CHAPTER – 4

EDUCATION SECTOR: A PROFILE OF USER-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

It was argued in chapter in 3 that, unless the people, who under the capital-centred model had been driven to the margins of the society, and their education and organisation become the prime focus, the development effort will come to a nought. In this endeavour, education has been viewed as the most important single factor in achieving rapid economic development, technological progress and a social order founded on the value of freedom, social justice and opportunity. Education, not only helps an individual to develop his potential to the full; increase his productivity and cultivate a quality of mind which would help him to become useful and productive member of society but serves as the fundamental pre-requisite of social and economic justice which are the twin pillars of the welfare state and the socialistic pattern of society. It has, therefore, become imperative to design initiatives in order to raise the level of education by increasing the literacy rate to bring about all around development. UNESCO, by describing illiteracy as “the most monstrous of all the many instances of wasted human potential— which still at the present time keeps more than one-third of the human race in the state of helplessness, below the level of modern civilization” has accorded education a high priority as a means of human resource development.1 It is, in this context, that efforts have been mounted world over to re-examine and redesign the unilaterally conceived development strategies in a way which will ensure that the neglected majority (illiterate) has a chance to benefit from development initiative.

In this direction, under the global initiatives undertaken, the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990) provided the global platform for proclaiming the urgent need for action to redress the denial of basic education to intolerably large numbers of the world’s children and adults. It was reiterated by the Executive Director (UNICEF) James. P. Grant in his address at the opening of the panel on ‘Mobilization, People’s Participation and Decentralization for Education For All’, that “we are, in the educational field, at an unusual period of opportunity and challenge. The increasing worldwide awareness that education lies at the heart of development is an invitation to action. But, the sheer scale of achieving education for all entails an entirely different way of conceiving and managing learning, away from a top-heavy, centralized model toward a more decentralized, democratic one in which all sectors of society are involved. To day, the challenge is to broaden and deepen people’s participation, heighten the mobilization of the whole society and bring authority and decision-making in support of educational goals closer to communities and families in each country”.

The World Conference on Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien, 1990 launched a worldwide initiative to meet basic learning needs. The participant countries pledged to meet the goal of EFA by the year 2000 and the achievement of a functional and sustainable level of learning and life skills by at least 80 percent of their youth. India, too became a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration committing to provide EFA by the year 2000. The goal of EFA have since been incorporated into the National Plan framework which in turn guides all developmental actions at the Center and State level in the field of education.

Before, we attempt a broad discussion on the user-friendly initiatives undertaken by the central and state governments towards achieving EFA, we will digress to understand how the educational development has shaped up in the country since independence.
Development of Education System in India

The provision of basic education facilities in the country has been a gradual process. India inherited an educational system quantitatively small and characterized by acute gender and regional disparities with structural imbalances.\(^2\) India embarked on the task of building a mass education system 50 years ago after attaining independence from British Colonial rule. In the post-independence era, the framers of the Constitution accorded due importance to education and Article 45 of the Constitution enjoined that “The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.” Thus, placing an obligation on the states to provide free and compulsory education with a special emphasis on the educational development of the minorities and weaker section of the society. And this resulted, in the declaration of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) as National goal.

During India’s recourse to nation rebuilding process through Five Year Plans in 1951, the educational development efforts were also regulated through the plan mechanism. Several commissions and committees, viz., Dr. Radha Krishnan Commission (1948-49), Dr. Mudaliar Commission (1952-53) and Dr. Kothari Commission (1964-66) reviewed the problems of educational reconstruction.\(^3\) On the basis of the Kothari Commission report (1964-66) and the report of the Committees of the Members of Parliament, a Resolution on National Policy on Education was issued by the Government on July 24, 1968, which was regarded as the first National Policy on Education (1968) in free India. The National Policy Resolution called for a transformation of the system of education, to regulate it more closely to the lives of the people, called for continuous efforts to expand educational opportunities and for sustained efforts to raise the quality of education at all stages. The adoption of the 1968 Policy

\(^3\) S.L.Goel, op. cit., p.44.
marked a significant step in the history of education in post-independent India. Since then, there has been a considerable expansion in the educational facilities all over the country at all levels. Efforts were initiated to adopt a common structure of education throughout the country and to lay down a common scheme of the studies for girls and boys. The subject of Education was brought to the concurrent list from the State list for fulfillment of national goal of Universal Elementary Education (UEE).  

