

# **OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

**Decentralisation of Educational Planning and  
the District Primary Education Programme**

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**DECENTRALISATION OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND  
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### *Abstract*

India has a multi-level planning framework. Under this framework, educational planning is initiated and carried out at the national, state and district levels. The reform efforts from the 1980s have been focussing on decentralised educational planning at the district level. The districts in India are primarily used to the traditional role of revenue administration. In the absence of planning machinery, planning competency and resource availability, decentralisation efforts could not become a successful operational practice at the district level. The decentralisation efforts under the recently initiated District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) have made concerted efforts to overcome these constraints to develop district level educational plans. An analysis of decentralisation of planning of primary education under the DPEP shows that the DPEP efforts, to a large extent, have succeeded in developing decentralised educational plans at the district level. Sustaining such efforts is equally important and it requires developing and institutionalising local level capacity and competency in educational planning.

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# **Decentralisation of Educational Planning and the District Primary Education Programme\***

N.V. Varghese\*\*

## **Introduction**

Development theories of the fifties postulated that disparities are inevitable in the process of economic development and they would disappear at a later phase of economic development (Williamson, 1965). Contrary to this expectation, regional disparities and inequalities in personal income distribution increased in many countries including the industrialised countries, over a period of time (Prud'homme, 1995). Hence, reduction of inequalities has emerged as a concern in all major efforts of reform in the recent past. Decentralisation is considered as one of the most important reform strategies in many countries to reduce inequalities. Education sector is not an exception to this general trend.

Decentralisation of educational planning is advocated to reduce disparities by improving the efficiency of the public delivery mechanisms. It envisages to make the planning process people-friendly and participatory, plans more local-specific and the educational institutions more efficient and effective. India has made various efforts to decentralise educational planning and the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is one of the major and recent efforts in this direction. This paper is an attempt to closely examine the efforts made towards decentralisation of education in India focussing on the DPEP initiatives.

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## **2. Decentralisation : What does it mean?**

No economic system in the world is totally centralised or decentralised. Some systems are more centralised than others. What distinguishes a relatively more centralised system from others is the decision-making process and exercise of control. In centralised system, the decision making power and the authority to exercise control are vested with the central authorities. In a decentralised system, the decision making process is more consultative and participatory and the control is exercised by people or authority located closer to units which prepare and operationalise the plans.

One may distinguish between horizontal and vertical division of powers in decentralisation. Horizontal division of powers refers to division of powers between national, provincial and local governments. In other words, horizontal division of powers has a territorial connotation. In India, it may refer to a state, district or block level. The vertical division of powers refers to division of powers over specific functions (Bray, 1991). It reflects more of a sectoral approach to development.

One may come across situations where what is proposed and practised as decentralisation has not resulted in transfer of decision-making power and authority to local level units. Decentralisation is sometimes misconstrued as deconcentration, delegation and devolution of power and authority.

Deconcentration demarcates and assigns responsibilities to lower level units without power and authority to decide and control. The decision-making power rests with the central authority. What is transferred is implementation responsibilities. It is a process of establishing field units of the central authority to have a better control of the total situation by establishing greater control over distant areas. In other words, it is nothing but an administrative convenience to exercise central control. The authority rests with the higher level and the lower level units are appended and relegated to the role of implementing units. Deconcentration results in creation of more number of administrative units at lower spatial units and provides an illusion that authority is close to the people.

Delegation consists of granting of state authority from a higher level planning unit to a lower planning unit for a specified period and that too, very often, in certain specified areas. In this case, lower level planning units do not act according to their own rights but on the basis of power granted to them by the higher authority. In this sense, the authority

enjoyed by the lower level unit is treated as a derived concession rather than a statutory right which can be withdrawn anytime when the higher authorities are not happy with the arrangement. Therefore, delegation is nothing but a diffusion of authority in an administrative sense.

Devolution of power is the essence of decentralisation. It denotes statutory powers to the local units to take decisions and prepare plans. The central authority is to be informed about the decision rather than taking prior sanctions from them. Decentralisation denotes power and authority to prepare and implement plans. It is not a situation of developing plans totally independent of national concerns but developing local specific plans within the framework and concerns indicated by national plans.

How do we distinguish a decentralised plan from others? The characteristics of decentralised planning can be categorised as follows. First, the lower spatial units of planning are given authority to develop their own plans which implies authority to specify targets and evolve strategies to achieve them. However, it is to be noted that the targets cannot be fixed totally independent of national concerns. Hence, guidelines from central level planning agencies may become essential and helpful to finalise targets at lower levels, which need not necessarily adversely affect the autonomy of lower level units. On the other hand, such guidelines help strengthen the multi-level planning framework. Absence of such guidelines may lead to anarchy, individualism and parochialism which weakens national polity and multi-level planning framework.

Secondly, another important characteristic of decentralisation is that the lower level planning units are given power and authority to reallocate the resources already allocated to them and mobilise additional resources, if necessary. This implies a change in the budgetary procedures. Formulation of budgets by the lower level planning units and exploring possibilities of mobilising local resources become very important. Untied funds or block grants are to be provided to the lower level planning units with freedom to reallocate resources to suit their priorities.

Thirdly, planning becomes decentralised when the lower level planning units participate in the planning process with the higher level planning units, say State, on more equal terms. The authority of the local unit is not based on a derived concession but on the basis of the statutory power it enjoys. The lower level units, say districts, are not subordinate to the state but work on a partnership basis based on the statutory power they

enjoy. The nature of information and communication transmission between policy units and primary units (Kurien, 1978) in the process of planning reflects the extent of decentralisation in any selected sector.

Decentralised planning process co-exists with centralised decision-making. What is important is to clearly demarcate the areas of decision-making at different levels. There are certain areas of operation where it is difficult and too costly to leave the decision making authority to the decentralised units. For example, issues related to national security, foreign policy, inter-state relations etc. are areas which cannot be totally left to the wisdom of district level planning authorities. Similarly, setting up of university or a college in a district is not a decision of a particular district alone. Even though these institutions may be located in a district, a decision to set up a university is taken either at State or Central level. In other words, even when decentralised planning is very well practised, there will still be certain areas where centralised planning and decision-making is unavoidable. This should not be treated as anti-decentralisation. Decentralisation does not necessarily mean weakening the Centre by depriving it of any decision-making power. It does mean, however, a clear definition of power and authority enjoyed by different units in the multi-level framework. What is essential is to avoid friction between centralised and decentralised planning units by clearly demarcating the areas of operations which fall within the legitimate purview of different planning levels.

### **3. Efforts towards Decentralisation in Education**

The Indian experience represents an interesting phenomenon of moving towards and away from centralisation. Till the 19th century, intervention in education by the colonial power was very limited. The Charter Act of 1813 initiated a process of government grants for education in British India. However, in the next two decades each of the Presidencies in India followed their own educational policies and programmes and education was not under a single agency. The Charter Act of 1833 changed this pattern by creating a highly centralised form of educational administration in British India. This trend towards centralised administration in education continued till 1870.

In 1870 efforts towards decentralisation of educational administration were initiated by Lord Mayo. Under this scheme, provincial governments were assigned fixed grants for education and authorised to levy local taxes to supplement the grants. The 1882 resolution of Lord Ripon on local self government underlined the importance of the role



of the self-government institutions to improve the efficiency of educational system. The period following this reform witnessed encouragement and promotion of local bodies in management of education. The financial contribution of the local bodies towards primary education during this period was significant. The Government of India Act of 1919 further strengthened these trends towards decentralisation by classifying education and local self-government as transferred subjects and placing them under the control of the Indian Ministers.

The Hartog Committee of 1929 noted that the experimentation in decentralisation led to inefficiencies and wastage and hence the committee was opposed to too much delegation of authority to local bodies. Various committees appointed in the 1930s and 1940s also recommended withdrawal of delegated powers from the local bodies to the provincial governments and thus contributed to the trend towards centralisation.

The initial years after Indian independence witnessed a trend towards sharing of power and resources between Centre and State Governments. The constitution of India provided for greater power and authority to State and Central governments in planning and management of education. It is interesting to note that discussions on decentralisation at this stage centred essentially around centre-state relations. Adoption of planning as the basic strategy for economic development and state funding of education contributed towards centralisation of decision-making in education in India.

