

EDUCATION, INCLUDING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

(Item No.17)

According to Article 45 of the Constitution of India, the State was mandated to provide free and compulsory education to all children upto 14 years of age within a period of ten years from the adoption of the constitution, that is by 1960. This implied enrolment at the age of 5 years plus and continuing of education for eight years namely, up to VIII Standard. But even at the 50th anniversary of independence, this mandate remains unfulfilled. The magnitude of lapse at all India level is well known. In Tamil Nadu the gap in respect of universalisation of elementary education is largely of quality in general, and in respect of girls in particular, both quantitative and qualitative. (5% for girls of age group 6-11 and 11% for 11-14 age group). By region, some habitations have no access or poor access to elementary education. These gaps exist inspite of the fact that a large network of schools has been built up and expenditure of over Rs.5,704 crores incurred in the last decade, 1986-1996. The obligation and responsibility of the State in providing elementary education and other basic minimum services has been reiterated in a recent conference of Chief Ministers in 1996. Universalisation of Elementary Education has to be a prime objective of planning, and has to be achieved in the shortest possible period - say within the Ninth Plan.

02. Progress made by Tamil Nadu in elementary education, hitherto, may be recapitulated. At present, there are 30,471 Primary Schools and 5,549 Elementary Schools in the State. The norms for the opening of Primary Schools to provide easy access to children of school going age is to have a school in every habitation with a population of 500 and above and within a distance of one Kilometer. 99.6% of such habitations have already been provided with Primary Schools. Only 204 habitations are yet to be provided with Primary School. The enrolment rate is 100.31% for the 6 - 11 age group and 99.12% for 11 - 14 age group. (The gross enrolment rate is arrived at on the basis of actual enrolment divided by the total school going children of the age group). The total number of children studying in primary and middle school is 88.94 lakhs.

03. Budget allocation for Elementary education in 1996-97 is Rs.1232.22 Crores which is substantial percentage of the State's expenditure on Education. Though the State can be said to have achieved universalisation of Primary Education by the enrolment rate, the problem of dropouts, low percentage in the enrolment of girls and inadequate number of teachers have reduced the quality and effectiveness of Elementary Education. Therefore, in the coming years the emphasis in the Elementary Education sphere should be: (1) Universal enrolment and retention of children in the school upto 14 years of age; (2) Substantial improvement in the quality of education to impart minimum levels of learning (MLL) and (3) Improvement of girls' enrolment and retention.

04. In terms of implementation, elementary education was largely the responsibility of Local Self-Governments, when these Institutions came into existence in Tamil Nadu during the early part of this century. The local boards and district boards established and managed primary schools, middle schools and high schools with abolition of the district boards in Tamil Nadu in 1958 and the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institutions at the village and block levels, the secondary education was taken over by the Government and the elementary education was transferred to the Panchayat Union Councils (Blocks). Between 1958 and 1981 opening of new primary and elementary schools, recruitment and transfer of teachers, supervision of schools, etc., were the responsibility of Panchayat Union and the elected representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions - Chairman of Panchayat Union and Presidents of Village Panchayats played a key role in promoting elementary education in the State.

05. Between 1981 and 1994, elementary education underwent three major structural and organisational changes viz. (a) creation of a separate Directorate at the State level (b) conversion of supervisory network at the District level and (c) conversion of all Panchayat Union teachers as Government Servants. The Government took a major policy decision in 1981, by which all teachers working in Panchayat Union schools, became Government servants (G.O.Ms.No.857, Education Department Dt. 23.5.81). However, the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of elementary school buildings continued to remain with the Panchayat Union. An Assistant Elementary Education Officer was appointed at the Panchayat Union level and was entrusted with the responsibility of managing the elementary schools within his jurisdiction. In December 1994, District Elementary Education Officers were appointed

at the district level for supervision, inspection and monitoring. A separate Directorate of Elementary Education was created in 1986 for formulation and implementation of policies and development programme for elementary education.