In the evolution of educational policy, the year 1985 has been another landmark as in that year the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was setup which marked institutionalization of the idea i.e. to build the country's human resource holistically which should be looked upon as the most valuable resource and the concept of development to be looked beyond economic growth. The objective was to bring about a coordinated integrated approach with regard to programmes affecting Human Resource Development. Further, to examine the problems and issues confronting educational development at all level in the country, a national debate was initiated on the status report on education entitled “Challenge of Education-A Policy Perspective” that culminated into the new National Policy on Education (NPE) and its Programme of Action (POA) which was adopted in May 1986. In India’s journey towards the goal of Universal Elementary Education, the National Policy of 1986 stands out as a significance landmark. The 1986 policy laid great emphasis on developing a national system of education, the elimination of disparities in the education system and provision of more facilities through qualitative interventions. It proposed to decentralize education administration with a view to make it more responsive to the needs of the people.  

To evolve a framework that would enable the country to move forward a review of the National Policy on Education 1986 and its POA was undertaken during 1990-92 by important committees, viz., the Acharya Ramamurthi Committee in 1990 and then again by the N. Janardhana Reddy Committee set

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up by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 1992. Based upon their recommendations the MHRD brought out a modified version of the National Policy on Education 1986 with modifications undertaken in its Programme of Action in 1992. The updated documents envisaged an overhauling of the system of planning and management of education by decentralization, creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions by giving pre-eminence to the people’s involvement including more women in educational planning and administration. It advocated that efficiency should be rated not by the ability to consume budget and demand more but by performance and delivery. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992 further contributed to educational development as Panchayati Raj Institution were given a greater role to play in the educational arena opened a new era for development of education at the grass-root level. A very recent development in the field of education has been the Ninety-Third amendment of the Constitution on November 28, 2001 declaration of basic education as a Fundamental Right of every citizen requiring the states to make necessary provision as a basic obligation. This declaration has been a step toward transforming the status of UEE from merely being a public sector activity of the state to that of a legal obligation, societal responsibility and moral commitment.

Within the education sector, elementary education has been given the highest priority in terms of sub-sectoral allocations to achieve the goal of UEE. The last decade has witnessed an unprecedented level of activity in the field of elementary education. In fact, 1990’s saw of major shift in the national policy towards provision of elementary education. These policy shifts clearly outlined the strategies and processes to be pursued for achieving UEE. The country saw the opening of the primary education scene to external assistance on a fairly large scale and the emergence of a large multi-state programme of primary education under the framework of partnership between the Central and State

7. A. Singh, op.cit., p.3.
Government on a massive scale through a number of centrally sponsored schemes.

II

Major User-Focused Initiatives

With this in the backdrop, the chapter will now dwell on some of the projects, programmes, schemes and initiatives undertaken in recent years to bring more children to schools, to provide better basic facilities in schools, to improve school qualities and to build a strong school and community linkages. While the design of these projects vary substantially, all of them address the objectives and strategies of the National Policy on Education 1986 and its revised POA(1992). The EFA, initiative coupled with various centrally sponsored schemes have undoubtedly made 1990’s the most intensive period of basic primary education development in India. More notable of these have been discussed below.9

Early Childhood Care And Education (ECCE)

Recognizing the crucial importance of early childhood education, the National Policy on Education 1986 recommended for strengthening ECCE programmes not only as an essential components of human development but also as a support to Universlization of Elementary Education and a programme of women’s development. The programme has been expected to provide necessary maturational and experimental readiness to the child for meeting the demands of the primary curriculum. It would also indirectly enhances enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools by providing substitute care facility for younger siblings. The national policy envisaged ECCE as a holistic input fostering health, psychological and nutritional development of children. The challenge in extending the ECCE facilities to all children has been so enormous that it needs to be made an integral part of all EFA projects in the years to come.10