India adopted planning within a mixed economy framework as the basic strategy for its economic and social development. Under this framework, the public intervention strategies decide the direction and pattern of development and the private sector operates within the boundaries drawn by the public policy. Planning is seen more as an 'instrumental inference' than as an alternative to market mechanism. The macro goals of the system and principal action directives are derived from the planning process while the micro-analogues are left to be implemented through the markets (Chakravarty, 1987). Basic questions relating to how much to save and where to invest are left to the planning process. The public investment was increasingly concentrated in the areas of infrastructural development and capital goods sector leaving consumer goods sector largely to the private sector. The inherent logic of the development strategy was that investments in capital goods sector will promote overall growth and development in the long run. Education in India continues to be an area dominantly funded and managed by the public authorities. The public character of primary education necessitates centralised decision

making. In the initial stages the major focus was on expanding the system depending on the sole delivery mechanism of formal primary schools. Perhaps, the centralised decision making process attempted to create structures to standardise processes and procedures. Given the resource flow mechanisms operating in the system, possibilities of decentralising planning efforts were rather limited.

The setting up of Planning Commission at the national level in the fifties helped shape national developmental plans. Planning decisions and efforts in the initial stages were more centralised. Professor Mahalanobis, the architect of the Indian plans was one of the first to recognise the need for making educational plans an integral part of the planning process (Chakravarty, 1987). However, detailed planning exercises were more seriously attempted in the productive sectors of the economy rather than in social sectors including education. Even within education, planning was mostly done at the central level especially in the initial years.

Even when planning decisions and processes were almost centralised, many programmes had decentralised implementation procedures. The Community Development programmes conceived and implemented during the First Five-Year plan period belong to this category. In the subsequent periods, there was an earnest effort to develop planning machinery and mechanism at the state levels. The setting up of State Planning Boards similar to Planning Commission at the national level helped prepare state plans. In fact, a three tier system of Panchayat Raj Institutions based on the Balwant Ray Committee recommendations was visualised to facilitate developmental efforts. The Third Five Year plan made an effort to develop district and block level plans for rural development. However, no planning machinery was formalised at the district level.

In 1969, the Planning Commission issued guidelines for developing district plans. Realising that planning competency has not yet fully developed at the state level and planning machinery has not yet been created at the district level, efforts in the seventies were redirected to strengthen state level planning process.

In the seventies it was realised that more than three fourths of the non-enrolled children were from a few selected states and these states were categorised as educationally backward and educational plans became more targetted towards educationally backward states and groups. In the subsequent period, planning efforts were focussed on these states.

#### **4. District as the Unit for Decentralised Planning**

District as a viable unit for decentralised planning was under discussion in India for a fairly long period. Perhaps, Professor Gadgil is one of the first in India to advocate planning at the district level. In the sixties, eminent economists and policy makers like Professors V.K.R.V. Rao, S. Chakravarty and K.N. Raj considered district as a viable unit for planning. It is to be noted that even when district planning did not become a reality, there were attempts to seek the possibilities and feasibilities of planning at the block level. Dantwala Committee (1977) provided guidelines for block level planning. Professor Y.K. Alagh while agreeing with the choice of district as a viable unit for planning preferred a grouping of the economy into 10-12 blocks for planning purposes. The Economic Advisory Council (EAC) of the Prime Minister in its second report (1974) recommended creation of 94 development divisions in the country for purposes of planning. Accordingly each division consisted of a cluster of districts with similar or identical agro-climatic conditions.

Choice of unit for planning depends upon the existing administrative structure and also the level of development of the planning machinery. Information-wise, the district is the ultimate reducible unit for which data collection machinery exists in India (Mundle, 1977). At this level, administrative structure is also fairly well developed. There is a collectorate at district level and below the state level collectorate is the most well developed administrative structure. More importantly, at district level we have relatively better trained or trainable staff who can undertake the responsibility of developing district plans. Block level may become a viable unit perhaps in the coming years when planning machinery and competency at the district level are well developed. But at present, at least in the majority of instances, the block is not a viable unit for decentralised planning in India.

As noted earlier, efforts to make planning effective at the district level were initiated in the sixties. The Planning Commission (1969) even issued guidelines for district planning. The report of the Working Group (Planning Commission, 1984) is a restatement and re-affirmation of the fact that district is the viable unit for decentralised planning in India at the present level of development. Therefore, in the present context while one talks about decentralised planning in India one is talking about district level planning.

Decentralised planning at the district level "is a kind of area-based, sub-state planning and arises from the need to supplement the national and state plans with a more detailed examination of the resources, problems and potentials of local areas (i.e. districts), so that investment programmes more specifically tailored to the particular needs of each district could be evolved and implemented" (Planning Commission, 1984, p.22). The Working Group Report further elaborates that district planning implies evolving a development scenerio at the district level based on (a) specific needs of the people; (b) growth potentials of the area; and (c) budgetary allocations and resources available.

The concept of decentralised district planning, as indicated in the Working Group Report is based on a multi-level planning framework where the district is treated as a sub-state, decision-making unit. The district plans have necessarily to be within the framework of national policies and state priorities. This link with other planning levels becomes essential to ensure a multi-level planning process to strengthen national developmental efforts by encouraging autonomy to the local units for preparing plans within the national confines.

According to the definition of Working Group, district planning is seen as a sub-system in the multi-level planning framework. All planning activities at the district level will be with a single planning body at the district level in line with Planning Boards at the state level and Planning Commission at the national level. The report stresses that the planning function will not be fragmented among numerous departments and agencies. In other words, planning at the district level will be integrated and it will dovetail with plans at the lower and higher spatial units.

The working group report conceives the progress of district planning in three distinct stages: Stage-I initiating; Stage-II limited Decentralisation; Stage-III final stage representing full decentralisation. It is expected that stages I and II will be completed by the end of seventh plan and stage III will be achieved by the year 2000 A.D.

The Hanumanta Rao Committee clearly identified the purview of district planning in education. Accordingly, the areas covered under district planning education are: i) elementary education; ii) secondary education; and iii) polytechnics and industrial training institutes (Planning Commission, 1984).

Following the Working Group Report, the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action envisaged setting up of District Board of Education to facilitate educational planning at the district level. The Working Group on Elementary Education set up in the context of the Eighth Five Year plan (Planning Commission, 1989) noted that there are educationally advanced districts in educationally backward states and there are educationally backward districts even in educationally advanced states. Hence, the Working Group favoured district as the unit for developing realistic decentralised planning in education.

The NDC Committee on literacy and elementary education (Planning Commission, 1992a) and the Eighth Five Year plan (Planning Commission, 1992b) categorised the districts for purposes of planning education into three categories : i) high literacy districts where enrolment is universal and retention rates are high with emphasis on quality improvement programmes; ii) Total Literacy Campaign districts where the campaign has produced an increased demand for primary education and conditions are conducive to increase the pace of expansion of primary education; and iii) low literacy districts where provision of facilities are poor, delivery mechanisms inadequate and community awareness at very low levels. The CABE Committee on decentralised management of education (Department of Education, 1993a) emphasised the need for integrating educational planning and management efforts with the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The recent constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th amendments) provide the statutory basis to strengthen the role of local bodies in planning and management of primary education.

## **5. Pre-requisites for Decentralised Planning at the District Level**

Successful decentralisation needs to be a slow process where the essential mechanisms and process are initiated, strengthened and institutionalised. The organisational arrangements for preparing and implementing district plans are to be created as an essential step towards decentralising planning process. Moreover, what is essential for successful decentralisation is a clear demarcation of functions at different levels to ensure that the process of preparing plans reflect the local decision-making authority and power. One can identify necessary conditions for facilitating decentralised planning.

Firstly, all areas of activity cannot be brought under the purview of district plans. Therefore, the first step is to identify the areas that can come under the purview of district educational plan. For example, the working group (1984) identified elementary education, secondary education, adult education, technical high schools and polytechnics and

Industrial Training Institute (ITIs) as areas for decentralised decision-making in education. The next step is to identify the coverage of the schemes in terms of geographical areas. Many of the programmes pertaining to the above mentioned areas may perhaps cover more than one district; others covering only certain blocks and villages of one district. Therefore, the programmes are to be divided into two broad categories (i) those pertaining to one district only and (ii) those pertaining to more than one district. Category (i) will be treated as district level programmes and category (ii) as state level programmes. Such a clear demarcation of programmes in terms of coverage will help avoid overlapping planning functions between districts and states.

