

The Year 2011 in School Education

This indeed has been the year of policies and practices pertaining SMCs and teachers that is the focus of our attention. Amendment Bill for Education Act 2028 has not received priority in the Constitutional Assembly (CA). The government has amended by-laws to the extent it can exercise its executive power. The two major amended by-laws are Teacher Regulations 2057 and Education Regulations 2059. (The latter has much to do with SMCs). It is observed that behind this move two factors have played the role: first is the facilitation of the School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) for its implementation (or pressure from donors in poky words including for addressing corruption) and the second is the pressure from teachers' organizations. In this process SMCs have lost their power over teachers although there are many changes in the management of Community (public) schools. This is one of the results of SMCs not being organized and not having power and perspective to keep the balance in favor of keeping more say of parents' in the school management.

Obviously, education too suffers from political instability as with other aspects of governance. It is felt that impunity in the country is increasing, so is corruption. Unlike in other sectors such as drinking water where beneficiaries feel more concerned, they do not feel investment made in schools is for them. They are bothered less with the investment as they take it as benefits of teachers! This makes corruption in education sector go even less bothered.

In general, education affairs except strikes by college students or school teachers do not get much national attention anyway. One interesting aspect from the third Nepal Living Standard Survey is that as high as 23% of the population in rich quintiles has never attended schools while nearly half of the population from poorest quintiles has not attended the school. This means that education as such is still needs to be popularized amongst life affairs of the people. Another interesting point to note from the same survey is that 25% of students have dropped out themselves from the schools for 'poor academic progresses' followed by 'for having to work at home'. This also suggests a high premium to be put in the quality of schooling. Also noteworthy is that indicators for educational development in the eastern parts of the country are not as better from other regions as one would expect. While it needs careful analysis, it may be a result of westward orientation of development actors in the country which of course does not mean that we should retreat from the west.

We review major aspects of our concern in education in the year 2011:

School Management Committees (SMCs)

Amendment of the Education Regulations further tightened representation of parents in SMCs: now only parents and grandparents of a child studying in the school concerned can be a member of an SMC. Earlier any guardians of pupils could also be elected. This has been done in view of the miss-utilization of SMC power by SMC members particularly the Chairs who elected themselves for purposes other than for the good of the school. Similarly, the power to constitute an SMC has also gone to DEO. Earlier the Head Teacher could organize this

process. SMCs have also lost the right to negotiate with external partners for the development of the school.

It has been observed that SMCs and Forest Users Groups (FUGs) are the only places with the possibility of expressing leadership as local elections have not held for more than a decade. Thus the two perpetual institutions had to employ many local leaders making them objects of contestation. SMCs are more omnipresent even more than FUGs and more locally accessible institutions where locals can assert their influence. This appears to have created undesired competition and source of corruption

Engagement of NGO sector with SMCs has continued possibly more in the further western part of the country. Some efforts have also seen to network SMCs in this region.

Teachers

Teachers were more in limelight this year for their assertion to policy. Their salaries have increased although the thorny issue of non-permanent teachers remains the same. They have been demanding to give permanent status to temporary teachers basically on the ground that government engaged them without any decision for long - as much as three decades to few. The government has also provided uniforms to permanent teachers creating another issue of contestation from temporary teachers. Its implementation has yet to be seen. However it could be a positive step in retaining teachers in school. In Andhra Pradesh in India, it was reported that uniforms have reduced absence-after-presence¹ of teachers as they could be spotted in other places if they sneaked out.

One of the most important changes is the upgrading basic qualification of teachers. Now the primary teachers must have passed 2 years of education after 10th grade. Government has also designed a training to upgrade their basic qualification who have no this kind of education. New provision has also stressed on the quality of the head teacher. Government in its annual budget also made financial provisions for retirement package for old teachers following an amendment of the Rules.

Fearless Environment

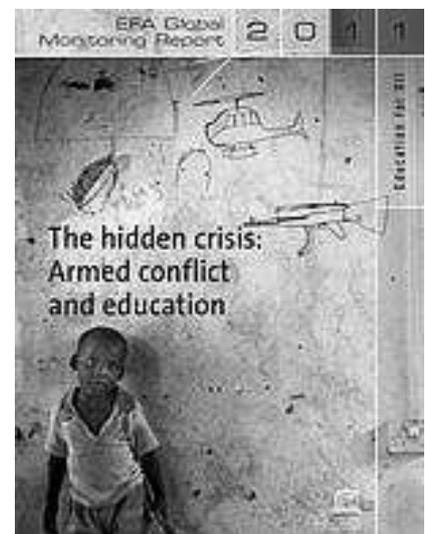
Child-friendly schools have been a buzzword among those who are working in school education. Non-government sector is stressing this aspect in particular. Teachers are being trained in child-friendly ways of teaching-learning and parents being made aware. This year government issued a directive for Fearless Environment in Schools. For some time, a UNICEF-supported effort for making schools a zone of peace is being endorsed at political levels along contestation and confusion in terai districts.