Minorities Education

The National Policy on Education and its POA has given emphasis on the education of minorities, weaker sections of society and those physically handicapped. In pursuance of the revised POA 1992, two new centrally sponsored schemes were launched during 1993-94. The first scheme has been called the scheme of Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities, which provides infrastructural support at the primary, upper primary and secondary levels in 331 minority concentration blocks, identified as such by the Ministry of Welfare and the second, as scheme of Financial Assistance for Modernization of Madarsa education by introduction of subjects like science, mathematics, social studies, Hindi and English in their curriculum. The scheme has been purely voluntary in character. General schemes such as DPEP, the Non-formal Education Programme and Adult Literacy Programme have an added focus on educationally backward communities and sector.

Bihar Education Project (BEP)

Bihar Education Project (BEP) was launched in 1991 with the express purpose of bringing about qualitative and quantitative improvement in the elementary system in Bihar. The project envisaged covering, in a phased manner, 150 blocks spread over 20 districts over a project period 1991-96. The project has laid special emphasis on the education of deprived sections of the society, such as SCs, STs and the women. Participatory and planning and implementation have been the crucial elements of the project. It was being managed through a state level autonomous registered society, viz. the Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad (BSPP). In its mid-term review in 1994-95 the programme was appreciated for a strong Mahila Samakhya component, organization of village education committees and community involvement in the programme implementation at the grass-roots and non-formal education through NGOS. Based on the request of the government of Bihar, the project once consolidated after review, was further extended into the second phase of two years’ duration (1996-98). It has been, now, proposed to merge the project with DPEP during the next years.
National Literacy Mission (NLM)

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) has represented a national and political commitment on the need to harness all social forces to achieve the objectives of effecting a qualitative change in the lives of the people. The National Literacy Mission launched in 1988, aimed at attaining full literacy i.e., sustainable threshold level of 75 percent by 2005. The mission has sought to achieve this goal by imparting functional literacy to non-literate in the age group of 15-35 including age-group of 9-14 where non-formal education has not been in operation. The Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) has been the principal strategy adopted by NLM of eradication of illiteracy in the country. The literacy campaigns have been area specific, time bound, delivered through voluntarism, cost effective and outcome oriented. The NLM has the aim of creating a learning society through continuing education programme for neo-literates with the basic objectives of retention of literacy skills and continuation of the education of the learners beyond literacy stage, improvement of living conditions and quality of life.

Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Despite considerable expansion of schooling facilities, a large segment of children from marginalized groups continue to be deprived of primary education. The scheme of NEF was introduced in 1979-80 to target school children in the age group of 6-14 years who had remained outside the formal system of schooling.

The programme was implemented both through the states/UTs, local and national NGO/Voluntary agencies. In order to make the scheme a viable alternative to formal education it has been revised in 1993 as Education Guarantee Scheme in Alternative and Innovative Education. The formal system has envisaged primary school for rural population within one km and upper primary schools within a distance of three km. The revised scheme launched in April 2001 has aimed at covering all the un-served habitations throughout the century where there have been no learning centers within a radius of one km.
and would be a part to the overall national programme framework for UEE, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

**Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL)**

India is one of the few developing countries which took initiative in 1991 of achieving minimum levels of learning (MLL) at the primary stage. The need to lay down MLL emerged from the basic concern that irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, all children must be given access to education of a comparable standard. The MLL strategy for improving the quality of elementary education has been an attempt to combine quality with equity. MLL has been drawn up as performance goals for universal achievement and for measuring progress towards UEE both in the formal schools as well as NFF centers.

