

Aided Programmes or Guided Policies?

DPEP in Karnataka

This article reviews the structure, functioning, impact and implications of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), in Karnataka. Assessed against the mandate of the programme and its validity in the field, the article calls attention to the limitations of the programme and to its impact on the state's policies for education.

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Since the past five years, state-led development in Karnataka has been based primarily on the rhetoric of globalisation, IT-led growth, privatisation and global competitiveness. Buttressing this talk and orientation has been the presence of external funding agencies in various arenas of Karnataka's development schemes. Both these, the orientation of the state and the presence of international lending/donor agencies, have implications for state development policy, governance and political processes.¹ The acceptance of loans as a source of state funding, particularly for development activity, is a matter of concern to us as citizens. Large loans automatically raise questions of how these funds are being utilised, and how they will be repaid in the future. Following recent reports on the efforts of the Karnataka government to secure very large loans of about 600 crore from the World Bank for education, we undertook an exercise to understand the implications of such large-scale funding in elementary education. The District Primary Education Programme in Karnataka (henceforth DPEP) was chosen as a representative case of such a large-scale project, supported by external funding. It was reviewed as a case that highlights the impact of aided programmes against a background of erosion of planned and guided public policies.

This paper does not claim to be a comprehensive review of the DPEP in Karnataka. Based on the access we had to public documents of the DPEP,² field visits, and some conversations with officials and NGOs, who have been involved with the DPEP, we have looked at some aspects of the programme and raised some issues. As a part of the programme has already completed its seven-year project period, the very first question that arises is regarding the impact and effectiveness of the programme: how were the loan monies utilised, and how effectively were the objectives of the programme met? After introducing the DPEP programme in the first part of our paper, the second part presents our audit of the phase I of DPEP in Karnataka. The third part of our paper explores the questions of influence of project-based programmes, such as the DPEP, and the funding agencies that support them, on policy, institutional structures and decision-making in the education sector. These queries relate to the emerging role of the state in the context of the entry of global capital, both at New Delhi and at Bangalore, and its impact not only to public education but also towards the entire social sector.

I DPEP

Prior to 1990, there were a few large scale foreign funded projects in education. UNICEF and the ILO had funded some non-formal education centres, the Andhra Pradesh Primary

Education Programme (APPEP) which was funded by the ODA (now called DFID, UK), the Siksha Karmi with Dutch funding and Lok Jumbish with funding from SIDA, were the only programmes operational. All of these were 'aid' programmes. Since 1990, the government of India began accepting funding for elementary education in the form of loans, with the World Bank being the largest creditor. The European Union is also a large donor. From the point of view of the World Bank, which provides the major component of the funds in the form of a loan, the funding seems to be linked to 'providing a safety net' within the overall policy of structural adjustment. Indeed, the first programme funded by the World Bank in Uttar Pradesh prior to DPEP, was referred to as a safety net programme. In 1993, the MHRD, GoI, conceived the DPEP as an umbrella scheme under which the support from all the different funding agencies would be channelled [MHRD 1993]. From this perspective, the DPEP is a 'post-facto' programme, evolved to accommodate funds that were being made available; it was not a programme conceptualised by the government for which it subsequently sought to raise money.

In phase I in 1994, the programme covered about 42 districts, in seven states. These districts were supposed to be chosen out of those with the lowest levels of female literacy. Subsequent phases have seen the programme spread to more districts and more states. It will cover about 242 districts (out of a total of 500-odd districts) spread over 13 states, by the end of phase IV.

The programme consists of a scheme spread over seven years to achieve the following:

- Decentralised and participatory planning and administration at the district level, involving village leadership, NGOs, schools, district and block personnel.
- Specific strategies to increase enrolment and retention of girls, SC and ST students (identified as gender, caste and tribe 'gaps' in primary education).
- Focus on enhancing capacities of teachers by providing workshops for teachers and production of new teaching learning materials to improve student achievement of learning.
- Administrative capacity building at the district and block levels.
- Collection of data and setting up an Education Management and Information System (EMIS) [MHRD 1995].

