

Minutes of the First Meeting of Governing Council of the National Mission for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan held on 21-2-05 at Hall No.3, Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

The first meeting of the Governing Council of National Mission for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was held on 21.2.2005 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India. The list of members of the Governing Council is at Annex-I. The list of members who attended the meeting is at Annex-II.

2. Shri Arjun Singh, Minister for Human Resource Development (HRM) initiated the discussion by welcoming the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Union Minister of State and other distinguished members. He briefed the gathering about the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the national flagship programme for achieving universal elementary education. He informed the Council that the present central government has significantly enhanced allocation of funds for SSA and Mid Day Meal scheme. He thanked the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and the Planning Commission for their unstinting support for SSA. HRM also informed the Council that a recent independent assessment of SSA had reported that the Programme has been able to establish "a very intense school – community interface and significantly improved access to schooling". He stressed the need for intense monitoring and greater involvement of leading social science institutions, NGOs and educationists in the implementation and monitoring of the Programme. He expressed concern over the high drop-out rates prevalent in some states.

3. Ms. Kumud Bansal, Secretary (EE&L) made a brief presentation on the progress made under SSA and certain issues of concern. She informed the Council that SSA would attempt to ensure complete provisioning of school infrastructure viz. a primary school / Education Guarantee Centre (EGS) / AIE within 1 km, provision of additional teachers for primary and upper primary

schools and construction of additional classrooms, drinking water and toilet facilities within 2007. She pointed out that in some states with a very large infrastructure gap, there would be a need to relax the 33% ceiling on allocations for civil works. She also highlighted the need to strengthen initiatives for quality improvements. SSA would work towards ensuring that all children attain mastery level in expected out comes. She highlighted the initiatives under SSA for children of disadvantaged social groups including SC/ST/Minorities and girls. She explained that the involvement of the community including people's committees and Panchayati Raj Institutions is central to the implementation of the programme. The expenditure on SSA has shown a steadily improving trend. Of the Rs. 4700 crores released by the central government during 2004-05, Rs. 3665 crores had been spent by the states and UTs by December 2004. The state governments had released Rs. 1100 crores as the state share for SSA which was 32% of the releases of the central government. She drew the attention of the Governing Council to certain aspects that required greater attention — stalled / slow recruitment of teachers in a few states and the need for reforms in governance (teacher deployment, filling up of teacher vacancies and ensuring stability of programme personnel).

4. Shri P. Chidambaram, Union Finance Minister stated that SSA has and will receive the highest priority and would get all the funds that are required. He welcomed the emphasis of SSA on community involvement and felt that ownership of schools should be transferred to Village Education Committees / Parent Teacher Associations. He drew attention to the recent study on teacher absenteeism that has indicated a high rate of teacher absence of 25% and also that only half of the teachers found present in schools were actually engaged in teaching. He was of the view that all funds under the programme should be released with clear conditionalities relating to desired results and outcomes.

5. Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission informed the members that the Prime Minister has indicated that SSA and MDM enjoy the highest priority for the government. SSA would not face any resource constraints in the coming years. He hoped that with the higher Finance Commission awards, states would be able to provide their share of 25% on a regular basis. The first release from the central government for SSA should take place during the first week of April. He was of the view that the programme has performed well for providing inputs like civil works, textbooks etc. The performance for recruitment of teachers needs to be improved. There is a need to shift to close monitoring of outcomes like enrolment rates, gender gap and the quality of education and appropriate ways of measuring such outcomes need to be devised. He advocated the need for high quality, systematic independent evaluation. While expressing satisfaction on the involvement of the NGOs in SSA, he felt that this aspect could be further strengthened.

6. Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister started his address by saying- "of the commitments made by our government, none is more dear to me than the one we have made to universal elementary education". The present government has shown its determination by imposing the education cess and significantly increasing the allocation for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid Day Meal scheme. The Mid Day Meal scheme is having a positive impact on children's attendance. We need to now ensure that teachers attend schools regularly. State governments need to strengthen Panchayats and urban local bodies and devolve effective powers and funds to these levels. He expressed satisfaction that a major proportion of funds under SSA are spent through Panchayats or school / village based people's committees. The Prime Minister urged the state governments to rejuvenate their elementary education systems through appropriate policy changes and effective governance strategies. There must be a renewed focus on ensuring accountability at all levels of the education system. He stressed that there is a need for greater openness, flexibility, accountability

and transparency in the functioning of educational administration at all levels. He stressed the need to focus attention on the weaker sections. The Prime Minister expressed the desire that SSA should take the shape of a national campaign all over the country, reaching out to all section of the society. It should involve experts, activists, educationists and grassroots organisations.

