

## **AIPSN Short Note on New Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020)**

**Involve Parliament:** The National Education Policy 2020 (henceforth NEP2020) document is supposedly based on the Kasturirangan Committee's Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) of 2019 and the large numbers of public responses to it. NEP2020 is so different from DNEP2019 that NEP2020 should be treated as a Draft and fresh public consultations should be held. In any case, thorough discussions on NEP2020 are required in Parliament before proceeding further.

**Lack of Federalism:** NEP2020 is highly centralized and intrudes heavily on the rights of States on a subject which requires therefore consultation with the state legislators. Discussions in State Assemblies are essential. Unfortunately, several aspects of NEP are already being implemented by the Centre and in some States pre-empting all participatory and democratic decision-making. The sharply increased centralization in NEP2020 will erode federalism and the rights of States. Even though Education is in the Concurrent List, under NEP2020 the States will only be allowed to implement Centrally-imposed policies under supervision of Central agencies for examinations, admissions, standards, funding and assessment, and with centrally imposed text books. NEP2020 leaves almost no scope for State-level shaping of Education which is essential in India because of its cultural, social and linguistic diversity. This makes it even more necessary that deliberations be held in State Assemblies, positions be taken by State Governments, and public opinion be mobilized in States to put forward State-level perspectives on education and the NEP2020 proposals. The trend of centralization is also reflected in NEP2020's call for National Textbooks, supposedly with "local content and flavor," instead of adopting a National Curriculum Framework and allowing States to develop their own textbook content. The centralization assumes more sinister dimensions in the clearly displayed desire to push a saffronization agenda through the Sangh Parivar perspective of Indian society and culture in curricula and in schools in general. Despite talking about promoting constitutional values in school education, the word "secularism" does not occur even once in NEP2020. At the same time, NEP2020 only makes passing references to tribal and indigenous knowledge, showing what the present government considers "mainstream" or "marginal" knowledge traditions. Additionally, in language education in Grades 6-8, NEP2020 takes forward the Hindutva idea of "one nation, one language" by emphasizing the "remarkable unity of most... major Indian languages, [and] their common... origins... from Sanskrit," completely downplaying the independent ancient, historical and continuing Dravidian and different Adivasi and other language groups in the North-East. NEP2020 proposes a three language formula, where Sanskrit could be exercised as an option apart from the mother tongue or local language, and has already met with opposition by Tamil Nadu, exposing the lack of consultations with State Governments.

**Commercialisation:** NEP2020 is full of lofty phrases, flowery language and appeals to aspirational sentiments of students. However, the concrete proposals actually do not offer socially desirable and practically feasible solutions to the fundamental problems outlined above. Some are completely impracticable and are therefore likely to fall by the wayside, and many proposals are such as to exacerbate privatization and commercialization, raise costs, and reduce access to socially and economically deprived sections, while negatively impacting quality with the possible exception of a few elite and expensive institutions which will be out of reach of the vast majority of students. NEP2020 will cause severe damage to quality of education, increase education costs, and sharply reduce access to education for students from SC/ST and other socially and economically underprivileged sections, at a time when there is a legal obligation on the State to ensure quality outcomes in education for the large mass of students and youth as a right of all young citizens. NEP2020 provides an open playing field at the pre-school, school and college/university levels for corporate and private interests, while making token statements about preventing commercialization

of education. While NEP2020 talks of raising public investment in education to 6% of GDP, so did the Kothari Commission Report way back in 1966 with implementation falling far short.