Secondly, decentralisation would be meaningful only when the district has authority to decide on the allocation of resources to various activities. Financial decentralisation involves establishment of suitable budgetary and re-appropriation procedures channelling through sectoral departments and agencies channelling funds directly to the area levels (Sundaram, 1983) i.e. a shift from vertical to a horizontal channelling of resources. The state resources should be divided into two viz. (i) divisible pool; and (ii) non-divisible pool. Those which are earmarked to schemes/projects based on the location of the projects belong to indivisible pool. All others will be in the divisible pool. The district may not be given the authority to reallocate resources earmarked for specific projects. The Working Group Report while appreciating the idea of empowering district planning body with all powers for sectoral allocation as an ideal goal, advocates a modest starting with a small amount near about ten per cent of the total allocation. The budgets need to be prepared at the district level to help reflect actual needs as expressed in the decentralised plan with enough freedom and authority to the districts to decide on the programmes and the necessary financial allocations.

Third is an issue pertaining to the decentralisation of administrative decision-making process. Matching authority with responsibility forms the basis of administrative decentralisation. Administrative decentralisation originates in a quest for efficiency in terms of initiatives, performance and spread of administration at lower operational levels (Narain, 1963). In a sense administrative decentralisation is essential to prepare for implementation of plans. In the present context, there is a need for simplification in the administrative and technical sanctions so that none of the district level schemes are delayed for reasons of approval from the state level. The Working Group report favours bifurcation of functions at the district level. In this context the Working Group stresses the need to bifurcate the functions performed by the district collector into 'regulatory' and 'develop-

mental' and entrust the latter to an equally senior officer well-versed in developmental activities. Under this scheme, the Collectors will look after revenue, law and order and all other developmental activities will be under three chief executive officers. Some of the states have already initiated steps in this direction.

Fourth is the idea of democratic decentralisation. which attempts to associate more and more people with the work of the government especially at the local levels (Narain, 1963) to ensure peoples' participation in the developmental process. In this sense democratic decentralisation is nothing but an extension of peoples' right to manage their own affairs. It is in this context that the relationship between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and decentralised planning needs to be emphasised. PRIs are instruments in achieving democratic decentralisation providing a forum for people's participation at large. The right of the people to participate and partake in the developmental process is, to some extent, achieved through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The recent constitutional amendments, as noted earlier, provide for improved power and authority to the PRIs. PRIs in the States are reorganised and strengthened as a first step towards effective decentralisation.

Fifthly, at present institutional arrangement at the district level do not exist to initiate and carry out planning on a regular basis. Therefore, one of the essential conditions for success of decentralised planning is to develop a planning machinery at the district level. Developing planning competencies at the district level is equally important to help initiate planning processes and also to implement and monitor planned activities.

Sixthly, a well developed information system is essential for the success of district plans to help change the decision-making process from subjective and experience based to objective and information based. Therefore, there is a need to develop and institutionalise the collection, compilation, storing and retrieval of data. Computers with adequately trained persons to manage them can help a lot in this regard. In the present context information is collected at the district and sub-district levels to be transmitted to the state and national levels. In the context of decentralisation, emphasis needs to be placed on analysing and using the information thus collected at the district level.

## 6. District Planning : The Constraints

It can be seen from the above that in India efforts towards decentralisation moved in opposite directions; first towards a highly centralised structure; then to a highly decentralised local body; then to provincial and state governments and now back again to the district levels. At present India has a multi-level planning framework where educational planning exercises are initiated at the central, state and district levels. In the initial stages, planning efforts were mostly confined to the central level. At the national level, the education division of the planning commission in consultation with the departments concerned and ministries draw up the plan. Normally working groups on specified areas of education are constituted to help develop Five Year plans.

At the state level educational activities are carried out by two agencies: (i) the secretariat which is responsible for policy-making and co-ordination; and (ii) the directorate which is responsible for direction and regulation (Mukherjee, 1970). Many states have separate directorates for different levels of education and some of the states have separate secretariats for school and higher education each headed by a separate Secretary. Most of the states have a planning cell to look after educational planning activities.

The state plans are mostly incremental in nature due to the fact that the states feel that the scope for state initiatives are limited. Increasing bureaucratisation of the planning process with the introduction of centrally sponsored schemes indirectly reduces the scope for state initiatives. It is also true that planning competencies are rarely developed at the state level. Even though planning cells are created at the state level, "these units are not effectively manned by technically trained persons" (Mathur, 1980; p.7). The planning process in India is not yet totally decentralised. Even now planning exercise is, perhaps, more rigorous and elaborate at the national level than at other levels. Planning at the state level is mostly an exercise in disaggregation and regionalisation of national plans. The scope for planning at the district level is very limited and it assumes the role of implementing central and state schemes. Consequently, very often, public debates on plans in India centre around national plans, state plans and interlinkages between them. Intra-state or district plans seldom attract the attention of public debate partly due to the fact that very little planning exercise is seriously attempted at the district level (Chakravarty, 1987).



The constraints at the district level to initiate planning process are many : (i) absence of a planning machinery; (ii) lack of resources at the district level; and (iii) lack of planning competencies. First, the districts in India are primarily used to the traditional role of revenue administration. A shift from this traditional role to the developmental role at the district was mostly confined to implementation of various programmes initiated by the central and state governments. Hence no serious planning work in the realistic sense of the term could be taken up at the district level (Prasad, 1988). Perhaps, such a need was never felt too. Therefore, many a district do not have any planning machinery adequately equipped to take up rigorous planning exercises in education. At present the district level educational officer has to draw up the plans. This is a tall order expectation given his busy schedule and competency. Therefore, if district plans are to be drawn up, an organizational arrangement to draw up district plan is also to be created.

Secondly, the scope for decentralised planning in the present context is very limited. The resource allocation decisions are taken at the state level. The share of 'untied funds' or 'block grants' is very meagre (Nanjundappa, 1982). Moreover, they do not have any authority to mobilise resources of their own. Hence districts are left with too little resources at their disposal to initiate any district specific programme. Given the nature of resource allocations, the districts are compelled to make proposals to implement the State level initiatives.

Thirdly, planning competencies are not developed at the district level. What takes place in the name of planning at the district level is nothing but manipulating the budget figures, perhaps on an incremental basis. This is an easy task which can be completed in a day or two. The rigorous exercise of any realistic assessment of the situation, fixing the targets, elaborating any intervention strategies, costing of the plans etc., are relatively non-existent at the district level. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) (Department of Education, 1993b) which attempts to make a serious effort to overcome these constraints, is the most recent effort to translate the idea of decentralised planning into an operational practice in the area of primary education.

## **7. District Primary Education Programme : The Context**

District Primary Education Programme is an exercise in decentralised planning and disaggregated target setting to encourage and promote local initiatives in primary education. The programme in its conceptualisation takes into account the recent trends in

the pattern of development of primary education and the current concerns and priorities and resources available to the system (Ayyar, 1995b, Department of Education, 1995b, Varghese, 1994). The DPEP envisages to energise the primary education scene through active intervention and resource support in the deprived areas so as to reduce the educational disparities between the developed and under-developed regions and groups of people. It takes into account the present level of educational development to devise intervention strategies.

### **Focus on Deprived Regions**

Primary education in India has expanded remarkably in the post-independence period. At present, India has one of the largest network of primary schools in the world. With 577 thousand institutions, enrolling more than 100 million children, and employing nearly 1.8 million teachers, primary education has become a gigantic public enterprise accounting for a considerable amount of public investment in India. The progress of primary education has contributed to an expansion of access to primary education, an increase in enrolment and retention in primary classes, and an increase in inter-stage transition ratios.

At present more than 95 per cent of the rural population has a primary school within a walking distance of one kilometer (NCERT, 1995). The number of primary schools increased from 209.7 thousand in 1950-51 to 577 thousand in 1990-91. Besides, there are around 277 thousand Non-formal education centres enrolling around 6.8 million children. Enrolment in primary classes increased from 19.5 million in 1950-51 to around 101.6 million in 1991-92 (Department of Education, 1993c) and the number of teachers increased from 0.54 million in 1950-51 to around 1.8 million in 1991-92 (Department of Education, 1993c).

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) at the primary level increased from 42.6 per cent in 1950-51 to 102.7 per cent in 1991-92. During this period, GER of boys almost doubled from 60.6 per cent to 116.6 per cent and GER of the girls almost quadrupled from 24.8 per cent to 88.1 per cent (Department of Education, 1993c). The inter-stage transition ratios increased from 16.3 per cent in 1950-51 to 35.6 per cent in 1991-92.

**Table 1: Growth of Enrolment in Primary Schools**  
(In Millions)

Period	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	13.8	5.4	19.2
1960-61	23.6	11.4	35.0
1970-71	35.6	21.3	56.9
1980-81	45.2	28.5	73.7
1990-91	58.1	41.0	99.1

**Growth rates**  
(in percentages)

1950-51 to 1960-61	5.5	7.8	6.2
1960-61 to 1970-71	4.2	6.5	5.0
1970-71 to 1980-81	2.4	2.9	2.6
1980-81 to 1990-91	2.5	3.7	2.9

Source: Department of Education (1993c).