In earlier aided projects, such as APPEP, there was a significant presence of the aid agencies in many aspects and stages of the programmes, including conceptualising the intervention, training, implementation, and evaluation. In contrast, in the DPEP there is no apparent, direct involvement of the loan agencies (World Bank or European Commission, etc) in the programme. They also cannot directly interact with or access any aspect of

the programme in the field, without the Gol mediating.³ Technical support for the programme comes from Ed Cil, a public sector company of the Gol, and overseen by the DPEP desk in the MHRD. However, formats used for district level planning in the DPEP and also for all financial dealings of the programmes (including tenders and balance sheets), seem to closely follow the models suggested by World Bank consultants, suggesting that there are more informal forms of interactions and influences in the programme. Loan agencies do participate in the bi-annual joint review missions, along with representatives of the Gol, to monitor all aspects of the implementation of the programme.

In all states, in accordance with the DPEP guidelines, the programme is the responsibility of an independent implementing samiti or society, created for this purpose [MHRD 1993], and headed by an IAS officer. The commissioner for public instruction and other members of the department of education and the DSERT are ex-officio members of the board. However the society can function completely independently of the norms and hierarchical structures of the department of education. The DPEP society works closely with the MHRD's DPEP desk and Ed CIL (New Delhi), in relation to issues regarding funding and in terms of technical inputs from choice of consultants to conceiving and implementing programmes. In many states, as in Karnataka also, many of the DPEP's programmes are also conceived by the states' DSERT, which functions as a consultant to the DPEP, and also by the state project office. All programmes are implemented through a network of block resource centres and cluster resource centres created for this purpose.

Funding

While the central government has borrowed from the World Bank, the same is made available to the state in the form of a grant. The centre and state share the budget: the central grant covers 85 per cent, while the state is expected to provide for 15 per cent of the budget. The DPEP budget itself is not a part of the state's education budget, and is not audited by the state (presumably it is covered by the CAG.) Under the DPEP, the state is required to maintain its elementary education expenditure at least the 1991-92 level, in real terms. In addition to the state's own budget from each DPEP district, the programme makes available about Rs 500 to 600 lakh per year (i.e., about Rs 3,500-4,000 lakh over a seven-year period). The present level of public spending per district is about Rs 6,000 lakh per year, so this amounts to an increase of about 10 per cent per year [Tilak 2002].

According to the DPEP guidelines, the programme is not a finance driven one, but seeks to build systems that are cost effective, sustainable and replicable. It also seeks to protect these funds from being spent for items such as construction by placing ceilings on these heads. The main portion of the budget is to meet the objectives of the programme: the focus on special groups and the enhancement of pedagogic quality. The document also specifies that the recurring liabilities at the end of the programme will be the exclusive responsibility of the state government [MHRD 1995:6].

DPEP in Karnataka

Karnataka was one of the seven states which was a part of the phase I of DPEP in 1994. In 1994, when the programme began, four districts were covered: Kolar, Mandya, Raichur

and Belgaum. In phase II, an additional 14 districts were added. Between 1994 and 2001, phase I districts had completed the programme period.

The total literacy mission campaigns in the state helped create awareness and demand for basic education. Following this, the DPEP was able to renew interest and support for primary education in the districts of the state. Officers from the DPEP and the department of education noted that prior to DPEP, the funds available to address the growing needs of the public education system in Karnataka were very limited. Construction of school buildings and teacher recruitment had been suspended and incentive programmes for underprivileged sections had become irregular. Coming after a decade long decline in the administration and management of primary education, the DPEP is widely perceived as having provided a boost to accessibility of schools in all settlements, and enabled an increased participation of disadvantaged communities. Following a pattern that has been noticed in all the DPEP phase I states, in Karnataka also there was a surge of interest in primary schoolteacher training, raising academic standards through introduction of new curricula (including encouraging textbooks using local stories and inputs by local persons), and renewing pedagogy. An institutional network, in the form of block and cluster resource centres, was created for academic support of schools.

Auditing the Programme

As mentioned earlier, in order to examine the implications of loan-funded government activities, we need to review the programme at two levels. Firstly, an audit to check that the money was spent effectively has to be made. That is, whether the objectives which were set out were achieved, and whether these efforts would be sustained in the long run, after the project period has ended. It is generally accepted that primary education, unlike higher education, cannot be expected to generate funds, therefore we have not addressed the question of loan repayment. Secondly, an examination of the impact on the system: in this case beginning with the education sector, moving to questions of governance and decision-making, etc., has to be made. In the case of creditors such as the World Bank, this second group of concerns would need to include the question of influences of funding agencies themselves, particularly in social welfare policy.

