FUTURISTIC AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION—NEED OF THE COUNTRY

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There has been a lot of contemplation upon education and its recent right based approach, inclusive education is yet to be mainstreamed and made a reality in India. When we talk of education, its parameters must automatically include those from the neglected sections of society. There are ample evidences in reports published by various governmental and non-governmental agencies on discriminatory treatment given to children on the basis of caste, class and gender identities. The NCPCR organised a Public Hearing in April 2011 to discuss issues of *dalit* children being asked to mop the floor in many of the government schools in the central and northern part of the country.

How much ever benefits government may provide, nothing is going to change in schools in particular and society in general till the educational institutes and those in the profession of teaching change their mind sets for attainment of fair, equal and value education and an egalitarian nation.

As education is not just a process of obtaining degrees but a journey of enlightenment, it must teach every child to respect and love its fellow human beings with or without any disabilities and challenges. When a child grows in an environment of egalitarianism, he/she grows to be a person with equality and democracy as strong pillars of its value system. In the present context, the author reflects how the governance in collaboration with public private partnership make right based approach to education which should be inclusive, gender sensitive and empowering.

Regionalism or regional feeling or attitude is one of the very prominent fuelling agent of exclusion within boundaries of educational institutions.

Migrated students from other countries or other distantly located state do suffer because of lack of support. The migrated students become a victim of exclusion. Food habits, communication language, religious and cultural biasness etc become absolute for survival of migrated students in an institution that is far away from their homeland. Many of the institutions don't address such needs of students.

Children enter educational institutions with certain level of knowledge and information acquired through informal processes with home and neighborhood. Exclusion (caste and class based) related practices within home and neighborhood are exported genuinely to educational institutions. Since children are tender, they get connected to many of such practices very easily within educational institutions. Gender exclusion appears to be first and foremost since girls and women continue to suffer all across various stages of development. Practices that delimit girls to exhibit best and thus make them excluded are noticed within home where girl child finds herself away from parental and love and affection in comparison to boys. Girl children get involved in almost all household activities that are performed by their mothers and often connect fathers in farming or other activities. Author's study on Scheduled Caste Primary School Girls in rural Haryana reveal circumstances that are striking and critical to address gender exclusion in schools. "Home environment and the environment in schools are too responsible for the poor education of SC girls. In the absence of a proper environment/climate, better results cannot be ascertained. These environments are believed to be very important factors for those girls who are attending the schools. SC girls in rural Haryana

hardly get any time to study at home, since her help is required by the mother in performing household activities. The girls, who are attending schools, are not free from different activities even at school. Needles to mention that these girls in the school attend the visitors and teachers. In most of the schools it was found that girls are preparing tea and washing utensils, as if they are born only to do such activities" (Mohanty, 1999).

The Origins of Inclusive Education

Advocacy for inclusive education revolves around three main arguments. Firstly, several writers claim that inclusive education is a basic human right. For example, Christensen (1996) argued that exclusion or segregation of students with special needs is a violation of their human rights and represents an unfair distribution of educational resources. Similarly, Lipsky& Gartner (1996, 1999) asserted that inclusive education is a fundamental right, derived from the principle of equity, which, if recognised, would contribute significantly to a democratic society. This is also emphasised in UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement* (1994) and by Slee (2001), the latter considering that inclusive education is about the cultural politics of protecting the rights of citizenship for all students. Writing from a British perspective, and as a person with a disability, Oliver (1996) argued that the education system has failed disabled students by not equipping them to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens, while the special education system has functioned to exclude them from both the education process and wider social life. He thus saw inclusion as a political as well as an educational process.

Secondly, as Lipsky& Gartner (1996, 1999) pointed out, in designing educational programmes for students with disabilities, the focus must shift from the individual's impairments to the social context, a key feature of which should be a unitary education system dedicated to providing quality education for all students (cf., Meijer et al.'s (2003)one-track approach mentionedabove).A similar point is advanced by English writer, Skidmore

(2002), who found that teachers have two contrasting 'pedagogical discourses' – the discourse of deviance and the discourse of inclusion. These differ along a number of dimensions, such as teachers' views on the educability of students, their explanations of student failure, and their curriculum models. He argued that the discourse of inclusion provides an alternative vision of the relationship between education and society that runs counter to the processes of segregation and differentiation that have dominated the development of mass schooling. The latter point was also expressed by Slee (2001), who claimed that the more schools have been called upon to include the masses, the more they have developed the technologies of stratification and exclusion. Slee saw a danger, too, in inclusive education deteriorating into assimilation or absorption.

