

Collaborative efforts for education, Collective benefits for our nation.

INTRODUCTION: The importance of education

The world looks with awe towards our country. All the way from international surveys to United Nation's report, from WTO's estimates to fortune 500 CEO's views; everyone is looking at India with great hopes and expectations. Indians in turn are looking toward its young population of 550 million who we all believe will shape the future of nation.

But are these young minds of India prepared to handle this mammoth task of nation rebuilding and taking India to next level of success? The answer to this question is –“Not really” and that's where the role of education becomes so crucial in today's time – if at all the vision of super power India is to be realized.

An uneducated or insufficiently educated young population of half a billion will rather be a liability on the nation. Conversely, if only we can rightly educate these young Indian and equip them with right kind of skills the same half a billion population will become an asset, a force to reckon with.

Two things have to be clearly understood at this point:-

- 1.) We need to understand that a well educated and skilled workforce can be of great use for nation building.
- 2.) Secondly, education is the most important tool that can help us achieve the requirements of first point.

Understanding the challenges of the Indian education system

Given the diversity and size of our country, Indian education system faces three major challenges:-

- The problem of reach (Expansion)
- The problem of quality (Excellence)
- The problem of divide (Inclusion)

THE PROBLEM OF REACH

We are 7th largest nation on this planet and to reach every part of our country in itself is a big challenge. This poses the first problem in front of us for our education system – the problem of reach. How do we make sure that every Indian living in any part of our county has access to quality education?

This issue can be addressed in following ways:-

Distribution of responsibility

- a) To expand the reach of education, we need to distribute the responsibility. We have seen that government alone cannot do much, hence public-private partnership, say through corporate social responsibility can be one way to distribute responsibility.
- b) Another way could be through NGO partnerships.
- c) Yet another way could be through individual who are keen to become edupreneurs or educational entrepreneurs.

In all these three the key role of government has to be that of a facilitator. *Government should encourage private sectors and NGOs through various incentives and benefits. A lot of companies in private market do realize the value of education and corporate social responsibility and once the government shows keen interest they will take up the initiative with enthusiasm just the way it has happened in the United States where private companies are closely involved in various educational drives all the way from primary school to university level.*

Individual can be yet another way to increase the reach. There are so many people waiting for right kind of opportunity and if they are provided with funds and guidance they can help set up schools in various areas of country. *Introducing a “Special loan for educational setup” can be one such initiative on government’s part to encourage these individual edupreneurs to take up the task of expansion.* These individuals can vary from retired professionals, philanthropists, foreign nationals, college graduate to local villagers.

THE PROBLEM OF EXCELLENCE

Government introduced “Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan” in order to expand the reach of education. It helped establish large number of schools. We also added education as a fundamental right in our constitution but in all this we missed one clause – quality. *Poor education is as good as no education at all.*

Hence, the second problem Indian education system faces is that of maintaining quality of education across the schools across the country.

This can be addressed through following measures :-

a.) Centralized – Decentralized quality control

We need to have quality control both at the central level and at lower level all the way up to city to ensure the quality of this quality control. The center board should come up with basic quality norms from a very practical point of view keeping in view the availability of resources. It should also prescribe quality measures for departments at lower level of quality control. The final quality checks should be done at city level by city government but the reports should be accessible to the highest level at the center. *This might sound as a mammoth task at first and that's where the second point – technology comes into picture.*

b.) Use technology to enable excellence

We are leaders in Information technology and we should be able to use this technology to enable excellence in education. One simple example could be how quality control can be implemented so easily through use of technology that is effective as well as cheap. Similarly, technology can be used for a variety of purposes to enable excellence like delivering virtual classes, collaborating group of schools and so on. *Use of technology is just limited by our imagination and commitment and it can do wonders for our education system.*

c.) College – School Partnerships

Colleges and schools have so far been alienated and no efforts have been made to create a partnership among the two in spite of the fact that schools and colleges are so inter-related. *College education follows schools education and it'll make sense if both can work in tandem to deliver value and excellence.* Various models can be used here, for e.g. each college can adopt a number of schools and help improve the education quality in those schools. Young students who are sensitive and well aware about the issues in schools will be more than willing to take up this initiative especially if it becomes a part of college culture. This will go long way in improving the quality of education and will also meet the demand of teachers.

d.) Performance based model

We have not valued performance in educational sectors as much we value it in other sectors. Hence introducing a performance based model can also help improve the quality of education. It can come in several variants depending on the need and appropriateness.

Teacher's pay can be performance basis, schools can get incentives from government on performance basis, corporate can get recognitions and awards based on their performance and contribution to educational excellence.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVIDE

We are a diverse country not only terms of social attributes but also in terms of economics. We have students who can afford quality high price education and students who lack even 1 meals a day. We have students bright enough to create computers and models and we have students who are mentally and physically challenged. This introduces the third key problem in Indian education system – The problem of divide or inclusion.

We need to make sure that no group of students are left behind when it comes to education. *Each students whether rich, poor, healthy or challenged should have access to right educational structure.*

Sarva Siksha abhiyan tried to address this issue to certain extent, we need to take it further by making it more practical and achievable. Some of the measures could be :-

1.) Special budgeting and policies for inclusion

Our educational budget should allocate a good chunk solely to the education than enables inclusion. This budget can be disbursed through NGOs, schools, individuals or directly by government. To ensure the transparency equal shares should be given from this special budget to NGOs, schools, individuals and government. To avoid any misuse of this fund, special monitoring will be required. *The existing anti-corruption bureau can be advised to keep a close track of spends on education or RTIs can be yet another way to ensure transparency.*

A special budget will not only encourage individuals and schools to take up the task of inclusion but also it'll serve as an incentive for anyone who wants to work towards educational inclusion.

2.) Special NGO tie-ups

NGOs working in this endeavor should be provided with additional benefits and incentives. *NGOs that are already serving mentally and physically challenged kids in some capacity should be directed and supported to introduce the educational component if possible.*

3.) Special educational zones (SEdZ)

To make sure that education reaches even the far deprived regions in our country, we can create special educational zones where it is quite easy and simple to set up a school that will include the excluded set of students. This can be quite similar to special economic zones but might require careful planning and implementation. *SEdZ should be carefully chosen to enable inclusion and not for economic motives.*

CONCLUSION : Lets walk the talk

All the points discussed above appear to be quite interesting but we need to understand that reality is far different and it's easier said than done. It requires immense commitment and motivation if at all we need to meet the challenges of expansion, excellence and inclusion. *Most difficult, perhaps is the inclusion because expansion and excellence can often be an outcome of profitable venture.* Whereas inclusion requires more of a social change. *We need to walk our talk.*

Government has to play the key role of a facilitator. The moment government say that its important to expand the educational system, to improve the quality of education and to include every strata of people; it attracts attention of corporates, citizens and the world. The moment government is committed, it generates a commitment in many others. Hence government should focus on education as it is the only tool that can drive our country to become a super power.

However, the mission is not only limited to government. We need public involvement. We need many more teach India and Sarva Sikhsha campaigns.

If we can collaborate efforts of government, NGOs, private sector and sensitize the civilians especially the youth towards this mission which will help us realize the nation that we have always dreamt of and allow us to live up to the expectation of the rest of the world that looks up to us with hope and expectations for a better tomorrow.

Let's Collaborate to improve education in India and it'll surely benefit us all in long term.