In this section we focus on the DPEP phase I programme in Karnataka. We try to assess the extent to which the objectives of the programme were achieved and whether the claims of the programme are justified. Based on the stated parameters of the intervention, the areas which will be reviewed are: (i) the expenditure of the programme; (ii) the quality of the EMIS; (iii) extent to which decentralisation of planning has been achieved; (iv) increase in enrolment and retention of students and (v) quality of education: pedagogic renewal and learner achievement.

Table 1: Summary of DPEP in Karnataka

	Districts	Project Period	Outlay (In Crore)	Expenditure (October 2001)
DPEP I	4 (now 5)	1994 to 2001	134.98 (rev214.80?)	169.9
DPEP II	7	1997 up to 2004	243.71	211.53

Source: Commissioner of Public Instruction, 2002.

Expenditure

The accounts of the programme are audited and reported in successive annual reports [DPEP Karnataka 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000]. In order to assess the financial regularity of the programme, vis-a-vis the norms, the current heads used in the annual accounts are not convenient. We found it necessary to regroup them according to our understanding of each type of expenditure vis a vis the categories: construction, management and the remaining for the intervention itself. The regrouping also permitted us to assess the nature of various expenditures.

Based on Table 2 above we find that in comparison with prescribed limits, administrative expenses, at 7.7 per cent, is slightly higher than the norm of 6 per cent. (Salaries at the SPD have been included as a part of the management cost.) Civil works alone, at 17 per cent is below the norm of 24 per cent for construction. Capital assets should most probably be included as part of the project management cost, which would then push up its share to 14.2 per cent, which is way beyond the stipulated limit.

The salaries for BRC-CRC, textbooks, teacher training and school grants have been grouped together as contributing to the programme's objectives of improving learning levels and retention. This is about 44 per cent of programme expenditure. The salaries of DPEP teachers have been taken along with PPC as towards achieving the programme's aim of increasing enrolment. This amounts to approximately 35 per cent of expenditure, and is in the form of salaries alone (total salaries, including the SPO is Rs 62,67,99,478, accounting for 46 per cent of total expenditure).

Based on the total expenditure and enrolment data for the seven-year period (1994-2001), the yearly additional expenditure per child was computed and found to be approx Rs 169.00 in DPEP-I (total expenditure from 1994-2001 divided by total number of children enrolled in schools over the same period). Compared to the current expenditure of about Rs 1,350 per child, this constituted an increase of about 12 percent. In spite of having these figures, it was not possible to estimate the increased expenditure per child, for specific type of project activities such as teaching learning inputs for higher learning achievement, or activities towards increased enrolment. This was because data is not presented with the appropriate break-ups.

Although it is known that there have been several NGOs and consultants involved in the programme, these expenditures

are not indicated anywhere in the statement of expenses (the narrative section of the annual reports also do not indicate which were the NGOs and the consultancies involved in the project).

Fifteen per cent of funds for DPEP are supposed to be from the state, The DPEP annual reports also provide information on the yearly state contribution. But there is no evidence of this allocation in state education budgets [Government of Karnataka 2002]. The project itself generates recurring liabilities in the form of salaries for BRC and CRC teachers and also additional DPEP teachers. The annual accounts show that the disbursement of other potential liabilities such as the annual school and teacher grants have been irregular, and there are signs that it may not be continued. On enquiry we learnt that a sustainability report for DPEP-I had been made in 2001, but this has not yet been discussed nor is it a public document. Under the conditions where the structures of the DPEP have been replicated and standardised throughout the State, it is not clear how the liabilities are being met. Close scrutiny of the 2002-03 Education Budget does not indicate under which heads of the budget the new additional expenditures have been allocated [GoK 2002].