**On School Education:** NEP2020 seeks to undo the right to education of good quality that poor and historically marginalized sections of society have managed to obtain after much struggle. It lays the groundwork for abandoning the justiciable Right to Education (RtE) Act for children of 6-14 years age. While NEP2020 makes tall claims about “universal access” from 3-16 years of age, making it sound like an advance over RtE, mere access is actually a step backward from the guarantee of good quality education contained in RTE read with NCF 2005. It will also be non-justiciable, since NEP2020 is not backed by any legislation. Access to education will *de facto* be restricted, especially for students from rural, tribal and remote areas, by NEP2020 proposals to close down many schools on grounds of “viability” and “efficiency.” A basic and fundamental flaw in NEP2019 is its attempt to replace the right to good quality outcomes guaranteed by the RTE Act read with NCF 2005, by mere access to quality education. This will take Indian school education back by 50 years. A large number of government schools, especially those in small or isolated communities, are to be shut down in the name of efficiency, viability and resource optimization. While such a process is already under way, NEP2020 now gives this process *de jure* status. Previous Education Commissions and Education Policies had called for a strong publicly-funded Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools, although implementation never delivered. NEP2020 has now completely abandoned this basic and important idea for a deeply unequal society as prevails in India. NEP2020 introduces public national-level examinations after Grades 3, 5 and 8, apart from the existing exams after Grades 10 and 12. This “exam raj” runs counter to all global trends, and not only adds to the burden and pressure on children, it further exaggerate the importance of exam performance as a means to assess learning outcomes.

**Regarding Teachers:** Teachers will be severely impacted by NEP2020 proposals for dilution of teacher training at the school level, for extending probation period in higher education institutions (HEI), and for linking tenure of service and other conditions of service to subjective assessments by autonomous and unregulated HEI managements. The well-known shortage of qualified and trained teachers, especially in the public education system and, within that, in tribal and remote areas, is acknowledged in NEP2020 but inadequately addressed. The NEP2020 scheme also introduces a 2-year BEd for Graduates and a 1-year BEd for post-grads, again underestimating the special training required to become teachers, and instead assumes that graduate or post-grad degree with brief training on teaching as such would be adequate. NEP2020 also introduces short-term courses of 2 weeks to 3 months for any person with or without adequate qualifications. These provisions will create under-qualified teachers adversely impacting quality of education, and will open the doors for commercialization of teacher training.

**About Vocational Education:** Vocational Education (VocEd) in India has historically been badly managed and understood. In India’s caste- and class-ridden society stretching back thousands of years, the middle classes/upper castes received education while lower classes/castes received skills-training passed down from earlier generations. This casteist framework persists to this day, where a virtual ‘firewall’ persists between the education system and the skills system, ill-suited to a modern industrial economy where the work force requires not only advanced skills but also higher levels of knowledge in related areas. NEP2020 states that VocEd would be fully “*integrated with the educational offerings of all secondary schools in a phased manner*” and further, that towards this end, “*secondary schools will collaborate with ITIs, polytechnics, local industry etc (NEP2020 Para 16.5).*” The NEP2020 proposal to place VocEd in secondary schools also puts a burden on the already stressed school system with additional responsibilities, need for new teachers with adequate skills, experience and qualifications and, above all, expensive infrastructure in equipment/machinery

for different trades/vocations. Schools are struggling even to have the most basic facilities such as science laboratories, and to expect them to be equipped enough to provide skill-training in a wide range of vocations is a pipe-dream. NEP2020 proposals on VocEd have been placed in a vacuum, divorced from the National Skills Development Mission, which is proceeding completely independently, with little or no linkage with the educational system. Therefore NEP2020 and the government policy framework within which it is situated, completely fails to address the needs of Indian industry and economy, and will not meet the aspirations of India's youth with regard to the knowledge- and skill-intensive economy of the future.