The meeting was chaired by Shri Arjun Singh, Union Minister HRD after the departure of the Prime Minister.

7. HRM invited members of the Governing Council to give their comments on the agenda and any other observations. The major observations made by the members are outlined below.

7.1. Dr. D.S. Bisen Minister for School Education, Madhya Pradesh requested the central government to release the first installment of the funds within the first quarter of the year. He expressed satisfaction over the functioning of SSA. He requested for a change in the fund-sharing pattern of SSA from 75:25 to 90:10. He also requested for increase in the funds for repair of school buildings, specific strategies for migrating children and emphasized the need for providing at least three teachers in every school including at least one science teacher.

7.2. Shri Vasantrya Purke, Minister for School Education, Maharashtra stressed the need for physical education and music teachers in every school, a public examination at the end of class IV and class VII, strengthening of VECs and effective steps for ensuring regular attendance of teachers. He requested for certain changes in SSA norms to provide for Block Resource Centres in urban areas, compound walls for schools and free textbooks for all children.

7.3. Shri H.D. Johar, Minister School Education, Punjab informed the Council that the state has not been able to fill up vacancies of teachers due to a severe financial crisis. He requested for a 100% funding from the central government under SSA.

HRM responded by saying that the state should give high priority for elementary education and use the additional funds under the Finance Commission Award for this purpose. He informed the members that he would visit Punjab during the month of March 2005 to discuss these issues.

7.4. Shri C.V. Shamnugam, Minister Education and Commercial Taxes, Tamilnadu informed the house about some significant initiatives being taken in Tamilnadu including the introduction of a flexible admission policy, significant increase in the budget allocation for elementary education, a comprehensive programme for inclusive education for children with disabilities, special coaching for SC/ST children. With near universal enrolment and low dropout rates there is an urgent need for an SSA-like scheme for universalisation of secondary education. He also requested that the 75:25 sharing pattern should continue beyond the 10th Plan and that SSA should permit construction of compound walls for schools.

7.5. Dr. Vallabhbai Kathiria, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) was of the view that certain experiences from Gujarat could be useful for other states, e.g. Shala Praveshotsav, Vidya Lakshmi scheme for promoting girls education, Gokul Gram Yojana for providing an additional classroom in each school, recruitment of the Vidya Sahayaks, Karmayogi teacher training programme to increase teacher motivation and feeling of responsibility among teachers. He suggested that MPLAD guidelines should permit grants for providing computers to primary schools and also stressed the need for a thorough census of disabled children.

7.6. Ms. Mohisina Kidwai Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) appreciated the concept and implementation strategies of SSA. She supported the agenda for the meeting. She felt that the selection of teachers should be done carefully; residential schools for girls should be setup; Nehru Yuvak Kendras should be involved in SSA activities and special attention to be given to working children.

7.7. Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT expressed concern at the large-scale recruitment of para teachers which was against the recommendations of the Chattopadhyaya Committee. He felt that these teachers with low salaries and inadequate qualifications may not be able to provide quality education in primary schools. He felt that institutions of higher education could be involved in the quality improvement in programmes in elementary education.

7.8. Dr. M. Mukhopadhyaya, Director NIEPA stressed the need for making school an interesting place by providing facilities for sports and music. The quality of teacher training needs to be improved. He felt that the enthusiasm and commitment seen at the national level should also percolate to state, district and block level so that SSA can become a truly national campaign.

7.9. Shri I.S. Rao, Dr. Baba Sahib Ambedkar Institute of Social Sciences, Madhya Pradesh felt that there is an urgent need to change attitudes within the education system towards SC/ST children. Effective participation of these groups can be ensured if their representatives are compensated for wages for the days of participation in meetings of the people's committee under SSA.

7.10. Prof. Fatima Ali Khan appreciated the concept and design of the programme but felt that there was a considerable gap between the design and ground reality of implementation. There is a need for greater accountability of

the system for which space should be provided for participation of all concerned citizens.