The decadal growth rates (Table 1) reflect some of the interesting features of expansion of primary education in India (Varghese, 1995a). Firstly, the fifties was a period of faster expansion of the system followed by continuously declining growth rates in the sixties and seventies. The decade of the eighties witnessed signs of recovery in growth rates in enrolment. As can be seen (Table 1), the rate of growth has more than halved between the fifties and seventies and the recovery in the eighties is only marginal. At any given point of time the rate of growth of expansion of girls is consistently higher than that of boys. This may be partly due to the relatively narrow base of girls in education. However, it needs to be noted that the share of girls in total enrolment in primary education increased from 28 per cent in the fifties to around 44 per cent in the nineties.

A closer scrutiny of the pattern of growth of primary education in the eighties shows that the recovery in growth rates is more a phenomenon of the post-mid eighties. More importantly, the growth has taken place increasingly among the deprived groups located in the backward regions of the country. For example, while the overall growth rate in the eighties was 2.9 per cent, the same among girls was 3.7 per cent, among scheduled castes 3.5 per cent and among scheduled tribes 5.1 per cent.

During the period between 1986 and 1993 the number of primary schools increased by around 33.4 thousand. Of this, nearly 82 per cent of the increase is in the rural areas.

More importantly nearly 80 per cent of the increase in schools has been accounted by the educationally backward states of India with an educationally backward state like Madhya Pradesh alone accounting for nearly one-fourths of the total increase. During the same period the net increase in teachers was around 121 thousand. Nearly 84 per cent of the increase in teachers are accounted by the rural areas. Similarly 66 per cent of the new teachers are employed in the educationally backward states. Even in case of enrolments, girls account for 60 per cent of the additional enrolments in these areas. All these may indicate signs of recovery in primary education in India. The DPEP attempts to capitalise these trends by selecting the educationally backward districts under this programme. At present nearly 75 per cent of the out of school children are in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Each of these states has externally funded primary education programmes in operation.

### **Resource Support**

It can be argued that progress of primary education in India depends on the public investment in education. Public expenditure on education as a share of GNP has increased in India from 1.2 per cent in 1950-51 to 3.9 per cent in 1989-90. The share of elementary education during the corresponding period increased 0.48 per cent to 1.72 per cent. However, plan allocations to education which is a reflection of new initiatives and programmes, have been declining in India. During the first two decades of planned development (1950-1969) allocation to elementary education as a share of total allocation of education declined from 56 per cent to 24 per cent. However in the next two decades there was a consistent increase in the share of resources allocated to primary education from 24 per cent in 1969 to around 37 per cent in the Seventh Plan (1985-90). Allocation to elementary education in the current plan (8th Five Year plan - 1992-97) has increased to 47 per cent. Although this trend is positive, it is to be noted that we have not yet reached the levels of the first plan allocation.

Another trend worth noting is that the share of plan expenditure on primary education to total educational expenditure has been declining in India. In the eighties, this share has increased from 5.9 per cent in 1980-81 to around 12 per cent in 1991-92. As noted earlier, an increase in plan allocation reflects the resource base for new initiatives in primary education. Another positive trend is the increase in Centre's share in plan allocations to elementary education from around 5.3 per cent in 1980-81 to 9.7 per cent in 1984-85 further to around 28 per cent in 1991-92. Therefore, it can be seen that the

increase in the share of plan expenditure to total expenditure on primary education is primarily due to the improved share of the allocation from the centre.

Needless to add, like in all developing countries, the share of salaries, mainly teacher salaries is very high and it is around 95.5 per cent of the total expenditure on elementary education in 1983-84. This trend may be the same even today. The argument is not that the resource base to primary education has reached an all time high in the eighties. In fact, in terms of allocation to education as a share of the total plan allocation, allocation to primary education as a share of total plan allocation and the share of plan expenditure on elementary education, the situation in the eighties continues to be worse than that of the fifties. Therefore, what is to be noted is that there seems to be a policy of according increased priority to primary education in public funding and it has helped arresting the eroding resource base of primary education. However, this is not the case if we consider the non-plan expenditure which is the dominant part in the total educational expenditure.

Many argue that there is a decline in investments in education during the period of structural adjustment in India (Tilak, 1993a; 1993b; Varghese, 1993; Chalam, 1994). For example, non-plan expenditure on education (centre) has shown a decline even at current prices from Rs. 9,450 millions in 1993-94 to Rs. 9,320 millions in 1994-95. The decline, no doubt, is steeper in real terms. At this rate one is not certain whether public expenditure on education will be maintained atleast at the pre-reform period in real terms (Varghese, 1994). The DPEP envisages direct resource support to the selected districts which are by definition educationally backward. Such resource support will be an addition to the existing levels of resource allocation. In other words, one can expect that the resource availability to the backward districts will be substantially higher than the existing levels.

### **Accent on Quality**

Studies on primary education in India have shown that even when enrolments are increasing, retention rates are increasing at a monotonic rate. For example, between 1960-61 and 1990-91 GER increased by 40 percentage points while the retention rates increased only by 17 percentage points. Even now nearly half the children enrolled in grade one drop out before they reach grade five.

What happens to the children who are retained in the system. Studies have shown that levels of learner achievement are rather low among the primary school children

(Dave et. al, 1988; Govinda and Varghese, 1993; Shukla, 1994; Bashir et. al. 1993; Jangira, 1994; Varghese, 1994a; Bashir, 1994). Many of these studies have pointed out the importance of minimum facilities to be provided in the schools and improving teaching-learning process and teacher competency. Therefore, from the mid-eighties onwards the emphasis of public policy measures on primary education is increasingly shifted to improving the quality of primary education. Some of the measures initiated in this regard in the recent past are: (i) the Operation Blackboard Scheme; (ii) establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET); (iii) defining the Minimum Levels of Learning; and (iv) decentralisation of educational planning and management (Varghese, 1995b).

The periodic educational surveys conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 1990) have highlighted poor facilities in primary schools and the Operation Blackboard (OB) Scheme was an effort to provide minimum facilities to the primary schools. Under the OB scheme all primary schools in the country are ensured of (i) a minimum of two rooms; (ii) a minimum of two teachers; (iii) a minimum of two blackboards, two teacher chairs and tables; and (iv) a limited number of teaching-learning materials which include maps, charts, globe, mathematics kit, science kits etc. This scheme was started in 1987-88 and upto 1993 it has covered around 469 thousand primary schools.

From the provision of facilities the next effort was to improve the curriculum transaction and classroom practices. An effort was first made to clearly define the competencies to be achieved by children in primary grades. The Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) committee headed by R.H. Dave was an effort in this direction. The primacy of teachers to improve quality of primary education is very well recognised. In fact, the teachers can "make or break" the whole educational process (Bray, 1990). Therefore, another important policy measure initiated was to improve the teacher competencies. This is visualised to be achieved not only through pre-service training programmes but also through frequent in-service training of teachers. The DIETs are established in all districts to facilitate both the in-service and pre-service training requirements of teachers. As of today, nearly 290 DIETs are established. It is expected that all the districts will be covered under the programme by the end of the eighth Five Year Plan i.e. by 1997.

## **8. Consolidation of Recent Efforts Under the DPEP**

India has started accepting structural adjustment loans from the World Bank from the nineties onwards. Many of the developing countries which accepted structural adjustment loans and introduced reform measures experienced a decline in public spending in general and that on social sectors including education in particular (Lewin and Berstecher, 1989). To resist such trends and to protect the public expenditure on social sector programmes, the World bank introduced Social Safety Net (SSN) programmes. The SSN is one of the sources of funding support for the DPEP. In other words, initiation of economic reforms supported and funded by the international agencies, notably the World Bank provides the broader context for large scale external funding support for national programmes in primary education in India. It is the liberalisation policy of the nineties which facilitated external funding in primary education in India.

District Primary Education Programme is conceptualised and concretised on the basis of varied experience the country has witnessed and expertise gained in the process of planning and implementing educational programmes in India (Varghese, 1995c). First, our experience of practising decentralised planning has shown that in the present set up, the scope for local initiatives is very limited in district planning. As discussed earlier, this is primarily due to the fact that crucial allocation decisions are taken at the national or state level and hence the districts have virtually very little authority to allocate resources to the programme or activities which they consider to be dear. DPEP attempts to alter the pattern of resource decisions favouring local initiatives at the district level. Under this programme the districts are assured of resource support, if plans are prepared systematically. Therefore, DPEP attempts to localise planning and resource allocation decisions.