The major concern behind the need to have minimum levels of learning was to reduce the existing disparities and improve the level of achievement in rural areas, socially and economically backward areas and thus working towards the establishment of equity and social justice. The MLL, therefore, has emphasised relevance, functionality and achievability. The reduced quantum of learning within MLL framework would enable children to learn to mastery levels, even while permitting the teacher to relate text-book information and objective reality into, a meaningful process of understanding and application through experimentation, exploration and activity based teaching and develop the ability to progress faster through later stages of education. The MLL as an effective solution, taken together with a continues and comprehensive evaluation system, would help the teacher to control the pace of learning and get an insight into the learning difficulties and learning achievements of children and thereby help them to structure their pace, method and success of teaching. And provide a kind of inputs to education planner that are necessary to improve condition facilities and the quality of teaching in schools. This new approach integrated various components of the curriculum classroom transaction evaluation and teacher orientation and has emphasised the active involvement in a decentralized manner of teacher, education, parents etc.
National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education

This scheme (NP-NSPE), popularly known as Mid-day meal scheme (MDM), was launched on August 15, 1995 to give boost to UEE in terms of increasing enrolment, retention and attendance in primary classes by supplementing nutritional requirements of children attending primary schools. It is an ambitious scheme that has been operationalised throughout the country in a very short period. The programme has aimed to cover all government and government-aided and local body schools. The programme has envisaged provision of nutritious and wholesome cooked meal of 100 gms of food grains per school day, free of cost, to all children in classes I-V where cooked meal is provided and three kilograms per month per child where food grains are being distributed subject to minimum 80 percent of attendance.

Micro-planning

Efforts have been made in the past to bring elementary education system closer to the community. The modalities created over the years have continued to serve the well-to-do sections of the society, which co-opted into their fold, the influential teachers and other persons concerned with delivery of basic education services. As a result, schools have been running in an unsatisfactory manner, children dropout in large numbers and the levels of their learning have been well below the expected norms. A significant percentage of children has remained altogether deprived of the benefits of elementary education.

Micro-planning project has envisaged a process of designing “a family-wise and child-wise plan of action” by which “every child would regularly attends schools or non-formal education center, continue his/her education at the place suitable to him/her and complete at least 8 years of schooling or its equivalent at the non-formal center”. The notion ‘micro-planning’ relates primarily to a “unit” of planning. Micro level planning has been operationalised at village levels, through Village Education Committee and similar participatory structures at Block, Taluk and District levels play an important role in its operationalisation. Micro-planning can be effective only when there is total integration of efforts and resources-human and financial from all quarters. An attempt has already been made to
create a positive environment in total literacy campaigns districts for taking up micro-planning projects.

**Mass Literacy Campaigns (MLC)**

A major effort during the EFA decade in India have been the Mass Literacy Campaigns (MLC), also called the Total Literacy Campaigns. These were conceived as people's campaigns, rather than as a usual government scheme or project. The MLCs were initiated through the Ernakulam (Kerala) experiment in 1989.11

It was Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) and the All India People's Science Network (AIPSN), both non-governmental organizations that chose to experiment with the campaign form in a non-revolutionary setting in India. Choosing the district of Ernakulam in Kerala for the experiment, the structure envisaged for implementing the campaign was conceived as very broad-based, involving governmental and non-governmental agencies and also political parties. The registered district committee formed was later called the Zilla Saksharta Samiti (ZSS), which had units at the block and right up to the village level. The structure was not setup first, it evolved through a phase of mobilizations that was undertaken throughout the district. An intensive household survey, conducted in a festival form in a day in the entire district helped identify both the learners and volunteer teachers (VTs). The major community contribution was conceived in the teaching-learning process, hitherto traditionally regulated by the state. In a sense, the entire mobilisational effort was focused on motivating the community to volunteer as teachers and/or organizers for a total of eighteen months. The ZSS was empowered to create its own primers and other books as also the training for the voluntary teachers and other functionaries. Consequently, in Ernakulam, persons who were not directly connected with the adult education department or state resource center of the government devised the teaching-learning process.