7.11. Dr. Sharda Jain, Sandhan, Jaipur argued that MDM must be treated as an educational activity and used to promote hygiene, social integration and gender parity. She also emphasized the need for revisiting teacher education to improve quality.

7.12. Smt. Sudha Murthy, Chairperson Infosys Foundation, Bangalore stressed the importance of teacher training programmes and the need for art and music teachers in schools. Accountability must be increased in the system and teacher absence must be strongly dealt with. Corporate houses could be motivated to support residential schools for girls in rural areas.

7.13. Dr. Madhav Chavan of Pratham stated that he has already given some suggestions on the agenda to the Ministry. He reiterated the Prime Minister's assertion that EFA must be achieved today and therefore there should be a sense of great urgency in the working of the Mission. This would distinguish a Mission from a programme. He felt that Governing Council which is a truly empowered body should meet for a longer duration and the present meeting has not been in a position to discuss the entire agenda. The method of working of Governing Council could be reviewed. He stated that this a historic opportunity to make a decisive shift in the culture of the education system to make it more open and transparent.

7.14. Prof. M. Haleem Khan, Chairman Maulana Azad Educational Technical and Vocational Society, Bhopal appreciated the efforts of SSA, specially the initiative for including the Madarsas in Madhya Pradesh within the fold of elementary education which has helped lakhs of Muslim children. He made several suggestions — teacher training in Urdu language for Madarsa teachers,

involvement of Muslim religious leaders to improve enrolment of Muslim children, vocational training for madarsa going children and ensuring regular release of funds to the Maktabas / Madarsas included under SSA.

7.15. Shri Sonam Wangchuk, Student Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh emphasized the need for providing contextual interventions based on the needs of areas like Ladakh. This may require modification in some of the cost-norms that have been fixed at the national level. He felt that encouraging politicians and senior officers to enroll their children in government schools would greatly help in enhancing the quality of education in these schools.

7.16. Shri Paul Dinakaran Karunya Deemed University, Coimbatore opined that special schools should be setup for disadvantaged children and teachers should be provided in schools in the ratio of 1 teacher for every 30 children.

7.17. Swami Swarupanand Ramkrishna Mission, Gwalior emphasized the need to pay much greater attention to inclusive education for children with special needs.

7.18. Shri Mrinmoy Bhattacharya, General Secretary, World Federation of Teachers' Unions felt that under qualified para teachers cannot provide quality education. He suggested that the goal should be a common school system staffed with appropriately qualified and trained teachers. Teachers' organisations must be consulted at the state level on policy issues, as is being done at the national level.

7.19. Shri Ram Phal Singh, President ATPTF welcomed the initiative of HRM for including representatives of teachers' organisations in this high level body. He felt that adequate number of teachers must be provided in each school

to improve quality of teaching. The norm of two teachers for five classes is not adequate. The recruitment of para teachers could lead to dilution of quality.

7.20. Dr. S.N. Methi stated that the focus has to be on retention of children for which the classroom environment and interaction is crucial. Accountability in the education system should not be only of teachers, but also educational administrators. Tracking of children should continue throughout the elementary stage. An effort should be made to ensure that there are no parallel structures at the district and block level.

7.21. Shri Sanjay Bhadoriya complimented HRM and the Ministry for the SSA initiative. He suggested linking of education with earning and the need for proper infrastructure and environment at the school level.

7.22. Shri Girish Kumar Nigam, Teacher, Government Girls' Middle School, Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh stressed that there should be one teacher per class and the curriculum for government and English medium public schools should be uniformed.

7.23. Ms B. Nair, Kendriya Vidyalaya, New Delhi offered her services for the SSA programme.

7.24. Shri D.P. Tripathi, General Secretary Nationalist Congress Party felt that a long term view needs to be taken on the issue of EGS. He suggested that the model of children of higher classes teaching children of lower classes can be very useful in situations where there is a shortage of teachers. He complimented the department for presenting a critical appraisal of SSA.

8. Shri Arjun Singh Minister HRD pointed out that this august group is meeting in 2005, almost four years after the notification of the Mission. He thanked all the members for their useful suggestions and support for the agenda

for the meeting. He assured them that their views would be considered in the planning and implementation strategies of SSA.

He extended his heartiest thanks to the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Education Ministers from State Governments, honoured Members of Parliament and other esteemed members of the Mission for attending this meeting.