

Consultation on 'National Policy on ICTs in School Education'

**April 29th-30th, 2008
New Delhi**

Short Discussion Paper
ICT in the context of education system

Hriday Kant Dewan
Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur

ICT in the context of Education System

Before we begin, I would like to make a statement that ICT can be used but it can also be misused. I remember a meeting with the Commissioner of Public Instruction of a State who very happily told me that I can tell you exactly what each teacher in my State would be teaching at this particular moment. He felt that if all the teachers in the State were doing the same thing as per directions given it was very good. He felt that if there was a mechanism to actually monitor and find out what was happening in each class and make it uniform it would be extremely useful. For him the purpose of ICT would be to facilitate and empower the teacher but rather to monitor and keep a tab on them. He would like to ensure that institutions reach them and they follow them and do as required. ICT is a tool and the tool can be used in many ways depending on the purpose and the view point of the person using it.

Education System:

The key points that describe the administrative structure of education today are:

- (i) Centralized planning and resource use.
- (ii) Need for information sharing and transparency.
- (iii) Gathering data systematically once and organising it.

Since the planning and resource use is centralized there are some implications of this. We are discussing these implications without going into the merits of whether such a centralized system is good or bad. The implications of this system are that reliable data needs to be available and we should be able to organise it in a form that is usable and comprehensive. In the last few years a lot of data has been gathered from the field. A lot of time has been spent in this exercise but the data has not been organised and collated in a systematic manner. Resulting in repeated efforts of collecting and losing this data. If ICT has to be useful for administrative purposes one of its key requirements is that the system has a belief in moving towards organising and sharing information. It should also be towards sharing it transparently.

If a good system is evolved where information can be placed and made available, such that it is constantly reviewed and monitored by general public as well as educationists. The systems and inputs received should be used by the secretariat to make appropriate changes. The data base that emerges incorporating the feedback would give a knowledge base that will help in planning.

If the aggregated data is available at the cluster and at the block level and mechanisms are found to help concerned persons analyse this data in a meaningful manner rather than for punitive

action then you could have the possibility of realising the challenges that education faces.

A system based on ICT for information storage and retrieval can only aid the movement in the direction of the system that wants to use it. It has technology that can facilitate the availability of this data. The quality of the data would be affected by the manner in which outcomes of the data are used on people concerned.

The data if organised and made available could for example help in facilitating the cluster team to have a feel of the situation in each school and find appropriate ways to support it so that it can develop. The school data has many dimensions that could also help the district and even the State officers in planning. However, if this data is available it can also be used for non-transparent purposes and therefore, we cannot say that ICT can lead to better administration. Unless there are processes created that will facilitate creation of transparency and facilitate efficient functioning and administration we have problems. Some possible uses of ICT can be the following:

Facilitating support and development of education.

- (i) Status information at all levels. This can be used to find directions of change.
- (ii) Teacher deployment and rationalisation of options and placements. Transparent availability of this information could help a lot in rationalisation.
- (iii) School setting up proposal review systems - instead of random and anarchic setting up a mechanism that reviews all information related to the need and viability. Also assess alternative possibility requires a data base.
- (iv) Assessment records. Helping compare performance across years.
- (v) Records of training, who has received. Which type? How many trained in what? Who needs to be trained? Even data on expertise and capability.

A data bank that helps ensure that appropriate teachers are nominated and also helps locate persons who are capable for various tasks rather than relying on word of mouth.

- (vi) School visit and feedback systems and their record for progress and change.

This organised properly would help the concerned people analyse their observations and compare them over time. If the feedback on the changes seen is given in an encouraging manner the benefits from this could be immense.

- (vii) Tracking school staff attendance pattern. Requiring teachers/HM to log in. Entering attendance record.

Caution:

We may remember the useful purposes can be dominant if and only if two key things are part of the process. The first is the recognition that changes and improvement happen by providing

constructive feedback and scaffolding and not merely by reward and punishment. The entire system and not the lowest or lower rungs are responsible for making the system run efficiently and purposefully. Therefore, the analysis must include looking at the role of all institutions and their different levels to see how their functioning and administration can be improved.

The system and its people at all levels need to have the ability to analyse the data and information, they should know the data that they are collecting and the purpose that they can put it to. They should not be just collecting data for someone else whom they do not even know and their only purpose of gathering data is to send it to someone else. They must be aware of the data that they are gathering, how it is being organised and structured and be equipped to look at the data and find answers to questions that are in their minds. And lastly while analysing the data remember that inferring from it has to be in the casual context of each class and each institution.