School Mapping

One of the important ways of dis-aggregated area specific planning at village level has been school mapping. School mapping entered educational discourse and practice in the 1970s as a technical tool for rational allocation of educational resources with particular focus on the location of schools. School mapping has been a set of techniques and procedures used to plan the demand for school places at the local level and to decide about the location of future schools or Non-Formal Education centers as also the means to be allocated at the institutional level. This technique has been rooted in the educational reforms of 1963 in France and has been also referred to as “school location planning”. The technique of school mapping has been designed on the assumption that demand for education exists and that it suffices to open a school for children to enroll. Being more and more concerned with the issues of educational demand and quality, school mapping has gradually been evolving from a simple exercise of locational planning to a more comprehensive exercise for micro level educational development.\textsuperscript{12}

In most cases school mapping has been an activity or planning exercise primarily carried out by the local school administration. But in several countries exercises was carried out through school mapping commissions with various stakeholders (Parent associations, teacher’s unions and employees) as representatives. It has been a technique to mobilize the village community, to assess the education situation in a village, to plan for improvement of facilities, and eventually to systematically move towards Universal Primary Education (UPE).

Teacher Education

The centrally sponsored scheme of Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education was launched in 1987-88 in pursuance of the NPE, 1986. It has envisaged strengthening of the institutional base of teacher education as also taking up special programmes for mass orientation of teachers. The

programme of Mass Orientation of School Teacher (PMOST) was also taken up during 1986-90 to create a viable institutional infrastructure, academic and technical resource base for orientation, training and continuous upgradation of knowledge, competence and pedagogical skills of school teachers, adult and non-formal functionaries and teacher educators in the country. About 17.62 lakh teachers were covered.

**Operation Blackboard (OB)**

The National Policy on Education 1986 recognizing the unattractive school environment, unsatisfactory conditions of buildings and insufficiency of instructional material in primary schools, which function as de-motivating factors for enrolment and retention, called for a drive symbolically called “Operation Blackboard” (OB) in 1987-88 with the aim of improving the human and physical resources available in the primary schools. The scheme has aimed at bringing the existing primary schools in the country to a minimum standard of physical facilities by providing them with: at least two reasonable large all-weather rooms along with separate toilet facilities for boys and girls; two teachers as far as possible, one of them a women and essential teaching and learning material including blackboard, maps, charts, a small library, toys and games and some equipment for work experience. The scheme was revised in 1993-94 and was extended to provide a third classroom and third teacher to primary schools where enrolment exceed 100 students.

The scheme was implemented through the state governments, with 100 percent assistance from the Centre towards salary of additional teachers and provision of teaching learning equipment. The scheme has brought about a remarkable quantitative and qualitative improvement in primary education. 5.22 lakh primary schools have already been covered under the scheme which has now been expanded to the upper primary school system where 47,000 schools have been covered.\(^\text{13}\)

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\(^\text{13}\) Annual Report, 2001-02, op.cit., p.73.
Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP)

The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) has been implemented since 1987, with assistance from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The project aimed at universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in the remote and socio-economically backward villages of Rajasthan, with primary focus on girls. Since teacher absenteeism has been found to be a major obstacle in achieving the objective of UEE, the project used the novel approach of substituting teachers in dysfunctional schools with local youth known as Shiksha Karmis. A Shiksha Karmi (SK) has been a local person with a minimum educational qualification of class VIII for men and class V for women. To overcome the basic lack of qualification, Shiksha Karmis’ have been given intensive training through an induction programme as well a periodic refresher courses. This approach has enabled rural youth, with inherent talent and potential, to blossom into confident para professional with self-respect and dignity.

The project was being implemented by the Government of Rajasthan through the Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Board (RSKB), with assistance from voluntary agencies. The SKP has also been running non-formal classes Prehar Pathshalas-schools of convenient timings. For girls' education, Angan Pathshalas are being run in some blocks. The SKP has aimed at addressing issues related to UEE through decentralized initiative involving the community. At the grass-root level, Panchayat Samities, Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis and the village community constantly interact with each other to achieve the aims of the project. The Village Education Committees (VECs) have contributed to the improvement of school environment, augmentation of infrastructure and facilities, large enrolment of children through school mapping and micro-planning in the Shiksha Karmi Schools.

The SKP has emerged as a unique instrument of human resource development. The project has been known for its open participative style and continuous experimentation to achieve its objectives. The approach, strategies
and achievements of the SKP have attracted national and international recognition.