Secondly, the experience of centrally sponsored programmes show that, it increases bureaucratisation of planning process, reducing the role of local level units to implementation agencies. Normally, these schemes are planned at the central level and executed at the local level. Under the DPEP, guidelines are prepared at the national level and plans are developed at the local level.

Thirdly, planning in India continues to be largely sectoral. This helps to exercise bureaucratic controls and vertical linkages. DPEP attempts to provide an area approach to planning emphasising on the horizontal linkages in place of vertical linkages. The idea

of convergences of services, inter-departmental co-ordination in planning and public participation is expected to ensure this.

Fourthly, the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) are initiated and completed in India in many districts. TLCs are a major effort in successfully mobilising local initiatives to prepare comprehensive plans at the district level. The successful completion of TLC projects (NLM, 1994, Saldanha, 1995; Varghese, 1995b) have shown that planning competencies can be developed at the local level. The DPEP attempts to build on this experience gained by the districts and preference given to TLC districts in DPEP funding helps to strengthen this experience further (Ayyar, 1995). The Adult Education Departments have played very marginal role in TLCs. It is largely planned and implemented through different committees not necessarily connected directly to the education departments. Primary education is a continuing programme and is implemented through the existing institutions and control mechanisms. Therefore, unlike TLC, DPEP envisages a stronger role for the education department both in facilitating planning and in implementing programmes. Therefore, DPEP is expected to be more departmentalised and bureaucratised than TLCs.

Fifthly, primary education in India has reached a stage where the focus needs to be shifted from increasing access to improving achievement level. Therefore, emphasis in DPEP planning is increasingly shifted from creation of new institutions to improving institutional effectiveness. Perhaps, planning and management of existing institutions and the teaching-learning process therein form the focus of DPEP planning exercise.

Sixthly, India has some experience in planning and managing externally funded projects. But most of these are small scale projects focussing on some of the selected aspects of primary education. Although project planning is a part and parcel of these exercises, comprehensive area-specific plans keeping district as the unit was never attempted under the externally funded projects in India. However, the DPEP builds on the experiences gained from these project planning exercises. Bihar Education Project funded by the UNICEF, Lok Jumbish project and Shiksha Karmi project funded by SIDA, Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project funded by ODA, Mahila Samakhya Project funded by the Dutch and Uttar Pradesh Primary Education project funded by the



IDA are some of the externally funded projects operating in India. DPEP expands the scope of project planning to district planning. In fact, DPEP is an exercise in decentralised planning in a project mode.

Sixth is the effort to professionalise educational planning. As noted earlier, planning competencies are virtually non-existent at the district level. Our experience shows that percolation of competencies from national to state level and further to lower levels is difficult, if not impossible. DPEP is an experiment to alter this process of competency building exercise by starting from local level to the state level.

## **9. DPEP : Some Salient Features**

India rarely depended on external funding on a large scale to promote primary education. Externally funded projects focussing on selected aspects of primary education were in operation in many states. DPEP is the first effort where external funds are mobilised on a large scale for a comprehensive programme designed to support public initiatives in primary education. The major funding sources are the IDA, ODA and European Union. The negotiations for funding started in 1993. The programme design and guidelines were initially formulated by the Government of India in February 1993. The various stages of approval and sanctions at different levels show that it took around 20 months to complete the cycle of programme design and formal launching of the implementation of the programme.

The DPEP guidelines were formulated in April, 1993; the Union Cabinet accorded its approval for the programme in December, 1993; the Planning Commission approved it as a centrally sponsored scheme in January, 1994. The Expenditure and Finance Committee of India met in May 1994 and approved the programme details and the programme was formally launched on 8th November, 1994 - with the release of Rs. 352.9 million to the State Implementation Societies of the seven states considered under the programme in its first phase (Department of Education, 1995a). In the first phase the programme covered 42 districts from seven states; in the second phase the programme covers 22 districts from five states. As of now the programme covers 64 districts from 12 states (Table 2). It is expected that the programme would be extended to at least 110 districts in the Eighth Five Year Plan proposed to be drawn from external sources.

**Table 2: Coverage of the Programme**

	States	No. of Districts	Funding Sources
<b>I Phase</b>	Assam	4	IDA
	Haryana	4	IDA
	Karnataka	4	IDA
	Kerala	3	IDA
	Madhya Pradesh	19	EU
	Maharashtra	5	IDA
	Tamil Nadu	3	IDA
<b>II Phase</b>	Andhra Pradesh	5	ODA
	West Bengal	5	ODA
	Gujarat	3	IDA
	Himachal	4	IDA
	Orissa	5	IDA
<b>Total</b>	12	64	

The objectives of the programme are: i) Universal enrolment of all children in the age group 6-11; ii) reducing dropout rates in primary stage to less than ten per cent; iii) improving learner achievement levels by atleast 25 percentage points above the measured baseline levels; and iv) reducing gender gap to less than five per cent. The criteria for selecting districts under this programme are: i) educationally backward districts with female literacy below the national average; and ii) districts where TLCs have been successful leading to enhanced demand for elementary education.

The resource allocated to each district depends on the proposals made in the district plan and their appraisal by GOI and the funding agencies. However, the maximum ceiling is Rs. 400/- million for each district. The guidelines for allocation of resources between different project activities is also clear: i) The civil works component has to be restricted to 24 per cent of the project budget; ii) The cost on account of project management is to be limited to six per cent; iii) DPEP would not finance non-educational incentives; iv) Financing of salaries would be on a declining basis i.e. 90 per cent of the salaries in the first two years; 80 per cent of the salaries for the third, fourth and fifth year and 65 per cent of the salaries in the Sixth and Seventh year of the project; and v) Rs. 2000/- for each school per year for improving school facilities and Rs. 500/- per teacher per annum for teaching learning aids and consumables ( MHRD, 1993b; 1995 b).

## **10. Planning Under the DPEP**

The DPEP is an exercise on decentralised planning and disaggregated target setting to promote local initiatives in primary education with adequate resource support and improved management mechanisms. The location of planning under the DPEP in the context educational planning in India lies between centrally sponsored traditional schemes and TLC experiences on the one hand and between project planning exercises under various externally funded primary education projects and our own experiences of practicing district planning in education on the other. It is less bureaucratic and departmentalised than centrally sponsored traditional schemes; but more departmentalised than TLC programmes. It is more broad based than project planning but more focussed, targeted and closely monitored than traditional district plans. It is an exercise to locate the limits of de-departmentalising planning without losing control and direction by public authorities. It is an effort to professionalise educational planning by developing planning competencies outside the boundaries of the department. The effort is not to make the departments redundant but to redefine the role of the department to facilitate better and improved quality of services from the existing institutions.

The planning process initiated under the DPEP varied from similar efforts initiated in the past. Planning under the DPEP took note of the factors constraining district level planning and it did attempt to remove the constraints; the planning process was supported by the national resource groups and participatory approach was emphasised. Now let us see how the planning process was carried out under the programme.

### **(a) Creating Facilitating Conditions**

The sources of funding under the DPEP are varied. However, approach to planning is uniform across the DPEP districts. The approach is elaborated in the DPEP guidelines. (Department of Education, 1995). The guideline provides only a framework within which plans are to be developed. Although the approach to planning is unified, the DPEP does not envisage uniform plans across districts. The guidelines only ensure that the plans are prepared within the framework of national concerns and priorities. The parameters are flexible to ensure local variations reflected in the plans. An analysis of district plans prepared under the DPEP shows that they vary across districts in terms of priorities, strategies and programmes.

The programme ensures direct funding of district plans with a maximum ceiling of Rs. 400 million. This helps in overcoming the constraints imposed by centralised resource allocation decisions whereby the districts did not have the option of initiating their own programmes. Assurance of resources has improved possibilities of developing district specific plans with local specific intervention strategies.

The programme does not depend on external agency to provide for professional support to develop district plans but are to be drawn by the district level planning groups. Each district constituted core groups on district planning and they developed the plans through a process of mutual consultation. Very often, the plans are not prepared by the district administrators. In fact, they are prepared with the support of the local resource organizations. In many states DIETs and other state level resource organisations played an important role in developing district plans. Based on the experience in the first round of plan preparation, three patterns can be identified: (i) DIETs playing a major role in plan preparation; (ii) state level institutions playing a significant role; and (iii) administration or department of education playing a major role through local consultants.