A third argument asserts that since there is no clear demarcation between the characteristics of students with and without disabilities, and there is no support for the contention that specific categories of students learn differently, separate provisions for such students cannot be justified (Lipsky& Gartner, 1996, 1999).

Why Inclusive Education is imperative?

India has witnessed a steady growth over the years in enrolment of children from all sections of society, particularly from weaker and disadvantaged sections, such as, girls, SCs, STs, and linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities. Owing to the increased inflow of children from weaker and disadvantaged sections, classrooms in schools and colleges are becoming increasingly diverse. As a result, schools now have to address new issues and challenges and reorient their teaching-learning practices and processes to make classrooms and schools responsive to, and inclusive of, the learning needs and interests of diverse learners.

Because of two-third populations of our country are unable to comprehend equity and equality, democracy, secularism and above all sovereign and republic. Not only they are huge in number, they are equally potential and productive for India. The success to stabilized and improved GDPs (Gross Domestic Products) is in the hands of those who are marginalized economically, underprivileged and socially weaker sections. Poverty, on one hand, casteism, social economic and gender inequalities on the other have drawn attention of planners, policy makers and academia. All such groups are of national and international priorities and titled as socially excluded. Towards the end of last century, discussions and deliberations have multiplied their frequencies on the issue of "social exclusion in the era of knowledge economy." Globally, the concept of social exclusion characterises contemporary forms of social disadvantages. In many parts of the world the concept of "social exclusion refers to the illegitimate and non-democratic social processes in which certain groups are denied access to fundamental rights, primary opportunities, and key resources and have been away from the mainstream of social development and social integration". Historically originated from marginalization and disadvantages, the concept reflects significant kinship with poverty and alienation. Social exclusion refers to the ill social processes and practices that have laid down the foundation of a barrier between the excluded mass and the national development. It involves the systematic denial of entitlements to resources and services, and the denial of the rights to participate on equal terms in social relationships in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. Exclusionary processes can occur at various levels – within and between households, villages, cities, states, and globally. This is an actor-oriented approach which is useful because it points to who is doing what and in relationship with whom.

Inclusive Education is a philosophy and policy approach that aims to remove obstacles to attendance and ensure that every individual will get the opportunity and necessary support to identify and develop his or her talents to the full potential.

These talents may be of theoretical, practical, cultural and social nature.

The persistence of discriminatory practices by teachers, educators, school authorities and all of us in general about underachieving learners' socio-cultural identities, capabilities and potentialities are based on several problematic assumptions. Some of these pertain to pervading beliefs and common perceptions about the children's individual and collective identities and their capabilities and potentialities. These are often deeply rooted and shaped by varied socio-cultural contexts which have remained largely unspoken but understood by those who believe in diverse societal norms.

In generic perspective, inclusive education deals firmly with exclusion related practices that are difficult to define because of their variability in educational institutions. "Beyond the figures, what we know about the excluded?" is one of the ten pertinent questions raised by UNESCO (2013) on Inclusive education that is quite applicable to all those excluded sections including physically and mentally challenged. Exclusion related practices are universal in nature and exist in varied forms within educational institutions. Though institutions vary significantly, certain forms of exclusion are commonly noticed among them while in certain cases exclusion is context or institution specific. Exclusion related practices are defined as those acts or practices employed intentionally/deliberately by an individual or group of individuals that affect significantly and makes an individual excluded to an extent that the individual or group of individuals suffer immensely. In the context of educational institutions, it may be defined as those acts or practices that prohibit students, faculty, staff and workers to participate and contribute at par with general populations of the institution. As a result, they become deprived, neglected, and oppressed. The act is necessarily an ill practice either designed in planned manner or out of whims; it affects an individual or group of individual in an educational institution.