However, it will take some time before a stick loses its place from teachers' hands.

¹ It is the practice of coming to school to sign in the attendance register and walk away.

Nepal and EFA in GMR 2011

1. UNESCO annually publishes Global Monitoring Report (GMR) on the progress on Education for All (EFA). Nepal is mentioned in the report for the following:
2. For good progress in immunization of children that goes with mothers' level of education.
3. Disadvantaged children have gained significant cognitive development with subsequent increases in enrolment and progression through primary school.
4. Nepal is one of the countries nearing UPE where school survival rates of have declined or improved marginally.
5. Nepal is also one of the countries that are likely to miss literacy goal by 2015 although it is mentioned for raising literacy amongst particular groups.
6. It also mentions Nepal who have made difference by providing scholarships targeting girls from low-caste groups.
7. This GMR is focused on Conflict and Education. Nepal is portrayed as one of the countries where military spending has outstripped school education moderately. Ten percent reduction in army expenditure can educate some 300,000 more children. It also shows modest picture in terms of the quality of education in refugee camps.
8. Nepal is also mentioned regarding perceptions of unfairness related to education that can be a potent source of grievance. It says that in Nepal, poverty and exclusion, particularly among marginalized castes and ethnic groups in rural areas were key factors driving the decade-long insurgency. It notes recruitment of schoolchildren was particularly prominent in areas where socio-economic or ethnic exclusion was most apparent.
9. In Nepal, imposition of Nepali as the language of instruction fed into the broader set of grievances among non-Nepali speaking castes and ethnic minorities that drove the civil war. (This statement is similar to what a workshop that CEPP attended had similar information from Sri Lanka – see Workshop on Peace Education later in this report).
10. It also mentions UNICEF, Save the Children and other agencies effort of bringing different parties treating schools as 'Zones of Peace'.
11. Sighting the role of aid agencies in strengthening financial governance, it gives example of a monitoring system that reports on aid diversion by publishing records and maps on the UN Nepal Information Platform that identify areas in which aid has gone missing.
12. It also mentions Nepal's court ruling for adopting legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in schools.



Corruption in the School Sector

The year was marred by the news of the corruption in schools. Major areas of corruption are infrastructure, salary for teachers particularly under per child fund (PCF). Next to the grants for buildings, PCF system has been the major source of anomalies in schools. It is known to all that number of children is inflated under many guises to keep the minimum number of children to retain a school. Repercussion: the statistical figures are hardly precise. It was reported that even the whole school was faked and children were hired from India to attend the school on the day of inspection in one reported case! Nexus of teachers and SMCs elected for profane purposes is the main culprit. It can be devised that some of the amendments of by-laws are aimed at addressing such anomalies.

Private Schooling

Private schooling system continues to decrease efficiency of public funds in education. Helpless parents raise the regulation of private schools rather than opting for the improvement of public schools. Faith in public schools has been evaporated although cases of the improvement of community schools are coming out in the news sporadically. No firm policy has come out yet to address this deficiency although it is rumored that government will not allow the establishment of new private schools. Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) 2010/11 showed that some 27% students are in private institutions now. The survey suggests that while 60% students from richest quintiles chose private schools, only 10% from poorest quintiles opted for this type of schools.

Although UNCPA is asserting itself as an advocate of anti-privatization policy in education, provisions for private schools have not changed much. One of the demands of Nepal Republican Educational Forum was to increase the salary of teachers of private schools and the amended rules have endorsed it. It also changed the provision of tax to private schools: 1.5% to 100/student since the current financial year. Community schools particularly in the vicinity of urban areas are suffering from low number of pupils and reporting of their closure is increasing – probably more in Bhaktapur than in other districts. It can be devised that they are closing due to a combined effect of migration and private schools. It is felt that government's effort of merging schools has taken some momentum.

Multilingual Education

Issue of mother tongue education (that was taking some shape as multi-lingual education in the country) has been under a deep shadow of federalism and ethnic politics. Possibly Limbus are bearing the torch of mother tongue education rather than any other language groups. There are few institutions who take language as a part of being child-friendliness. By this year, the number of languages in which government has produced curriculum reached 20.

Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs)

ECDs are talks of education forums – both at policy and local levels. They take a lot of time of the villagers concerned with schools both for sacred and profane intentions. Many are interested in the grants and the possibility of hiring a facilitator. They have often drawing attention for the fact that they are grossly under paid – below minimum wage standards. There are serious questions regarding pedagogy as ECDs become early centres of rote learning in absence of understanding both from parent and teacher (although called facilitators) sides.

In urban areas it's a fashion to call schools for younger children as Montessori Schools whereas few are based on the principles. News reporting in such anomalies have increased and government is under pressure to set minimum standards.

NB: CEPP intends to further widen, deepen and authenticate this kind of review in the coming years. This is also an invitation to interested individuals or institutions to join us to take the task forward. This is a part of CEPP's Annual Report 2011.
