meaningful ICT Policy in education (or any domain) can only emerge when the domain actors and experts design the policy, since policy making requires deep understanding of the domain contexts and challenges, domain aims and priorities, rather than that of technology per se. It is useful to remember that even in the business world, ICTs started to provide returns only when their design and implementation was driven by line departments (such as purchase or manufacturing in ERP systems). First phase implementations in business world driven by the CIOs or CTOs were usually in the area of payroll or financial accounting and had limited impact on business.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

Why don't you join the consultations and influence that instead of protesting?

Apart from writing to the Minister, MHRD in march 2008, many of us have attempted several times to discuss this issue with MHRD as well as with GeSCI and CSDMS. However, while invariably GeSCI and CSDMS insist they have no authority to facilitate the process, they prepare the consultation notes, the discussion procedings as well as the policy documents. They decide the people to invite and those to exclude.

These organizations have typically not invited most of the educationists to their consultation processes. The NPISE requires a good understanding of Indian education system, but they only call one set of people and exclude the large group of Indian educationists who have the most to contribute to NPISE.

Even the recently held consultations on September 30, 2008 on "Teacher Capacity building", people like Dr. Poonam Batra, Mr. Rohit Dhankar, Dr. Hrudaykant Dewan, Dr. Vinod Raina etc. who have worked for decades in teacher education have been excluded.

These organizations were invited to a workshop of educationists on NPISE, held in NCERT on April 29 and 30 - they accepted to come and did not turn up, clearly disengaging from serious discussions amongst educationists on this issue.

They have also largely ignored inputs to their drafts, contributions to their call for papers. They have also not responded to some critical questions raised about the process and the policy draft raised during the discussions on UNDP Solution Exchange which were initiated by CSDMS.

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GeSCI is an international agency and will bring in expertise, so what is the issue?

GeSCI is a loose UN affiliate setup by five northern countries – in 2004. It is not an UN agency. It has a very small Indian office. The expertise that it can bring from these contries and the relevance to the Indian school education context – one of the largest and most complex in the world is suspect. One has to only look at the first draft that GeSCI and CSDMS prepared to challenge any thought on the value they have brought into the process. (http://www.itforchange.net/index.php/dis/edu-ict/74-other/187-ict-in-school-education-policy-document.html)

It is interesting that MHRD did not consider UNESCO, if at all it was keen on international expertise. UNESCO has a focus on education and has created a toolkit for policy making in this area and is a formal part of the UN system with well established legitimacy and credibility, essential to policy making.

In any case, given the wealth of experience and perspectives in Indian education, it is really doubtful if we need any international 'expert' organisation to lead our policy making process.

GeSCI first project in India was to work with Government of Rajasthan to setup the Rajasthan Education Initiative (REI), a Public Private Partnership umbrella, which has World Economic Forum and CII as its other partners. This suggests the ideological inclinations of the organisation.

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MHRD has setup a drafting committee now, so what is the issue?

MHRD has setup a policy drafting committee recently. However, the basic problem with regard to the drafting committee is that it does not exist in the public eye - there is no announcement of this committee from MHRD about its existence, mandate, role, power/authority as well as its relationship to Gesci/CSDMS process - what is visible to the public is the claim of Gesci/CSDMS to be providing the 'leadership' to policy making.

Recently these organizations held a round table discussion on "C**apacity building of schools and teachers in ICT**" at Hotel Claridges,Delhi on 30 September. Their consultation concept note (attached) declares that **"GeSCI with CSDMS under the aegis of MHRD will lead the process** of collaboration, consultation and participation ..., bringing together the expertise and experiences of the community of practitioners, who have experimented with the development, delivery and integration of ICT in capacity building of schools and teachers".

Even though the drafting committee is yet to release its draft, Gesci/CSDMS are continuing with public consultations and calling for contributions on different themes. The relationship between the drafting committee and these processes is unclear.

Secondly, many of the members of the committee have an education technology background and it has been felt that the drafting committee needs to include more diverse voices and include more core education perspectives.

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What will happen if this process continues

If we have a national policy on ICTs in School Education that caters to the interests of business organizations and supports the centralized procurement on a large scale, of proprietary software, licensed education content, and imposes these on schools and teachers all over the country, it will significantly burden and harm the school system. Indiscriminate and non-participatory deployment of ICTs will further burden the load of teachers. Arguments that 'with computers, the role of teachers would reduced to that of facilitators' which are already being heard, would further reduce the possibilities of teacher professional development,by eroding teacher autonomy and agency. Indiscriminate deployment of computers could trivialize learning processes and impact the relationship between the teacher and the student.

This will also destroy the positive possibilities that ICTs have – of creating and sustaining networks of teachers and educators, supporting local collaborative processes for generating curricular knowledge and resources, decentralizing education administration, de-constructing free and open source tools to further customise and create localised applications.

The second and equally important issue is of private businesses being involved in policy making. The ICT area is used in many cases by technology vendors to push their involvement in making policy under the guise of 'technological expertise'. If this process is not reversed in this case, it will act as a fillip to the privatisation of policy making across all areas under the guise of use of ICTs. This will be hugely detrimental to our goals of democracy, social justice and equity.

What needs to be done now?

We need to act now to stop the current process of private entities making policy. We request your support in:

a. Writing to the Minister MHRD, protesting against this process – (You can also email it to hrm@sb.nic.in)

b. Discussing with friends and colleagues working in education domain as well as in other fields in the development sector and public institutions and seek their support and endorsement.

c. Writing about this issue in media and bringing this to the public notice

You can contact us on educationpolicy@itforchange.net for any clarifications or information

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