The forms of exclusion related practices vary from primary to secondary stage through university education. At primary stage, children are discriminated on the basis of caste, socio-economic status, and gender basis. "Elementary education in India has witnessed a steady growth over the years in enrolment of children from all sections of society, particularly from weaker and disadvantaged sections such as girls, SCs, STs, and linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities. Owing to the increased inflow of children from weaker and disadvantaged sections, classrooms and schools are becoming increasingly diverse. As a result, schools now have to address new issues and challenges and reorient their teaching-learning practices and processes to make classrooms and schools responsive to, and inclusive of, the learning needs and interests of diverse learners" (Deshkal-Unicef, 2010). Teachers, students and staff are invariably involved in such practices. Since it is primary, it provides a lasting impression in the minds of oppressed that further jeopardize their survival in society from youth through adult stage. In Indian context Anitha(2000) and Geetha(2000) have reported exclusion related practices in educational institutions. Teachers and students of forward castes categorically abuse children coming from lower caste background and disadvantaged sections. Bullying behaviour, physical assault, teasing, and passing comments are commonly noticed within educational institutions at secondary schools through universities. What is shocking about the discriminations that studies are too less in number, while the frequencies and magnitude of such discriminations are quite large.

Anubhuti Vishnoi(2012) cited in the Indian Express that "Report says caste, gender discrimination rampant". Instances of discrimination and untouchability were found in 186 schools of five states— Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat and have been submitted to MHRD by forty-one independent monitoring institutes, the report states further. In the same line, the India Today reported in July 2013 that "Taking a serious note of alleged discrimination against children of lower castes at a primary school;

Allahabad High Court has directed the authorities to transfer the principal and initiate an inquiry against principal." In southern parts of India, Center for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Mangalore University (The Hindu, 22 October 2012) revealed discrimination in Karnataka schools. The study reported that " In what reveals the persistence of caste-based segregation of children in primary schools in rural Karnataka, around 13.7 per cent of Dalit children surveyed in the State have claimed that their teacher had asked them to sit separately from 'higher caste' children in the classroom. It is enumerated in the report that "the harassment and discrimination faced by 2,425 Dalit families or 12,677 people in 50 villages, of which 825 families have children going to primary school." The findings of the study are far away from our Constitutional ideals, making us realize how democratic we are in practice. In 2007, a District Magistrate in U.P handed over three teachers of a primary school to the police because of their discriminatory behavior and attitude. "As told by students and parents that teachers would regularly throw plates with mid-day meals (MDM) at Dalit children, make them sit apart from the rest of the class and cane them with separate stick, washing their hands soon after", reports the India Together –The News in Proportion(17 August 2007). It is a well researched phenomena that schools and facilities are responsible for exclusion. Geetha(2009) reported the enrolment rates of SC children in an urban settlement in Jaipur decline from 74 percent among children 5-13 years, to 35 percent in the age group 14-18 years in household under survey. "Among Bhagarias, hardly any child goes to school. Gender differences are sharp. Among Balmikis for instance, the enrolment percentage of girls barely reaches double figures"(Geetha, 2009).

Class and caste based social exclusion was narrowed down by the establishment of Ashram Schools in tribal areas and in order to provide quality school education Navodaya Vidyalayas were set up in rural areas. " To fulfill the educational needs, as a socializing process, many of the Indian tribal communities had their traditional institutions such

as Abors had the Mosup, Kuki, the Zwalbuk, Naga, the Morung, Garo, the Nokpanti, Oraon, the Dhumkuria, Gond, the Ghotul, etc"(Ambasht, 1997 and 1970).

As reported by GOI (1988) a number of schools especially in backward and slum areas had remained closed for certain period of time in number of cases schools had not functioned since the beginning of the academic year (Nambissan, 2000). Punishment in many form and the exclusion of children's language and culture from the medium and content of school knowledge, as well as message of inferiority that are conveyed to them through the hidden curriculum, are crucial factor that are likely to adversely affect the children's motivation to learn and their interest to studies (Nambissan, 2000). Velaskar(1998) reported that new stigmatizing identities based on secular criteria of lack of merit are being imposed on dalits in place of their old, traditional, impure identity. They are enrolls as "undeserving", "stupid" and "indolent". Anitha (2000) reported that some teachers quite openly stated that "formal education is not useful for the children of the lower caste" and such teachers support their arguments by citing instances among children of those communities who have discontinued schooling and working as an agricultural labourers in the villages. The Bodh study mentioned that corporal punishment was common when children failed to give the correct answers to the teacher's questions. Teachers often felt that fear was necessary for children to learn (DPEP, 1999). So far as the Dalits are concerned, stereotypical notions of social inferiority underlie the use of corporal punishment as a pedagogic tool as well. Schools thus not only fail to reach out and address the context of educational deprivation of these communities but often tend to compound it. Jalaludin reported in the Times of India(Jan.14,1991) that 47.9% of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children surveyed in the Tikamgarh block of Jhansi district did not even enroll in school because they feared that they will not be allowed to sit with upper caste. The findings of the NSS (42nd round) regarding reasons why Dalit children discontinue their studies are of interest.