EMIS and Non-Reliability of Data

It has been noticed by field researchers that availability and organisation of data relating to schools and enrolment in the DPEP districts are impressive. The district and block offices organise and computerise data, and have also undertaken regular surveys and collected school based data on a regular basis to update their EMIS. However, it is also widely acknowledged that the figures reported in the district level EMIS are not very reliable. School attendance and enrolment data are generally inflated.⁴ Placing the onus of increasing students' enrolment on the teacher may have resulted in widespread over-reporting of students' attendance. Linked to this is a current widespread underreporting of the numbers of children who are out of school. As mentioned earlier, data presented in public documents of the DPEP does not permit any systematic comparison between the pre-DPEP and DPEP phase, and also between non-DPEP and DPEP districts. Data is also not easily accessible to researchers for verification. In various statistics reported, the cumulative data for 'elementary' (class I to VII) and 'primary' (class I to IV), are variably used as indicators for

Table 2: Summary of Statement of Expenditure of DPEP Phase I (Karnataka)

Head	Total (1994-2001)	Percentage of Total Spending	Stipulated Exp Limit Acc to DPEP Guidelines (MHRD1995) (Percent)	
Civil Works	Civil works	Rs 23,22,94,605	17	24
Administration	Administration	Rs 3,36,69,828	7.7	6
	Salaries: SPD	Rs 7,14,82,641		
Capital Assets Programme	Capital assets	Rs 8,86,37,116	6.5	
	Teacher training	Rs 17,96,56,465 (30 per cent of prog)	13	
	Teacher/school grant	Rs 12,79,44,008(21 per cent of prog)		
	Salary: BRC/CRC	Rs 21,33,80,527 (36 per cent of prog)	9.5	
Enrolment	Textbooks	Rs 6,78,08,295 (11.5 per cent of prog)	5	
	Salary: DPEP teachers	Rs 45,76,09,417	35	
	Salary: PPC	Rs 2,27,15,803		

various aspects of success relating to Karnataka and/or DPEP. These make any systematic comparisons across reports and use of data very difficult.

Decentralisation

District level planning: The state plan of the DPEP is supposed to be generated on the basis of district level planning by which attention is to be paid to specific needs of the district. The annual work plans of Kolar and Raichur, two districts of the first phase, of 1998 and 2002, were examined. There is no evidence of any planning that takes into consideration the particular features of the district, to design specific interventions. There are wide variations - ecological, economic, and socio-cultural - in the districts in the state, which are reflected in the wide variations in the literacy levels and conditions of schools in the districts. These do not find any reflection in the plans, which suggests that they have been overlooked. Instead, modules produced at the SPD office are simply applied on an arithmetic proportional basis, depending only on the numbers of schools and teachers to be covered. We learnt that there is no district level deliberation and process to develop district specific plans. The district specific problems seem to be un-recognised and also un-addressed.

The lack of attention to locally specific problems and requirements, and the inability of local personnel to pay attention to the same, can be observed in the extent to which micro-planning exercises have become routinised. Thus we see micro plans for different areas exhibiting a great degree of similarity, and not reflecting differences between them. Further, micro-planning data and details remain exercises on paper. There are neither links nor any follow-up to indicate what actions or strategies are undertaken to address the problems that are identified.

The district institute for education and training (DIET) were set up in 1993 to provide academic support for elementary education in all districts. In spite of having wings such as planning and management, etc, they have not been a part of the district level planning. They are also not a part of the district level executive bodies of the DPEP. None of the programmes described in the annual work plans of each district suggest any effort at district level for strengthening of educational human resources, or the involvement of local NGOs, etc.

Community mobilisation: Another feature of the emphasis on decentralisation in the DPEP was the integration of local communities, especially local elected representatives, into the administration of schools, and to encourage their contribution to development of schools. In Karnataka, community involvement has typically taken two forms. The first form has been the setting up of Village Education Committees (VECs). These have been effective only in some villages, where landed and relatively well-off and powerful families have been able to engage with teachers and the education bureaucracy. Since 2002, VECs have been disbanded and new structures called School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMC) have been initiated with members drawn from students' parents. The second form has been to encourage the community to contribute in the form of land and or money, to build or improve school infrastructure. In the DPEP phase I, communities have been encouraged to share the costs of building schools and providing infrastructure. This has led to a situation where communities that have not been able to mobilise funds or resources such as land, or wield significant

political influence, continue to be either without schools or have very inadequate structures [Vasavi and Chamaraj 2001].