Domestic support to the planning process was ensured under the DPEP. The planning process under the DPEP recognised the need to develop planning competencies at the district level. This was facilitated through constituting a National Core Team. This National Core Team had 12 core groups each representing an area of specialisation and headed by a specialist in the area. Frequent interactions between the district, state and national authorities and members of the National Core Team either in the form of meetings, workshops or training programmes helped develop planning competencies. While the major technical support for drawing district plans were provided by national institutions, the process of plan preparation were supported by groups from state and district level resource organizations.

Each school is ensured of a limited amount allocated annually to improve facilities and to meet expenditure on account of consumables. This has helped in ensuring that planning for schools and their facilities are local specific. This has strengthened the power and authority of the headmaster of the school and increased the involvement of the local communities in decision-making process. In other words, this helped in initiating a process of school based planning and management of education in India.

Restricting the share of civil works to 24 per cent and project management to six per cent, left substantial amount of resources to plan for education specific activities. This ensured that the planning exercise not getting reduced to civil work activities. And this increased the scope for promoting district specific activities directly promoting the teaching-learning dimensions of primary education.

The notion of medium term plans and annual plans helped in making plans more and more realistic. The initial plans are only indicative and the annual plans are more specific and elaborate. This gave a chance to revise the plans as and when required. The plans are also modified with each stage of implementation. This approach gave the district authorities the scope to initiate actions, make mistakes, learn from the mistakes and correct them. In other words, it instilled confidence among the district planners that planning competencies are to be developed and learning by doing is the best method to develop competencies.

Studies as a part of the planning exercise provided a strong empirical foundation for the plans. As part of the DPEP plans, many studies were initiated in all the districts. In general, the studies pertained to the areas of (i) assessing learner achievement and its determinants; (ii) assessing teacher motivation and competencies; (iii) gender issues; (iv) issues specific to the tribals; (v) issues pertaining to production and distribution of textbooks; and (vi) studies on state finances. These studies helped in deriving local specific intervention strategies.

### **(b) The Planning Process**

The planning process envisaged under DPEP has broadly two dimensions: (i) professional and technical; and (ii) participatory. The professional and technical dimensions pertain to the actual drawing up of plans which involve assessing the present situation, assessing the tasks involved, elaborating the strategies and programmes and costing of the plan. The organizational arrangement to professionalise planning exercise was through (i) Support from National Core Team; (ii) support from state and district resource organizations; (iii) plan preparation by DPEP Planning core groups both at the state and district levels.

The planning process under the DPEP started in March, 1993 when the first workshop with participation from Government of India, national resource organisations,

representatives of the state governments and funding agencies was held at NIEPA. There were three documents to guide the plan preparation process: (i) the DPEP guidelines (in draft form) issued by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 1993); (ii) a manual on district planning developed by NIEPA (Varghese, 1993a) detailing out the methodology, data requirements, steps to be followed in the plan preparation; and (iii) a document by the World Bank based on their experience of the primary education project in Uttar Pradesh.

To further facilitate the planning process, a National Core Team (NCT) was formed in April, 1993. As mentioned earlier, the NCT consisted of 12 functional areas. The areas included were (i) District Planning; (ii) Teacher Training; (iii) Curriculum Transaction; (iv) Early-childhood Education; (v) State Finances; (vi) Management Information system; (vii) Gender Issues; (viii) Tribal Education; (ix) Textbook Production and Distribution; (x) School Effectiveness; (xi) Non-formal Education; (xii) Baseline Assessment Studies. Each of these functional areas formed sub-groups specifically identified specialists to look after the concerned area in the planning process in different states. In all around 60 professionals mainly from the national resource institutions were identified for this purpose. A two-day workshop was organised at NCERT in April 1993 to orient the NCT members to DPEP and its major concerns.

From May, 1993, the NCT members visited the states and districts. These meetings were attended by the state and district level educational functionaries who are supposed to be associated with the district planning exercises. In these meetings, each of the functional area representatives of the NCT discussed how each area can be well represented in the district plans. These meetings also helped in drawing up activity schedules at the state levels. Each of the states covered under the DPEP programme was assigned to one of the NCT members to facilitate the overall co-ordination of planning activities between the States and Centre. To facilitate these meetings and to ensure completion of the district planning activities as per schedule, representatives from the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, were present in all these meetings. In fact, after the workshop deliberations, the NCT member incharge of the state, representative of the Department of Education and the state government officials discussed and finalised the schedule of activities to complete the district planning process.

After this first round of meetings, the state government formed state and district core teams to prepare the district plans. These teams included officials from departments

other than education, faculty members from University Departments and other resource institutions and NGOs and representatives of the local communities as members of the core groups. The district groups prepared the first draft of the district plans and were sent to the respective state incharges and MHRD by June, 1993. The NCT members closely scrutinised these plans and sent their comments and at times visited the states to provide further professional inputs to improve the plans. These plans were further revised by the end of July and submitted to the MHRD. The members of the NCT scrutinised these plans and had prepared their comments before the project preparation mission members of the funding agencies visited India.

The first project preparation mission from World Bank visited India in July, 1993 and had detailed discussions with the heads of the functional areas of the NCT. After these meetings the Mission members and the NCT members jointly visited the states and districts in August, 1993. Based on these visits, the mission members evaluated the district plans and suggested modification both in terms of content, rigour and format. These suggestions and comments were discussed with the state level officials in Delhi.

Immediately after the preparatory mission, the District planning group of the NCT summarised the contents of the comments by the NCT and Mission members and shared this with the district planning group. To revise the district plans based on these suggestions, a workshop was organised at NIEPA in September, 1993. This workshop was attended by all those who were actively involved in the district planning process. The district groups came with their respective plan documents. The effort in this workshop was to provide professional support to improve the plan documents. The NCT members did not directly involve in preparing district plans at any point of time. The effort on the other hand, was to ensure that the district groups prepared the plans and planning competencies are developed at the local level.

In the first round of the planning exercise some patterns did emerge: First, the plans prepared by different states varied, but plans for different districts within the states were similar. This indicated that although planning process and plan preparation was done by the district level core-teams, there is an element of centralisation at the state level. Therefore, the effort in the next round was to further decentralise the planning process. Secondly, most of the plans with few exceptions, did not reflect the participatory and consultative process expected to draw up the plans. Thirdly, different states followed different patterns for preparation of district plans. These patterns can broadly be divided

into three categories: (a) DIETs taking the major responsibility and providing the professional input required for the preparation of plans; (b) State Governments relying on consultants from university departments and professional institutions to prepare the plans; and (c) the State Government department taking major responsibility of preparing these plans. Perhaps, participation was more elaborate in pattern (a) and the least in pattern (b). Fourthly, technical inputs especially relating to enrolment projections, costing and sequencing and scheduling were weak in many of the district plans. The workshop helped overcome these deficiencies in the district plans and to make plans more realistic by taking into account diversities among districts.

These plans were further modified and improved at the district level during September and October, 1993 and the revised plans were submitted to the Departments of Education. This round of revision was substantial and showed a much improved professional competence of the district teams to prepare plans. The documents could clearly identify problems, elaborate strategies and, suggest specific programmes. The costing of the plans and presentation of the plans needed, perhaps, more improvement even after this round. These plans were further scrutinised by the NCT teams and later by the pre-appraisal mission which visited India in November, 1993. This time too the state and district visits by the Mission was jointly with the NCT members. Based on the evaluation of the plan documents by the Mission members and NCT, meetings were held to further modify the plans. Two issues that prominently came up for revisions at this stage were: (i) elaboration and detailing out of the activities for the first year; (ii) identification of agencies to implement the plans and development of implementation plans.

NIEPA organised another workshop in February, 1994 to provide professional support to the district teams to further modify the plans and to prepare the annual plans. At this stage the professional support was provided to equip the district planning groups to develop competencies for scheduling of activities pertaining to each of the major areas of concern indicated in the district plans. Consequently different workshops were organised to specifically plan and schedule various activities in the respective areas. For example, workshops were held to prepare plans pertaining to textbook production, teacher-training, Management Information System etc. The revised plans were submitted to the Department of Education which were further scrutinised by NCT members and approved by the Government of India and finally appraised by the funding agencies. This completed the planning cycle in the first phase of the DPEP programme in India.



In the normal planning process, district plans are seen as a process of regionalisation of national and state plans and the effort at the district level is essentially to work out the implementation implications of the state plans. Hence state plans are prepared first and then district plans are formulated. To facilitate decentralised planning, this process has been reversed under the DPEP. The DPEP guidelines form the basis for drawing up district plans. The state component plan is drawn out only after the district plans are complete. In fact, the state component plans are envisaged as intervention strategies to facilitate smooth implementation of district plans (Varghese, 1994b). This strategy worked very well to shift the location of planning process from state to the district level and to strengthen the district planning groups to initiate district specific intervention strategies.