While around 46% of Dalit drop out in rural areas is attributed to economic reason (including participation in domestic work), a significant 30% of children discontinue their education because of lack of interest in studies. A further 16% leave the education mainstream as result of failure(NSSO,1989).While lack of interest in studies and failure are often seen as a consequence of parental and community attitudes as well as poor academic abilities, the qualities of education that children (especially first generation learners) are exposed to, surely needs critical attention(Geetha,2002). Omprakash (1986) opined that poverty is the single most important reason for Scheduled Caste not attending the school. Non-school going children are assets to the family. Discussing the educational backwardness of the Scheduled Caste, Chowdhary (1971) says that majority of non- school going age group in the rural areas belongs to Scheduled Caste**.** Selvanathan (1989) also is of the same opinion that the percentage of illiterates is substantial among the Scheduled Caste than that non-scheduled caste. Chitnis and Aikara (1977) in a study of drop out and stagnation on Scheduled Caste students and they were found to be very inferior in almost all aspect of socio-economic background and in performance as well. According to the DSCFDC sponsored study carried out by the Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, in 1992-93 revealed that a majority of them (up to 90%) claimed that they send their children to school, but their drop-out rate is rather higher, especially among the girl children. Several factors like illiterate parents, lack of guidance, financial inadequacies, apathetic commitment of teachers and their non-serious attitude, domestic responsibilities and peer group influence are responsible for these social phenomena.

What are efforts and effects?

On the basis of prevailing practices on discrimination, the Constitution of India has enacted a number of acts. These include the Minimum Wages Act,1948 and the Equal Remuneration

Act,1976,the Protection of Civil Rights (Anti-Untouchability) Act (1955), the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act (1976), the Inter State Migrant Workmen(Regulation of Employment and Service Conditions0Act,1979, the Child labour(Prohibition and Regulation) Act,1986,the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act (1993) and various Land Reform Acts, Equal Opportunity Act,1995, People with Disability(PWD) Act1995, the National Trust Act (National Trust for the welfare of persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy,, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability)1999.Despite of Constitutional Guarantees, practices leading to social exclusion are persisting in our society.

Apart from the constitutional and statutory provisions, the government of India has also established some commissions to assist the excluded and distressed groups by way of skill training, financial security, life security entrepreneurship development programme etc. Such as, National Commission for Women, Human Rights Commission, National Scheduled Caste Finance and Development Corporation, National Commission for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, National Commission for Minority,National Commission for Safai Karmachari etc.

Historically, continued deprivation could not be eliminated only through constitutional and legislative provisions. Consequent upon, there have been affirmative actions to ensure equal opportunity of education for country's large depressed class population including reservation, policies and scholarship etc.For examples,incentives such as, fret et book, uniform and stationary, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(SSA), Mid Day Meal Scheme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh, Mahila Samakhya Programme. To uplift the educational status various scholarship schemes and plans were initiated, like Pre matric Scholarship for SC Students, Post matric Scholarship for SC, Central Sector Scheme of Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for providing scholarship to SC students to pursue programmes in Higher Education such as, M.Phil

and Ph.D, Central sector scheme of National Overseas Scholarship for SC students. Schemes which provides financial assistance to the students from primary to higher education, like Ambedkar Chhatrabhas Yojana, Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrabhas Yojana,Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Residential Coaching Academy for upgradation of merit of SC students, free coaching for SC,ST and OBC students.

Pathways to Future

Inclusive Education complies with the principle of universality, education as a human right. Individuals are different, yet every individual has a potential for learning. Access to adequate quality education should be given to every individual regardless of personal features and gender, as well as ethnic, religious, sexual, social, economic and geographical factors.

1.Recognizing the Increasing Diversity of Classrooms

There is first a need to recognize the changing social composition of learners in the classroom resulting from an inflow of children from diverse backgrounds in terms of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language and religion. This increased diversity presents new issues and challenges in curriculum design, teaching-learning practices and processes, learning materials, and teacher education that meet the different learning needs of these children. These issues and challenges cannot be addressed unless they are first recognized by policymakers and practitioners.