Enrolment and Retention

The DPEP is considered to have had a positive impact on enrolment and retention as a direct consequence of some of its activities. However, when we examined the data and statistics that were available, we were not able to independently assess these claims. One of the publicised claims is that in the DPEP-I districts, there has been an enrolment growth of 9.52 per cent [Task Force on Education 2001]. But this report, does not mention that in the state, overall, there has been an enrolment growth of about 4 per cent in the state. So, in fact, the percentage that can be attributed to DPEP activity would need to be modified to 5.52 per cent. None of the reports also comment or reflect on why the enrolment in the DPEP-II districts is only about 5.7 per cent (modified to about 2 per cent, after taking into account the overall state growth figures). Although girls and SC and ST children are the special focus groups of the programme, the data presented in the annual reports also do not give separate statistics for these groups. Thus we are unable to assess the achievements vis-a-vis these specific constituencies.

Teacher Training, Textbooks and Learner Achievements

Along with material development, in-service teacher training received much attention as a focus area for quality improvement. Early training packages, used in Karnataka, were developed by the DSERT and by NGOs and artists. They attempted to influence the attitudes of teachers towards teaching poor children and in addressing issues of caste and gender. There were a few projects that addressed content knowledge. A pyramidal model was used, in which master trainers trained BRC and CRC faculty, who in turn were supposed to train teachers. Since 2001, the in-service teacher training programmes ('Chaitanya') have been conducted for all primary school teachers of the state. These programmes were developed on the DPEP model. Through the DPEP, primary school textbook revision was also initiated. Mathematics labs were also introduced and the resource people for all CRC and BRCs were trained in this.

Some of the NGOs who have worked with the DPEP in these trainings expressed a degree of frustration. The DPEP provided them with a window to contribute to the qualitative improvement of government schools, but they could not include field level monitoring and follow up in their project plan. On the whole there are very few systematic studies of classroom transactions and pedagogical practices to assess the efficacy of these efforts. The only study, Clarke (2000), found that although DPEP teachers had learnt the new jargon ('activity-based', 'child-centred', joyful learning', etc) there was no appreciable difference in the understanding or practice of DPEP and non-DPEP teachers. Both methods were reported to be derived from pre-existing pedagogical practices and had no evidence of special child-centred focus. To our knowledge, no other study about teachers and teacher training is available. Several educationists have pointed to the inadequacy of the notion of 'quality' that has informed the DPEP arguing that it relies too heavily on only a intuitive notion of the understanding of the child as the starting point, for curriculum reform [Dhankar 2002]. Several

schoolteachers themselves also echo this, saying that the trainings have focused only on the I and II classes and have dealt with only simple concepts. In addition, as many teachers and observers have indicated and as we have observed in several schools, 'joyful learning' and teaching have become synonymous with making children sing and dance in class. Even when enthusiastic and interested teachers have requested for specific inputs to teach difficult topics in the higher classes, their requests have gone unheeded.

The DPEP had also made provisions for grants for teachers and schools. This was to enable teachers to prepare teaching aids and for school development (Rs 500 per teacher and Rs 2,000 per school). The DPEP annual reports did not indicate how teachers have been using this fund, and whether they saw this, along with the trainings they receive, as enhancing their professionalisation. The annual reports of 1999, 2000 indicated a reduction in the allocation of these funds (from about Rs 300 lakh in 1999 to about 98 lakh in 2000). There is, however, no explanation for the reduction in this expenditure.

In areas such as learner achievement also, we found that there has been no systematic monitoring or assessment. Testing, to evaluate if there has been a progressive improvement in learning outcomes, was not been carried out periodically. Occasionally class I and class IV results were reported in the annual reports, but as there were no pre-DPEP, and non-DPEP comparisons, it was not possible to conclude anything about improvements in students' learning as a consequence of the DPEP interventions. We learnt that in a study commissioned by the MHRD to evaluate phase I DPEP districts, the test results indicated that about half the children in class IV still have not acquired adequate language abilities [Dewan 2002].⁵ We attempted to assess the impact on learning by examining class VII examination results in the DPEP phase I districts, with the results from non-DPEP districts, for the last few years. This did not yield anything as the reported achievement levels are grossly exaggerated and therefore unreliable.⁶ Jha et al (2001) point out that monitoring of schools is inadequate in the state, leading to gaps between professed goals and actual achievements.