**Lok Jumbish**

An innovative project called Lok Jumbish (People’s Movement for Education for All) with assistance from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was undertaken in Rajasthan in 1992 to achieve education for all by the year 2000 through people’s mobilization and their participation. The project has been implemented by the Lok Jumbish Parishad (LJP) an autonomous society registered under the Societies Registration Act. The important feature of the project has been its focus on creating necessary structures and setting in motion processes which would empower community, especially, women and make education an instrument of women’s equality. The project laid emphasis on pursuing the goal of equity in education. One of the critical processes in Lok Jumbish has been people’s participation which basically implies transfer of initiatives back to people in regard to their children’s basic education. It also means involvement of the project functionaries at all levels and the intended beneficiaries in decision making.

The Lok Jumbish approach to microplanning has entrusted the responsibility of village level planning to a cluster of agencies. Agency representatives are responsible to the democratically elected body at their level. Ensuring total enrolment and retention in a village has been the task of a core-team which secure the cooperation of the VEC, Mahila Samooh, parents and teachers. The underlying theme has been to place trust in the experience, potential abilities and judgement of the community while gradually upgrading their capacity to plan for themselves. The whole process has intended to effectively bridge the gap between the community and school empower communities, parents and teachers and to appraise educational policy makers and planners of the aspirations of the people, enabling them to be pragmatic and sensitive in their decision-making.
Lok Jumbish has been able to set up innovative management structures incorporating the principles of decentralization and delegation of authority as well as build partnerships with local communities and the voluntary sector. The project interventions have been made in several components of primary education like teacher’s training, MLL, opening of new schools, NFE centers, school mapping and upgradation of primary schools.¹⁴

**District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)**

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), a centrally sponsored scheme launched in November, 1994 was conceived as a beachhead for overhauling the primary education system in India. The programme aimed at operationalising the strategies for achieving UEE through district specific planning and disaggregated target setting. It moved away from the schematic piecemeal approach of the earlier programmes and tried taking a holistic view of primary education development with emphasis on decentralized management, community mobilization, capacity building at all levels and district specific planning. It has made concerted efforts to promote wider mobilization by focusing on participation by the poor, deprived and disadvantaged people. The process was instituted through the village committees such as Village Education Committees and bodies like Mother-Teacher Associations and Parent-Teacher Associations. The programme was structured to provide inputs over and above the provisions made by the state governments. Since the study of the design and performance of DPEP programme constitute a part of the main subject matter of the research, a detailed examination of the programme has been attempted in chapter-7.

**Janshala Programme**

Janshala (GOI-UN) programme has been a collaborative effort of the Government of India and five UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA) to provide programme support to the ongoing efforts towards achieving UEE. Janshala, a community based primary education programme, aimed to make primary education more accessible and effective, especially for girls and

children in deprived communities, marginalized groups, SC/ST minorities, working children and children with special needs. A unique feature of the Janshala has been that it happened to be a block-based programme with emphasis on community participation and decentralization. Districts and blocks for Janshala were selected from those where DPEP was not being implemented.\(^{15}\)

The programme covered 139 blocks, including 10 cities in 31 districts of nine states. It has run for 5 years from 1998 to 2002. The programme at state level was run through existing structure of educational administration. Janshala primarily aimed at strengthen primary education by organizing alternative education systems, improving existing systems, involving community in school organisation and instilling a sense of ownership of schools among the people. Therefore, to strengthened school-community linkages.

All states under Janshala have carried out community mobilization activities and intensive micro-planning exercises with community participation. Village Education Committee as its nodal agency, PTAs and other grass-root level structures have been set up in Janshala blocks and they have actively worked on school improvement, enrolment and retention of children in primary schools and alternative schools. Janshala programme, though limited in its coverage and scope has contributed significantly to the ongoing efforts of Government of India to achieve UEE through various innovations in community processes, teaching methodologies and education of marginalized. It has amply demonstrated that decentralized mode of functioning are pre-requisites for ensuring innovation at village, school and block levels. The emphasis on community participation and microplanning has prepared the ground for greater cooperation between different stakeholders at the grass-root level. It was expected that in the areas where Janshala has been implemented, its experience of working with community would enable preparation of need based District Elementary Education Plans under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). It was

learnt that SSA would thus be able to use the springboard of Janshala in moving forward to achieve its time bound goals and also integrate the experiences of Janshala in its strategies for providing quality education to all children.