06. It is necessary to take note of some of the persistent weaknesses of the system as brought out recently (May 1994) by the Appraisal Mission of the World Bank funded District Primary Education Project. The following are principal constraints on sub-sector efficiency and effectiveness: (a) **shortfalls in access**, indicated by the large number of children that never enroll and a continuing high level of illiteracy; (b) **low internal efficiency**, reflected by high repetition and drop out rates; (c) **unacceptably low level of quality**, as evidenced by low levels of learning achievement; (d) **inequities**, as manifested by considerable variations of educational disadvantages due to gender, caste and tribal affiliation; and (e) sub-sector constraints, as displayed by historically inadequate financing and weak management at the national, state and district level.

07. The Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment envisages the devolution of powers and responsibilities to Panchayat Raj Institution in respect of 29 items, which covers "Education, including primary and secondary schools" (Item 17). Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 has assigned the responsibility to the Panchayat Union for the opening, maintenance, and expansion/ improvement of elementary schools including the "payment of grants to private managed elementary schools" (Section 112, item (e)). But the Act protects school teachers including the Head masters as Government servants, (Section 109). The State Planning Commission considered the question of the entrustment of powers to Panchayat Raj Institution in the background of changes introduced in the management of elementary education in the State between 1981 and 1994, and the constitutional and statutory provision referred to above. The community participation in managing the elementary schools is essential. Given their stake in the education of their children, Village Panchayat and Panchayat Union can supervise elementary education in a better manner. The Panchayat Unions are even now responsible for construction and maintenance of primary and elementary school buildings.

08. The primary and elementary school teachers number about 1.75 lakh. They are government servants, and should continue as Government servants. The pay and privileges enjoyed by the existing teachers as Government Servants should be protected. At the same time they should be responsible to the democratically elected Panchayat Raj Institutions at the Block and Village level. The Assistant Elementary Education Officers should attend the review meetings convened by the Panchayat Union. At the District level, the District Elementary Education Officers should advise the District Panchayat in all the matters of elementary education. The Director of Elementary Education will continue to provide guidance to the Panchayats on academic matters and will be responsible for evolving policies and programmes, for improving the quality of elementary education through the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

09. In view of the above background, the State Planning Commission recommended the following powers to be entrusted to Village Panchayats, Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats in respect of Primary and Elementary Education. Since the Secondary/Higher Secondary education is being presently imparted by school system (In many states colleges conduct/impart higher secondary education), State Planning Commission recommends that present arrangement and management of Secondary Education by the Government should continue.

I. VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Opening of new schools and provision of educational facilities.	(1) Survey of the Panchayat Village to estimate the School Children. (2) Campaign for full enrolment of school age children. (3) Recommend to Panchayat Union on opening of primary school and upgradation of Primary school in the Panchayat village to Elementary or Secondary school. (4) Recommend to Panchayat Union on opening of special schools/ residential schools and Hostels.

<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>
	(5) Assist Panchayat Union in school mapping and locating/relocating schools.
	(6) Ensure healthy and harmonious teacher-community relations.
	(7) Counselling the parents to reduce drop-out problem.
	(8) Supervise attendance of teachers and students in Primary and Elementary schools and take follow up action with P.U./A.E.O to ensure regular attendance of teachers.
2. Implementation of State/Central supported students welfare schemes.	(1) Assist in the distribution of learning materials. Books, Uniform, Footwear etc. to students.
	(2) Assist in the implementation of the Educational schemes and programmes like Operation Black Board and District Primary Education Programmes.
3. Maintenance of Educational Infrastructures.	(1) Provision and maintenance of physical infrastructure facilities such as School Buildings including drinking water, toilets, Play Grounds, furniture etc.
4. Management of Schools.	(1) Form a Village Panchayat Committee on education with Panchayat President as its Chairman, some ward members and Headmaster/Headmistress of Primary and Elementary schools as its members to promote education in the Panchayat Village.