2. Developing the Profiles of Diverse Learners

Without a clear understanding of the various socio-economic and cultural characteristics of diverse learners, it is difficult to evolve strategies and develop plans at classroom, school and system levels to teach children from diverse backgrounds. It is therefore necessary that relevant data and information on diverse learners is collected, examined and analysed in order to inform and shape policies and practices to makeclassrooms and

schools inclusive and responsive to the learning needs of children from diverse backgrounds. Child profiles can be an important and effective tool to promote inclusive classrooms. Child profiles can be created through school-community mapping by conducting a household survey in the villages of the schools' catchments area to determine how many members each household contains, their ages, and their levels of education. These maps can be created by schools by enlisting the help of community members and elders, VEC members, village Panchayat representatives or even dedicated youth volunteers. This step will actually help to build stronger links between the school and the communities it serves. The map can be shared with parents and community members and leaders to identify, discuss and analyse the various factors, especially school-based practices and processes that appear to cause exclusion of children from diverse backgrounds. Based on the analysis of the exclusionary practices and processes, a descriptive profile of each child can be created. This profile will help to identify, link, and analyse the factors that could affect children's learning. The child profiles can also be used to identify the differential learning needs and interests of children from diverse backgrounds.

3. Developing a Contextualized Understanding of School-based practices and processes

A contextualized understanding of teacher beliefs and behaviour as well as the teaching-learning practices and processes, and their impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of children from diverse backgrounds is a crucial prerequisite to develop inclusive classrooms that are responsive to the diverse learning needs and interests of these children. Without this, it will be difficult to assess the professional development needs of teachers, and evolve appropriate training curricula, practices and processes to prepare them to teach diverse classrooms. Therefore, there is a critical need for school-based ethnographic research which can better inform policy and practice.

4. Developing Inclusive Teaching and Learning Practices and Processes

Classrooms are diverse in terms of the types of children and the ways in which they learn. Children learn in different ways because of experience, environment and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, there is a need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to meet the different learning needs of such children. We need toknow the different ways that children learn, to help us develop teaching-learning practices and processes that are more meaningful for the children, and help them, especially those who have been historically excluded from learning, to learn better. Students from all ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds come to school with already-constructed knowledge, including their home languages and cultural values, acquired in their home and community environments. Such knowledge and skills should serve as the framework to construct new knowledge and understandings. For classrooms to be fully inclusive, the learning materials and curriculum need to be made inclusive and responsive to the diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds of children. This would make it relevant for all children in terms of what is taught (content), how it is taught (method), how the children learn best (process), and how it relates to the life experiences of the children and the environment in which they live and learn. Instructional quality in a diverse classroom can be improved by using multi-cultural and multi-ethnic examples, scenarios and vignettes to illustrate academic concepts, ideas and skills. This is a powerful strategy to incorporate diversity into the heart of teaching, because examples are fundamental to, and consume much of the actual time, devoted to teaching in all subjects and school settings. Relevant examples can link school knowledge to the lived experiences of diverse students, and improve academic achievement.

5. Developing a System of Regular Evaluation and Feedback on the Impact of
Teaching-Learning Practices

Teaching diverse classrooms requires a tremendous amount of flexibility to respond to the different learning needs and interests of students, and teachers need to constantly update their practices. However, without continuous and proper evaluation, teachers and school administrators cannot receive feedback from which to learn, and thus will lack the indicators of what works well, what does not, and why. While there may be several instances of good practices used by teachers in some schools, the lack of formal documentation, record and evaluation means that potentially good practices are lost. Therefore, there is a need to develop an institutional mechanism for continuous documentation, evaluation, sharing and feedback on the impact of teaching-learning practices on student learning, and its linkage with the teacher support and training system.