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)\(^\text{16}\) is a current historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of UEE through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with states. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which promises to change the face of the elementary education sector of the country, aims to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the 6-14 age group by 2010.

SSA is an effort to recognise the need for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community-owned quality elementary education in the mission mode. It has envisaged to bridge the gender and social gaps. The ministry has released extra grant of Rs. 88.50 crores to 28 states/UTs for starting preparatory activities in 225 non-DPEP district and 12 DPEP districts. The SSA, without disturbing the existing structures in states and districts would try to bring convergence in all these efforts. Efforts will be made to ensure that there is functional decentralization down to the school-level in order to improve community participation. Besides recognizing PRIs/Tribal Councils in Scheduled Areas, including the Gram Sabha, states would be encouraged to enlarge the accountability framework by involving non-governmental organisations, teachers, activists and, women organizations, etc.

SSA is to accord the highest priority to community minority, transparency in programme planning and implementation of capacity building at all levels. The planning in SSA has been decentralized and highest priority has been accorded to community ownership and monitoring. The approach is community owned and village education plans prepared in consultation with Panchayati Raj Institution which form the basis of District Elementary Education Plans. Funds released to states are to be channelized to registered societies at state level. The focus

remain on districts having low female literacy rate and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. SSA is to cover the entire country by the end of the Ninth Plan with a special focus on educational needs of girls, Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes and other children in difficult circumstances.

The Central and State Government have been entrusted with the responsibility to jointly implement the SSA in partnership with the local governments and the community. To signify the national priority for elementary education, a National Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission is being established with the Prime Minister as the chairperson and the Union Minister of Human Resource Development as the Vice-Chairman. States have been requested to establish State Level Implementation Societies for UEE under the chairmanship of Chief Minister/Education Minister. This has been already implemented in many states.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan eventually plan to subsume all existing programmes including externally aided programmes within its overall framework with a district as the unit of programme implementation. In order to make the approach totally holistic and convergent, efforts would be made to combine programme implementation at the district level with all other departments. This would include, programme for children in the 0-6 age group under the Department of Women and Child Development, sports related interventions of the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, establishment of Public Libraries under the Department of Culture and Programme of Ministry of Health with regard to nutrition and school health.

III

It is more than fifty years ago that we began our efforts to transform the elite system of education with limited coverage into a mass education system that meets the basic education needs of all children in the county. In this long journey towards the goal of the UEE, The 1990s stand out as of great significance both for the intensity of action and the variety of new initiatives that
were brought in to achieve the elementary education goal in India. Each innovative project set specific target and designed a specific mechanism to deliver towards the national education goal. Although, the 1990s witnessed a spectacular expansion of primary education in India; development of primary education in India present a mixed bag of progress and failure. On the positive side, the country has witnessed multi-fold expansion of public primary education facilities. Various incremental achievements such as more schools, better physical excess, higher female literacy rate, better participation of women however, seems to be far too small for meeting the ever expending challenge of universal elementary education which is a constitutional commitment made five decade ago. India still accounts for 30 percent of the total adult illiterates and 35 million children in the 6-10 age group remaining outside the primary schools.

The new millennium begins with new promises. The revised framework of National Literacy Mission (NLM) promises to reach a literacy rate of 75 percent by the year 2007. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which is a flagship programme of the National Government promises to achieve the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2005 and the goal of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) by 2010.

It is fully recognized that sustainable change and development in basic education has been highly conditioned by regional and section disparities and state specific contexts. Mere funds and schemes from the center along with external assistance will not guarantee the achievement of UEE goal. The modernization and professionalisation of educational governance through progressive decentralization, devolution of powers and capacity building at the operating end, namely the schools, effective implementation mechanism and monitoring efforts are some of the important aspects which need to be addressed more seriously for achieving the ever elusive goal of EFA.