**On Higher Education:** NEP2020 makes the highly disruptive proposal to completely do away with affiliated colleges and move towards large, multi-disciplinary campus-based Universities or HEIs which would offer courses across all disciplines and categories, with a selected set of colleges becoming Autonomous Colleges with powers to grant degrees. NEP2020 would also lead to large-scale closure of affiliated colleges, severely impacting access to higher education of rural, SC/ST and socio-economically deprived sections. NEP2020 compels all Universities/Institutions to transform into multi-disciplinary campuses in this regard will either collapse under its own contradictions or will simply not take off except in a few cases where there are large corporate profiteering interests. NEP2020's proposal for 4-year undergraduate degrees with entry and exit points after each year with different Certificate/Diploma qualifications defeats the intention to expand higher education. The proposal provides for multiple entry and exit points. Such a schema will not enable obtaining the requisite upgraded qualification for mid-career learners, and on the other hand will destroy the integrity of the 4-year Bachelor's degree. NEP2020's intent of commercialization of education is clearly reflected in the corporate structures suggested for HEIs. Each HEI is to independently form its own Board of Governors (BoG) which would then take full control over all affairs of the University/HEI. Teachers are likely to be major victims of the NEP2020's corporate-style governance of HEIs, since Teachers' pay, type, tenure of employment, promotions etc will all be decided internally by each HEI BoG with no uniform standards or norms prescribed by government. The heavy hand of the Central Government is visible in the NEP2020 proposal to constitute multiple Central Institutions such as a Higher Education Council (HECI) at the apex accompanied by NHERC for regulation, NAC for accreditation, HEGC for grants, and GEC to frame outcome standards. Assessments of outcomes would also be done centrally, which may well determine ratings, accreditation and funding. There is no space at all in NEP2020 for democratized governance of HEI. Teachers and Students have no role to play in Universities, other than as "consumers". Within this neo-liberal landscape of privatized and corporatized HEIs, foreign universities are proposed to be invited to operate in India. They would implicitly set a standard or act as role models for Indian universities to follow, including corporate styles of governance, market-oriented course structures, casual or contract employment of teachers, and high fees. A centralized National Research Fund (NRF) is proposed to be set up in addition to the many agencies that already provide research funding. Only NRF will provide public funds for research to both public and private Universities. A national examination for entrance to HEIs will also be conducted by a Central Agency, even though the value of this exam is open to question since, according to NEP2020, "*It will be left up to individual universities and colleges to use NTA assessments for their admissions (NEP2020 Item 4.42)*". The relevance of Central and State Boards, and exams conducted by them are also therefore open to question.

**About Adult Education:** The whole concept of Adult Education is diluted as regards both purpose and delivery. Firstly, there is no focus on basic literacy, and life-long education is treated in a very casual manner. Secondly, focus is again on on-line transactions through digital primers and supplementary books. There is a shift away from the mass campaign approach pioneered by AIPSN/BGVS bringing together different government schemes to facilitate adult education. Despite

acknowledging that the mass campaign approach had yielded substantial dividends, NEP2020 goes back to outdated concepts of the 1980s emphasizing school-based approaches, “each one, teach one,” or by involving student volunteers for basic literacy and dependence on linkages with other programmes for life-long learning. There is also a systematic dismantling of the 4-decades old academic and professional institutions like Department of Adult Education (DAE) and State Education Resource Centres (SERCs) losing institutional memories and decades long proven experience of alternative approaches.

NEP2020 does not even mention Reservation even though it is enshrined in the Constitution. Everywhere only “merit” is mentioned as the basis for admissions at all levels, despite it being well known that so-called “merit” is only a reflection of privilege and benefits accruing from higher incomes and social status. There is a proposal that Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG) (including differently-abled children), a new grab-all term which eliminates recognition of the unique historical discrimination against SC and ST communities, could be taught mainly through National and State Institutes of Open Schools (NIOS/SIOS), increasing their deprivation and widening the digital divide, instead of having reservations and special arrangements within the public education system.

**Who benefits?:** All in all, while creating a few expanded opportunities for better-off sections of society, NEP2020 undermines existing rights of the majority and fails to meet the aspirations of economically and socially disadvantaged children and youth in India for all-round knowledge and gainful employment in the modern globally-integrated economy that is both knowledge- and skill-intensive. NEP2020 uses phrases and policy proposals that appeal to either privileged sections of society or to the “cultural-nationalist” stream of the ruling dispensation. Whereas several proposals of NEP2020 give an appearance of being positive changes leading to long-awaited modernization of the educational system, closer examination shows that the NEP2020 does not address the ground realities of the Indian educational system, will worsen the prevailing inequality of access for Dalits, tribals, urban and rural poor and other socially, economically and educationally deprived sections of society. If at all there are benefits of NEP, these will be obtained only by already privileged and better-off sections of society.