'Nali Kali' is Karnataka-DPEP's most successful and well-known programme. This programme had its genesis prior to DPEP, as a UNICEF-sponsored project, in which teachers of HD Kote government schools improved upon their pedagogy and curriculum in interaction with the Rishi Valley rural centre. However, its implementation over a block and the widespread interest on Nali Kali that soon followed was due to the support lent to it by the DPEP. Nali Kali at HD Kote and in a new district has been evaluated recently [Anandalakshmy and Krishnamurthy 2002]. As in the case of other evaluation studies, this too has not been able to unequivocally establish an impact on learner achievement. This clearly does indicate the need for a sensitive understanding of how to assess this area of impact in any evaluation study. The study does note that Nali Kali teachers in HD Kote are confident and enthusiastic. However, even these features could not be observed in other blocks where the programme was replicated.

Field-level assessments of the DPEP were mixed. Many personnel from the education department and many teachers appreciated the DPEP for inducing some energy and renewed attention on schools. Several teachers cited improvements in the infrastructure of schools as a major contribution of the programme. Some of the personnel at the BRCs appreciated the

opportunity to take initiative and innovate in the teaching-learning methods. But they also said that this was very dependent on the person who was at the helm, at the state project office. They were of the opinion that currently their role has become minimal and reduced only to implementing programmes. In the last year meetings have become irregular or routinised, and much of work focuses only on collecting data for numerous surveys.

III Influence of the DPEP

In this final section of the paper we examine questions and issues relating to the the DPEP programme on the education sector.

Institutional Structures

The creation of an independent society, through which DPEP would function, was justified by the MHRD guidelines as necessary in order to make the programme more efficient and promote local innovation and initiative. There seems to have been a belief that the normal bureaucratic organisation of the existing department would not facilitate the same. Although this society has as its board members officials from the department of education in their ex-officio capacity, it operates outside the normal bureaucratic and administrative norms and the decision-making process is not transparent. Normal structures of accountability in government departments also do not directly apply to such societies. The annual reports of the society do not provide an adequate picture of what type of planning and deliberations accompany the project.⁷

The financial and decision-making efficiency of an independent society may seem advantageous, particularly for the funding agency. The institutional implications of parallel structures are, however significant enough to warrant a rethinking of the model. It was acknowledged by the DPEP staff at the SPD's office that at the district level parallel structures were instituted to run the programme, with new office space, vehicles and computers. The staff of the education department who were not a part of DPEP noted the differential standards that were operating in the district level. They said that inadvertently a feeling of 'nimma DPEP' (your DPEP) was created. Such a chasm is especially problematic given that the DPEP was supposed to converge with the states programmes at the end of the programme period. It was suggested that for overall 'efficiency' more convergence between the DPEP and the education department (CPI) is essential. During the last two years, there has been a deliberate attempt to move towards uniformity across DPEP and on DPEP districts within Karnataka. The BRC-CRC structures have been replicated throughout the state; the same textbooks and teacher trainings are now applied everywhere.

Particularly in an area such as education, any project which attempts to influence and impact quality, which is 'time bound', can be only of a 'pilot nature'. It is built on the assumption that the system will absorb the activity in the long run. In this scenario, separating the project activity from the department does not seem 'efficient'. However, it is important that administrators heading these societies have observed that they enjoy this space to take some initiative. Some NGO consultants who have worked with the DPEP claim that only through parallel institutions can changes

and new inputs into the educational system be facilitated. This seems to indicate the need to revamp the existing government structures, which do not enable such possibilities. Given this 'lesson' learnt in the course of the DPEP, it is significant that the new central assistance, in the form of the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan or SSA, has come under the Karnataka state department of education.

Bureaucrats have also voiced the opinion that when there is no political will to increase budgetary allocations for elementary education, the availability of loans to meet necessary requirements of social sector spending provides them with necessary leverage. This trend, in which influential educational activities in the state take place outside the budget and outside the purview of the state legislature and overall education policy, has negative implications for the sector. In fact, in Karnataka we currently see a growth in the number of such assisted programmes but no coherent education policy.

The CRC and BRC are networked directly with the DPEP's state project office, and are expected to implement programmes devised at the SPO, for teacher training or material development. The district institutes of education and training were created via a central scheme for academic support of all activities relating to elementary education at the district level around the same time as the phase I of DPEP began. However there are no interlinkages between the DIET and the DPEP. We learnt that there had been attempts to involve the DIET faculty in aspects of the programme in the beginning. However, on one hand the DIET faculty were not well oriented to elementary education, and on the other the DPEP programme structures did not require the involvement of the DIETs (there is no mention of their role even in the DPEP guidelines, MHRD 1995). With the block and cluster centres implementing programmes conceptualised at the SPO, institutional strengthening for elementary education at the district level has not taken place. This observation is corroborated by the European Commission report [Jha et al 2001] on the DPEP in three states, including that for Karnataka.