### **(c) Participatory Approach**

The DPEP planning exercises emphasised on the participatory process of planning. The very fact that the local people are preparing the plans ensured better participatory process. Participatory process meant: (i) participation by other departments to ensure convergence of services at the micro-level; (ii) participation by elected representatives of the local bodies like Zilla Parishads and Panchayats; (iii) participation by academic and resource organizations to provide technical and professional input to the plan preparation process; (iv) participation by educational functionaries at all levels including primary school headmasters and teachers; and (v) participation by general public. As can be seen (Table 3) a fair amount of participation took place in the plan preparation process. As per the information available, there were around 1,016 meetings where more than 72,000 people participated. However, there are variations between States. Perhaps, variations between districts within a state are larger. Each district made its own plan for participatory process and executed them.

It needs to be mentioned that initiating participatory process was more difficult. Participation meant different things to different states. In the initial stages, participation was confused with public meetings. Very often, large number of meetings were held at the local level where state and district level officials came and addressed the gatherings. Although this had a positive effect on the mobilisation of the local community, in terms of consultative process these meetings were weak. However, in the second round, a more detailed plan for participatory meetings was prepared and mostly local people initiated the meetings which provided a better opportunity for the local people to express their demands on primary education.

Participatory process did make the planning process more difficult but realistic. The district teams felt that participatory process apparently reveals the weaknesses of the present system of education as it is delivered at the school level and the demands raised by the local community to overcome these weaknesses are too many. How to incorporate

**Table 3: Participation Meetings**

	No. of Meetings			No. of Participants		
	State level	District level	Sub-district level	State level	District level	Sub-district level
Assam	5	26	242	120	379	16815
Haryana	14	13	127	109	160	2480
Karnataka	11	33	60	440	911*	4114*
Kerala	4	19	59	108	109*	889*
Maharashtra	5	50	245	20	429	32481
Tamil Nadu	10	20	73	400	562	2935
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>1,197</b>	<b>11,492</b>	<b>59,527</b>

\*information on all districts are not available.

Source: World Bank (1994)

these demands in the district plans was a major planning issue. Perhaps, this gave a chance to the district teams to understand and appreciate the notion of prioritisation in the planning process. It also brought to light the debate on micro-planning Vs macro planning in the context of district planning process. Need for improving facilities in schools and teaching-learning process came out prominently in many participatory meetings. Needless to add that the single most dominant demand in all localities was for improving facilities in the schools.

Another dilemma faced by the district teams was with respect to the expectations from DPEP by the local people. These meetings did raise the expectation of the local people from the programme which exerted a pressure on the educational functionaries to

deliver goods. The educational functionaries realised the urgency of initiating local actions. The delay in the release of DPEP funds was an area of major concern for the local educational functionaries.

It needs to be mentioned that the nature and extent of participation varied across states and districts. It depended on the mobilisation capacity of the individuals and institutions who provided leadership to prepare the plans. One of the major areas of weakness in the participatory process was the feedback mechanisms. At times participatory process was parallel to the planning process. Only towards the final stages, the plans could reflect atleast partially, outcomes of these participatory meetings.

## **11. Efforts Towards Capacity Building**

Capacity building exercise under the DPEP needs to be seen in two phases: (i) during the pre-project activity stage; and (ii) during the project implementation stage. At the preparatory stage, capacity building relied on selected institutions and individuals. The institutional mechanisms and plans for capacity building were not adequately developed at this stage. However, the plans for capacity building are more elaborate and planned during the implementation stage. In the preparatory stage the National Core Teams and State Teams played a significant role in facilitating capacity building at the district levels. However, at the implementation stage the agencies directly involved with the implementation of the programme in collaboration and co-ordination with resource organisations at the national and state levels are playing a dominant role.

A discussion about the organisational arrangements for implementation of the DPEP may be helpful to understand the future capacity building exercise envisaged under the programme. At the national level a general council and a Project Board are constituted to facilitate the implementation process. The Project Board is an empowered body assigned with full financial and administrative powers to implement the programme. It would recommend policies, consider annual workplan and budgets, approve norm for new programmes, reviews DPEP progress and provide guidance to the DPEP bureau which functions under the Project Board (Department Education, 1995b).

A Technical Support Group (TSG) is created at Educational Consultants India Ltd., New Delhi. The TSG in consultation with the DPEP bureau hire consultants, transfer funds for capacity building programmes and research, facilitates supervision and

monitoring of DPEP activities by organising supervision missions and preparing progress reports. The TSG has eight units reflecting their areas of operation. These units are: (i) Pedagogy and Teacher Training Unit; (ii) Planning and Management Unit; (iii) Appraisal Unit; (iv) Civil Work Unit; (v) Research and Evaluation Unit; (vi) Management Information Unit; (vii) Procurement and disbursement unit; (viii) Supervision Unit(This unit structure is purely temporary). These units co-ordinate capacity building activities with individual and institutions involved in the respective areas.

At the state level, implementation of the programme envisages creation of a separate society. State implementation societies are created at the state level. These societies ensure local flexibility, quick flow of funds, wider representation and local decision-making in the implementation of the programme. It is expected that the societies will establish better linkages with education departments so as to transfer efficiency of programme implementation to the primary education scene as a whole. At the district level, a District Project Office is created to directly oversee the implementation. The DPO organises its activities in close collaboration with the DIETs which provide academic inputs for the programme at the district level.

DPEP envisages to build capacity in planning and management of primary education in the country. Capacity building exercise that took place under DPEP can be broadly categorised into five areas: (i) planning; (ii) research and evaluation ; (iii) improvement in pedagogical skills; (iv) programme management including MIS and supervision.

#### **(i) Planning**

The district planning process itself was an exercise in capacity building. As noted earlier, the modes of capacity building were meetings, workshops/training programmes and learning by doing. The national resource organisations like NIEPA played an important but facilitating role in the planning process. With the plan preparation process completed in the districts selected in the first phase of the programme, considerable amount of capacity is already created. The effort needs to be to consolidate the capacity already created by institutionalising it. The efforts to set up institutes or departments like State Institutes of Educational Management and Training may help ensure the process of capacity building in planning as a regular exercise. NIEPA organised a meeting of resource and social science research institution in February, 1995 to facilitate networking of institutions involved in the tasks of educational planning and

management. The institute is also developing modules and designing training of trainers programme in the area of educational planning and management.

### **(ii) Research and Evaluation**

As noted earlier, the pre-project period witnessed conducting of a large number of research studies in the areas of (i) learner achievement; (ii) teacher motivation; (iii) gender issues in education; (iv) tribal education; (v) financing of education at state level; and (vi) textbook production and distribution. In the first phase, all these studies were co-ordinated or conducted by national level resource organisations. Various workshops and training programmes organised under all these studies have created some amount of research capacity at the state and district levels. In most of the cases, study designs were developed at the national level. However, data collection, analysis and report writing were at times facilitated at the state and district levels. In most cases, core-groups were identified at the state level to facilitate these studies. These core-groups form a fertile ground to continue capacity building activities in this area.

After the formation of the TSG, co-ordinating the research activities and initiating and facilitating further evaluation research is directly undertaken by the Ed.CIL. Ed.CIL provides the financial support, contacts the consultants to design studies, contracts individuals and institutions to conduct the study. Through this process, a large number of institutions and department of education in various universities are involved with the DPEP research programmes in the second phase. The resource base in research broadened during the implementation phase.

### **(iii) Improving Pedagogical Skills**

Improving pedagogical skills and teacher competency is another area of major concern for capacity building under DPEP. Institutional mechanisms for this purpose already exist in the DPEP states. The NCERT, Regional Institutes of Education, SCERTs and DIETs are expected to play a dominant role in improving pedagogical skills and teacher competencies. Perhaps, the emphasis under DPEP is more on in-service training of teachers than on pre-service training programmes. It is found that the existing institutional structure may not be sufficient enough to provide in-service training on a regular basis. Hence Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres are envisaged under DPEP. The major concern in this regard is to improve the frequency and quality of inservice

teacher training. This was not an area of concern for capacity building in the pre-project phase. Organisational arrangements for conducting regular in-service training programmes are created at state, district, block and cluster levels. However, development of modules and conduct of research in this area are initiated only recently.