II. PANCHAYAT UNION

<i>ACTIVITY</i> <i>(1)</i>	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> <i>(2)</i>
1. Management of Schools.	(1) Carry out school mapping exercise/and decide on opening/upgradation of schools as per the criteria laid down by Government (Population of habitation and distance).
	(2) Review of the functioning of primary/elementary schools.
	(3) Co-ordinate the distribution of learning materials, books, Uniform, Foot-wear etc., under various schemes.
	(4) Organise campaign for full enrolment of children, with special reference to girls and reduction of drop out.
	(5) Review the report from Village Panchayat regarding attendance of teachers and ensure efficient functioning of schools.
	(6) Provide technical and financial support to village Panchayats for construction of school infrastructures.
	(7) Form a Standing Educational Committee as prescribed in the Act to look after the activities indicated herein.

III. DISTRICT PANCHAYAT

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Expansion of elementary education and improvement of quality of education.	(1) a) Educational development planning for the district taking into account the comparative status with the best districts in the State/All India both in quantity and quality terms. Organise educational conference to review progress periodically; b) Preparation of District Plan for elementary education after an assessment of requirement of schools and teachers in relation to school age population and the spread of habitations. (2) Advise Strategies/suggestions to Government for spread of education and attaining high levels - especially amongst the educationally deprived segments/sections of population. (3) Advise Village Panchayats/Panchayat Unions on the strategies for expanding resources for educational development through community contribution particularly for capital works and teaching equipment also to raise resources at the District level. (4) Monitoring and Evaluation of the performance of primary and middle schools relating to quality of education. (5) Organise campaigns, seminars, on universal enrolment, girls enrolment and reduction in the incidence of drop outs.
2. Management of schools	(1) Co-ordination with State Department of Elementary Education for improving the functioning of schools. (2) Assist in the implementation of Educational schemes like District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).
3. Remove impediments	(1) Continuous analysis of pressures forcing children to drop out and to plan and implement economic/social development programmes/strategies to mitigate the influence of such pressures.

Administrative Implication

10. Entrustment of powers relating to Elementary Education to the Panchayat Raj Institutions recommended by the State Planning Commission involve many administrative changes. The major decision will be to transfer the management of more than 35,000 Institutions (Primary and Elementary Schools) and administrative control of about 1.75 lakh teachers. The Institutions and the Teachers would become accountable to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. Till todate, they are supervised by a hierarchy of officials of the Elementary Education Department. The State Planning Commission recommends that the Panchayat Raj Institutions shall be entrusted with the power to review and supervise the functioning of primary/elementary schools.

11. The Village Panchayats will supervise the functioning of primary and elementary schools and report the deficiencies to Panchayat Union and the Assistant Elementary Education Officer (AEEO). The Panchayat Union will review the reports of the Village Panchayats and schemes being implemented in the area. The AEEO will attend the Panchayat Council review and report periodically the action taken to correct the deficiencies. The District Panchayat will review the district level schemes and problems pertaining to Primary and Elementary education. The District Panchayat may advise the Government about opening of new schools, relocation of schools and any other matter relating to Primary and Elementary education development in the district.

12. In this part of the State Planning Commission recommendations, the Primary and Elementary schools and hostels run for Adi Dravidars, Tribals and Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes, management aspects have not been included. This subject will be discussed in the part dealing with the subject "Welfare of the Weaker Sections and in particular of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes" (Item No.27 of the schedule IV).

Financial implications:

13. Construction of school buildings with water supply and toilets and maintenance of the buildings involve considerable expenditure. Construction of new buildings, additional class rooms, hostels, Toilets etc. may be taken up under development schemes such as Jawahar Vela Vaippu Thittam and Decentralised District Plan. Maintenance grants will have to be provided by the Government. It is assumed that the State Finance Commission would have made the recommendations on the norms and quantum of providing maintenance grants to Panchayat Unions for maintenance of school buildings.

Legal Implications

14. Our Recommendation mainly relates to actively involve the Village Panchayat / Panchayat Union / and District Panchayat in review/ supervise the functioning of primary and elementary schools and to review the development schemes relating to primary/elementary education is the first stage of entrusting power to Panchayat Raj Institutions in so far as education is concerned. In the second stage, (after two years) more powers could be given to Panchayat Raj Institutions.