Linkages between other agencies concerned with children's welfare and education, such as the departments of tribal welfare, social welfare department and women and child welfare could have been forged to meet the explicit mandate to address children of underprivileged groups. Organisations such as Mahila Samakhyas were supposed to be integrally involved with the DPEP, but there is no evidence of any such involvement. The programme has not been able to develop an inter-sectoral approach to enhancing education opportunities. In fact, at the district level the failure to address and alleviate district specific problems stems largely from failing to ensure and build these inter-institutional linkages.

Policy and Priorities

Other questions arise out of the entry of large-scale funding which pertain to the overall state policy towards elementary education and other policies in the social sector. For example, has the DPEP created any shifts in orientation or priorities? Are these shifts linked in any way to the interests and understanding of funding agencies and are they different from the interests of the government of India?

Aid/loan dependency in education: The DPEP seems to have contributed towards a willingness to believe that the only way the central or state government can meet the obligations of

ensuring an educated populace is by borrowing money. There is a danger that such funding in education, especially for elementary education, has already created a dependency mindset. While the state proclaims development of the education sector, it has not allocated a larger portion of the GSDP for education. Instead the World Bank is again in the picture, as a source of funding. These developments seem to be equally promoted by the Bank which is actively seeking to lend in sectors such as education.

Within the DPEP, and now in the central government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Jomtien slogan of 'Education for All' is repeatedly invoked; foreign fund agencies also draw on this slogan as the rationale for pushing states to accept loans/funds focused on elementary education (also see Fine and Rose 2001). The DPEP and SSA project documents use the term 'mission mode' which not only heightens the sense of urgency, but also builds on the assumption that all means of raising the money are justified. In the programmes of the SSA, the central proportion of the budget spending is supposed to be reduced in successive years, from 85 per cent to 65 per cent to 50 per cent. This automatically places pressure on the state to not only raise funds to meet the matching budget, but also to take over the recurring liabilities generated by the project. This seems to be a situation of pushing the state into the willing arms of the lender. The rhetoric of 'urgency' and 'mission mode' of functioning may also induce an impatience in processes and creates the need to see results quickly, in order to impress the loan agencies. In all this there is no reference to or discussion of how the loan will be paid back. An interesting comparison in contrast can be made with the earlier 'National Literacy Mission', which did not involve any borrowing.

Issues of equity in primary education: The state's orientation to the DPEP programme and its linkages with it indicate a complex approach to the education sector. While DPEP is treated as the premier and flagship programme for primary education in the state, the state has overlooked the structural bases of the problems of accessibility, equity and quality in education. The DPEP's mandate is to fill the 'gaps' in primary education and focus on providing incentives and programmes to enroll and ensure the attendance of children from scheduled caste and tribe backgrounds and girl children. But this action programme is not located within a larger framework of providing equal and quality elementary education for all. While DPEP may have enabled a focus on addressing such lacunae, the state has largely remained indifferent and inactive in implementing measures and programmes which can ensure equity. This is evident in that the state's total allocation for education is however only about 3.2 per cent of its GSPD (approx 2.5 per cent according to the medium-term fiscal plan document).⁸ This amount is lower than the budget allocation of many other states, and also less than that of the national average of 3.8 per cent of the budget. The budgetary allocation in 2001-2002 for elementary education was Rs 2,955 crore, that is 54.5 per cent of education allocation, with no substantial increment over the previous years. Average expenditure per child at current prices is Rs 1,350⁹

Further, the state has not paid adequate attention to the decline of government schools in the urban poverty areas or looked into providing more schools in these areas. Evidence that the state has not addressed the conditions and opportunities of the most disadvantaged children to be in school is