#### **(iv) Programme Management**

This has two components - developing management information system and supervision of project activities. There are two types of Information systems visualised under DPEP - project MIS and Education MIS. NIEPA is directly involved in the development of software and conducting training programmes in the area of EMIS. The other area, namely, PMIS is contracted to another institution.

In the first phase of the programme, the planning process depended entirely on the domestic capacity and competency. Now the efforts are being made to develop project supervision capacity in the country. Another national level institution - Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, is conducting regular training programmes both at the national and state levels to build capacity in the area of supervision of the DPEP programmes.

It can be noticed that in all cases, the capacity building plans are developed by these institutions which are involved in the process. This, perhaps, is a beginning towards a planned approach to capacity building.

### **11. Concluding Observations**

DPEP is at varying levels of implementation in various districts. In 42 districts, the plans are appraised and approved and are in the process of implementation. In another ten districts, the plans are being finalised and in another 12 districts plan preparation is still in the initial stages. Therefore, it is too early to make an overall assessment of the programme. However, our experience in the initial stages gives adequate scope for speculating on the process of decentralisation of educational planning process in India.

Designing of the programme involved a series of negotiations with the funding agencies on the one hand and state government officials on the other. The programme parameters provided in the DPEP guidelines is the result of such prolonged negotiation efforts.

DPEP is funded by various international agencies. The immediate concerns of these agencies and their approach to the problem do vary at times. Therefore, designing a programme which is within the confines of the national policy and priorities on the one hand and agreeable to the various funding agencies on the other was a difficult but rewarding exercise in improving the negotiating skills.

The broadbasing of the planning meant involvement of larger number of people in the process. Establishing communication among those who are involved in the task was itself difficult. Some perceive DPEP as yet another routine centrally sponsored scheme whereas for others it is a totally new and different programme. Some view DPEP totally in a project mode while others view it in a planning mode. Therefore, establishing communication network to ensure that the programme planned is in line with the programme that is visualised was a major task. The mode of communication is either through circulars or meetings. Meetings are found to be more effective mechanisms to understand the programme. However, frequent change of personnel at the state and district level was a major hurdle in facilitating communication process through this mode.

The decision to rely on domestic professional support to develop district plans and to initiate research studies has positively contributed to the development of capacities at all levels. The national level organisations played a significant role to facilitate the planning process. At the end of the first phase one can notice that planning capacities are created at the local levels. Now annual plans are prepared and scrutinised at the state and district levels. This is an indication of capacity building that has taken place in the first round.

The DPEP was an exercise in professionalising decision-making process in the area of decentralised planning in India. The close linkage between the departments of education and various resource organisations at various levels improved interactions between professionals, planners and administrators. This has helped in broadening the scope of the programme specifying the priority areas for investments in primary education and professionalising the planning process.

Planning process involved participation of people outside the education department. However, implementation is visualised as mainly the responsibility of education departments through creation of new structures like State Implementation Societies and district project implementation offices. More often than not, these societies are headed by people

not actively involved with the programme at the planning stage. Therefore, there is a need for continuous dialogue and in the process the involvement of centre at times becomes more than what was expected.

The DPEP is an exercise in developing district plans within the existing framework. In fact, the planning process showed how planning can be undertaken even when there is no planning machinery at the district level. In the absence of a planning machinery at the district level, the planning process relied on core groups which included members from other departments and professional organisations which are not normally involved in the district planning exercise. This facilitated to filter in new ideas and initiatives. However, the major limitation of this approach is that unless institutionalised, the earlier efforts may have limited scope for future planning.

What is the role of Central and State government in facilitating decentralised planning? DPEP experience has shown that an active involvement of the centre is perhaps unavoidable in the initial stages primarily due to its role in facilitating negotiations with the funding agencies and in providing resource support for the programme. However, the role of the Centre continues to be very active and direct even in facilitating planning process. Perhaps, there is a need for a reduced involvement of the Centre in the coming years to promote decentralisation. This can be done only through strengthening the state and district level capacities. Therefore, how the active and direct resource support from the national level is to be withdrawn is an important issue. It poses an important question while initiating decentralised planning process in a federal set up. When can the federal government withdraw from its direct help and involvement in the district planning process? If it withdraws before local level capacities are developed, perhaps, the efforts put in the initial rounds may be wasted. However, what is important is to have a planned withdrawal of the Central Government from the decentralised planning process at the district level.

The role of the federal government itself became more important because of the traditional mode of planning with which the states are used to. For example, during the plan preparation stage many state and local level authorities demanded blue print directives and framework from the Centre to prepare district plans. Perhaps, people are more used to prepare plans under strict directives than under broad guidelines. This change from a regime of 'directives' to 'guidelines' to prepare plans is a major change which has positive implications to promote local initiatives. It may take a longer time to make the



planners socialised to this process of planning. This will eventually promote local capacity building and reduce the scope for intervention by the Central Government.

Preparation of plans, participatory process and studies are visualised as an integrated process at the national level. However, in the process of implementation these three dimensions remained as three distinct and parallel activities. Even today, the mechanisms of feedback to integrate the results of the participatory meetings and studies in the plan remain weak. In the absence of such mechanisms, participation was more in the form of sensitisation and studies remained as something that is add-on to the programme. Perhaps, there is a fear that the initiative and control by the education department may be reduced if the programme is more research based and participatory. The inbuilt mechanisms in the system do not encourage or promote research and participatory process. Therefore, to make planning process more realistic needs a sensitisation of higher level policy makers and competency building at all levels.

Capacity building exercise experience during the first phase of the programme has some obvious limitations. The time limit provided was a limiting factor to facilitate capacity building. At national, state and districts levels, availability rather than competency of persons was the major consideration to be involved with the planning process. In many states the members of various core groups were changed occasionally. With every change progress of the programme became tardy. Even in-training programmes which were sequentially conceived to facilitate advance trainings, many participants were new and hence, the efforts were less successful. With all these limitations, the decision to prepare plans at the district level has contributed positively to capacity building. The major weakness of capacity building in the first phase was that only Delhi based organisations were relied on to provide resource support for planning and research. This was mainly due to the time constraint. However, in the subsequent phases other organisations are relied on.

Planning is seen as a 'one-shot' affair at the local level. The immediate purpose in the first phase was to prepare the plans. Once that exercise is over, there are no serious efforts to make it a regular feature by consolidating the efforts made in the first phase. There is a lack of organisational mechanisms to institutionalise the capacity that is already created. In many areas especially in the area of research, capacity building was mostly in the form of encouraging researchers to promote research in primary education. In the second phase of the programme, efforts are being made to broad base research

capacity in different institutions or individuals located in different places. But the limitation of this approach in a country like India is apparent in the absence of institutional mechanisms to bring them together.

An initial evaluation of the implementation of DPEP in all the states have highlighted certain interesting trends. Till now many believed that financial resource was the major constraint on universalising primary education. However, now it is increasingly realised that the system deficiencies are considerable and are a major constraint in achieving the targets. Many districts realise that they are not in a position to absorb the amount that was allocated. Since the expenditure pattern has to be corresponding to the plans and activities envisaged, many districts feel the need for preparing better plans even after the planning exercise is over. In other words, what was considered as an assumption is now becoming a major constraint. The time lags in implementation of various activities arise partly because of the delay in the decision-making process which is a reflection of the efficiency of general administration. How to make use of DPEP to strengthen the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms of primary education is an issue. To put it differently, will it be possible to implement DPEP effectively when the efficiency of general administration is rather low? Although creation of societies might be helpful, it may not solve the problem altogether.

The local level authorities are caught up in their efforts to keep pace with the programme. The preparation for implementation requires technical and professional support which is not readily available. How to circumvent the immediate requirements with the long term concerns of capacity building is a continuing dilemma at the local level. Earlier, the demand for professional support to prepare plans was very low. Now this demand has increased which has put pressure on the capacity building exercises. This is a positive trend to be taken advantage of.

Now the question is how far the enthusiasm witnessed in the first phase will be maintained. The annual plans provide a chance to making planning process a regular feature. However, a trend that is being noticed is that annual plan preparations are mostly done by the DPEP staff and the consultative process initiated in the earlier phase is not active. This together with the fact that the planning capacity that was created is yet to be institutionalised raises questions regarding sustainability of capacity building efforts in this area. Unless efforts are made to continue the consultative process involving those who were part of the plan preparation process at the district level in the initial phase, DPEP

may become more departmentalised reducing it to yet another centrally sponsored programme. The efforts need to be to maintain the momentum that is generated by consolidating the capacity building exercise that was initiated in the first phase of the programme.

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