6. A Greater Focus on Diversity Issues in Teacher Education and Training Programmes

Though the social context of the classroom has been changing, teachers appear to have little understanding of issues of diversity, and are ill-prepared to teach increasingly diverse student populations. There is, therefore, a need for systematic efforts to make teaching for diversity an integral component of the curriculum for pre-service as well as in-service teacher training. Teaching children from diverse backgrounds requires a tremendous amount of flexibility in teaching practices and processes as well as in curriculum design and learning materials to respond to their diverse learning needs and interests. It also crucially involves reflecting on and examining teachers' own personal and professional beliefs about diversity, based on caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language and religion, and analyzing how they influence their behaviour and relationship with children from diverse backgrounds. However, the attitudinal awareness and skills to teach diverse classrooms cannot be simply developed and absorbed through a one-off course during initial teacher training or in-service training. Instead, continuous reflection and re-examination of beliefs and practices needs to be inbuilt in a system of teacher support and development throughout their careers. Teaching and learning takes place in particular contexts. It is therefore important that preservice and in-service training are oriented towards developing among teachers an understanding of the importance of contextual specificity and an ability to critically reflect on their own specific classroom contexts and practices. This will equip teachers with the abilities to apply general principles of teaching for diversity in ways that work for their specific classroom situations. Teachers would also greatly benefit, if training programmes include their participation in activities that expose them to practical situations of addressing diversity, especially classroom practice and placements in schools that are already recognized for their use of innovative practices to address diversity.

7. Promoting Diversity in Workforce

Maintaining diversity in the teacher workforce is considered crucial to create inclusive schools. A teaching force that more closely mirrors the student population can benefit both students and teachers. Diverse teachers can serve as powerful role models for diverse students, potentially motivating them to strive further in their achievements. Diverse teachers also bring to the classroom their unique experiences and perspectives, which can help them to better relate to their diverse students. Diverse teachers may also be more inclined to view student diversity in the classroom as a resource. However, data in this regard suggests that while there has been an increasing flow of diverse learners in the classroom, the social composition of teachers has not kept pace with it. The recruitment policy for elementary teachers, therefore, needs to be focused towards promoting an increased intake of teachers from historically excluded groups such as women, SC/STs, religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, etc.

8. Developing an Organic School-Community Relationship

There is growing evidence that involving parents and the community in school affairs can be an effective strategy to address diversity in the classroom. However, the current official mechanisms and structures (VECs, PTAs, etc.) prescribed to ensure community involvement do not seem to be working towards achieving the desired outcomes, particularly with regard to the participation of marginalized and excluded communities. They feel helpless to assert their voices and participate in the functioning of the schools in the local power structure, and, VECs become a platform for the powerful sections of the local society to promote their vested interests. It needs to be recognized that in the changing context of increasing inflow of children from diverse backgrounds, it is important for schools to understand and articulate parent and community involvement in terms of diverse socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. The schools need to evolve programmatic activities in order to ensure the active involvement of the different communities in the local society. Through programmatic activities, communities can become active partners in developing a school-based plan to improve teaching-learning practices and processes. School-based plans to address the challenges of diversity in the classroom can provide many such opportunities for the active involvement of communities and parents.

The challenges of inclusive classrooms and diversity discussed by the Report may appear formidable, especially because mainstream policy and practice in the elementary education sector have yet to adequately recognize and focus attention on them. However, the Report indicates that during recent decades these issues and concerns have already started receiving attention from a section of policymakers and practitioners. Several innovative experiments of school reforms have been taken up by civil society organizations as well as in the government sector in different parts of the country. These experiments have attempted at curriculum design, development of teaching-learning

methods and materials, and teacher development from child-centred, inclusive perspectives, and have shown encouraging results in terms of the learning achievement of children from diverse backgrounds. The positive and critical lessons and insights from these initiatives need to be documented, shared and widely disseminated. Building on these lessons and insights, a perspective and concrete strategy can be developed to address the challenges of inclusive classrooms and diversity. Based on the issues and challenges identified and discussed, the Report presents a set of recommendations, and suggests building a nation-wide network of civil society organizations (CSO) and forming a **National Forum on Inclusive Classrooms** as a major strategic initiative to develop and promote the agenda of inclusive classrooms and diversity. These recommendations are closely interrelated and complement each other, and, therefore, indicate the need for a multi-pronged approach to address these challenges. It may not be easy to initiate the processes of change that are proposed by the Report. However, it is also important not to overestimate the challenges. Many components in the recommendations can be initiated by building on the processes that already exist, and revitalizing them in innovative ways. However, we need to finally emphasize that we would not succeed in initiating these processes of change unless there is decentralized planning. It would need a broad framework to plan upwards, beginning with schools; to identify focus areas and developing context specific intervention plans; and subsequently to consolidate these at the cluster and block levels. This could form a decentralized planning strategy at the district level. Only genuinely decentralized planning with school-based action plans at its core could make the agenda of inclusive classrooms feasible and achievable.

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