observable from the fact that child labour is widespread in the state.¹⁰

Education and the Neo-Liberal Economic Agenda

As the World Bank is a major funding agency, it is important to understand the extent to which the Bank's own orientation to decreasing subsidies to the social sector, and promoting market efficiency as a model, have influenced the philosophy of the DPEP, and through it the orientation of the state towards education. The Bank's rationale for investment in primary education is based on primarily four economic arguments: (a) that of inducing higher rate of returns/increased productivity by having an educated labour force, (b) making for more flexibility, efficiency and receptivity of labour market, with better quality education, (c) speeding up willingness to purchase and use green revolution technologies and high yielding seeds, and (d) enhancing women's education so as to lower fertility rates and incur less expenditure on illness, etc, and increasing women's participation in labour force [World Bank 1997]. This is popularly known as the 'human capital' perspective, in which education is regarded as a 'productive investment'. Although not stated in such reductionist terms, the education policy of the government of India has also informed by the same perspective since the 1960s. Beginning with the Kothari Commission Report [Gol 1966], this is evident in the National Policy on Education [Gol 1986] and also the Programme of Action, [Gol 1988]. These latter two documents are the ones that the DPEP draws upon to justify its objectives and plan of action [MHRD 1995]. It is thus not directly apparent that the Bank's interests in education have informed the design of the DPEP. However, structures such as the independent society, joint review missions in which loan agencies participate, the financial norms imposed by the Bank, as also the formats that are used for planning and reports all suggest to the pervasive informal influence it has had on the programme.

Through the DPEP, the presence, inputs, and impact of an external funding agency seem to have been legitimised and accepted. Similarly, there is also a growing willingness to allow and encourage the role of private and corporate sectors in alleviating some of the problems related to mass primary education. This has been facilitated especially through 'adoption' programmes and signing MOUs with corporate groups, all of which have been encouraged and given wide publicity.

These trends suggest a movement towards a neo-liberal economic orientation in which capital and the market rather than policies and the state gain hegemony; and ideas of competition, productivity, efficiency and profit, prevail over ideas of equity, justice. The World Bank has a role in directing this agenda. This was made more explicit in the 'EDUVISION' seminar held in Bangalore,¹¹ which, though supposedly organised, funded and conducted by the state, was graced by the presence of a number of World Bank personnel. Delivering the key note address, and releasing the document, 'Eduvision: Shaping Education in Karnataka', the vice-president of the World Bank, Josef M Ritzen highlighted that he visualises a future where markets will play a significant role in education. He promoted the idea of 'autonomous schools' (i.e., schools without public finance and non-profit) as the viable model in the future.

Perhaps a bigger danger of such 'professional', moneyed agencies working so closely with the government is that they may substitute for genuine democratic processes and structures.

The process that led to the 'Eduvision' document and workshop suggested that this is possible. Though year-long consultations were reportedly held with several groups of people, these were select invited fora. There was no open forum for engaging with issues and problems of the education sector. Even the Education Task Force,¹² which the same government had set up to evolve a perspective for education for the state, was completely left out of the entire process. Teachers' associations and unions were conspicuous by their absence at all levels of consultations. It is obvious that these were closed and selective consultations which produced a consensual perspective.

Even a year after its 'release', the 'Eduvision' document, is available only in a draft form, not to be quoted. Supposedly written with contributions by several local consultants, it is largely consistent with the agenda that the World Bank upholds. We find in it, no serious engagement with issues of equity. There is no mention of how the state will address and alleviate the multiple disadvantages faced by a large number of children and students, and instead recommends further investments in quality improvements and in research and development. Nowhere does the report state or advise what per cent or proportion of the state's budget must be committed to education.

That the issue of equity and appropriate policy in education at all levels in general continues to be dodged by the state government is observable in the frequent crises and tensions that the state faces with different education sectors and agencies.¹³ These contradictions which are glaring and increasing, caution us to the worsening situation that may develop if such externally-funded programmes are permitted to become the normative form in which state obligations to governance and provisioning of public goods are defined. In the absence of an overall guided and guiding policy framework, projects promoted by these external funding agencies, which now include many private corporate philanthropic ventures, seem to provide the state with its social welfare fig leaf. The extensive media coverage is also good publicity for the state and the donors.

We are compelled to ask why the state and its functionaries have not been cautious about these developments. In the context of a fragmented political apparatus, a co-opted media and an indifferent intelligentsia, there is need to be more vigilant about such programmes and to seek alternatives which will enhance the systemic capacities and capabilities of the state. There is an urgent need for education programmes to derive from a policy that is built on the norms of democracy, equity and self-sufficiency. EPW

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Notes

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2 The data and information we have used are the publicly available documents and reports. The main source has been the Annual Reports of the DPEP-Karnataka (DPEP, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999,