



Remarks of Shri Kapil Sibal, Honourable Minister for Human Resource Development, at the national release of the Annual Status of Education Report 2011 on January 16, 2012

[Shri Sibal's remarks followed a short presentation by Dr Madhav Chavan, President, Pratham Education Foundation, which offered recommendations for how to improve learning levels across the country.]

Ajay, Madhav, my colleague from parliament, Ms Anshu Vaish, all those who participated in the ASER family, all the young researchers and everybody else who is present. First of all I am delighted to be here, Ajay, on this particular launch. Every year we learn something more about what is happening in our schools through your fabulous survey which perhaps is a unique enterprise anywhere in the world.

I've listened very carefully to what Madhav has been saying and I in fact share many of the thoughts that he has expressed. But I think that we need to look at the problem of education not in the context of what the Government of India will do because education and levels of learning ultimately emerge out of the institution in which the child is learning. There is no way in the world that GOI or a minister in the GOI can monitor what is happening in the school system. And much of this needs to be understood and addressed at the level of the locality in which the school is situated and a lot of this needs to be decentralised. Because ultimately, remember, you can have any kind of policy framework in the country but the implementation has to be done at the school level. It depends on the quality of the teacher, the quality of the infrastructure, the environment in which the child finds himself/herself both in school and at home, the quality of the extent to which the parents of the children are educated, and the conditions of service available to teachers who are recruited in schools. These are essentially activities entirely in the control of the state government and the local community. So if we have to address the issue of quality and outcomes, I think state governments have to get far more proactive in the field of education and they should not be looking at the central government to provide solutions, because each state government has a different set of parameters and challenges that may differ from state to state. In a complex country like ours there is no one jacket that fits all. So I think this really is the crucial problem.

We have been moving away from the examination system. We have been talking about the CCE i.e comprehensive continuous evaluation that is part of the policy of the GOI, that is inbuilt into the RTE. But the fact of the matter is that very few teachers in this country understand what continuous and comprehensive evaluation means. We want to de-stress students, that has been our policy framework, but the problem is that although the RTE came into effect on the 1st of April, 2010, it is only now that a large number of states have promulgated their rules. So as you know it has taken almost one and a half to two years for state governments to promulgate their rules, you are not going to get the effect till five years from now. The RTE itself gives five years for the education system to come to terms with it. So I think it is a bit unfair to look at the outcomes from the RTE when the RTE is not fully in force at this point in time. I think five to seven years down the road you will see the impact.

Now you are absolutely right, what we need to do is to look at outcomes. Where are the problems in this country? Your findings show that much of the south is much better. If you look at Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh – these states are much better off and the population has stabilized as well. But all of the demographic dividend that we talk about is up in the north. Whether it is MP, Bihar or UP, that is where you have the worst indicators. So we are going to be in a lot of trouble if that demographic dividend is not going to deliver for the states and in turn for the nation. So as a national policy, what we ought to do is concentrate on states where the demographic dividend is available and where they are performing very poorly. It is all very well to say that the enrollment levels have gone up, but ultimately what is the attendance level? It is not more than 80%, there is still [the other] 20% and by the time they get out of middle school, people go out of school by almost 56%. That problem cannot be tackled at the level of the national government. The problem with this country is that we all blame the central government for everything. If a child does not go to school the minister in the union of India must respond. This is not the job of the central government and then if we try and set standards and request the boards to apply those standards then they say 'sangiye dhaanche par bara prahar ho raha hai' (the state framework is being violated). This is the tragedy of this country.

I was saying to someone who was riding with me that if you look at the health indicators in this country (and health is a state subject, thank god education is still on the concurrent list) – hospitals and dispensaries is a state subject and the worst indicators in the world in health are in India. Much worse than education. Why? Because the state governments have not delivered. There is no policy framework, no infrastructure.

What you need to do, Madhav, is that I will listen very carefully to you and march along with you but you have to make the state Chief Ministers listen to you. You have to go to localities, you have to go to schools, you have to get the community on your side. Unless you get the community... ultimately the quality of education depends on the quality of recruitment of teachers. If you don't make teaching an attractive profession what is the kind of personnel that you will be getting into this profession? Who controls that, not the central government, it is the state government. And what kind of teachers do the state governments give? Contract teachers. What qualification do they have? Next to nothing. What we are trying to do through the RTE is give the states a time of five years to get those qualifications. Now we have included a test – one has to pass a particular test [to become a teacher] - the TET. So we are trying to set standards so that you may get that quality but ultimately the delivery mechanism has to be from the state government. And each state government has a different problem at hand – you have Naxal areas in some parts of the country, North East where people cannot reach schools, transportation is unavailable, these are peculiar problems, then there are areas where education is not a priority, and that is why there are some states where the indices are going down.

This is a very serious issue and what we need to do is make the federal structure far more cohesive than what it is today.

You mentioned about the GRE and the SAT. For the last two and a half years I have been saying that we must develop a system through which the outcomes should be tested and therefore lets devise a system through which the child goes through only one examination instead of having to sit for several other examinations after school. So the child has a 12th Board examination and then a GRE or

SAT kind of test, which is an objective test, and you amalgamate the outcomes of both and prepare a merit list. But States are not on board. It is very difficult to convince the states. It is difficult to convince them to abolish the Class X board which many have not done till now. Many states don't have elementary education upto Class VIII. The state governments are not on board on many of these issues. Then we can prescribe the quality of the syllabi, broad parameters can be set up, but ultimately, the textbooks are again prepared by the state governments and given. But what is the level of those textbooks? I daresay that many of the textbooks that are given to children, the content is such that they are not age appropriate. So many children are unable to comprehend because it is beyond their comprehension. So if you start with that and move higher up, the comprehension will not improve it will only decrease. So what is the nature and quality of textbooks being provided by state governments? What is the nature of that syllabus is not decided by the central government.

I can say for the first time in the history of education [that] within the CABE committee, we take decisions with complete unanimity. There has never been a dissent ever since 2009, all states are on board, but most of the time they say unless you give us 100% we'll never be able to deliver. Give us all the expenditure. Now that is not possible. So these are very serious issues which are structural issues which need to be addressed. So I think the state governments must realise that the responsibility of education is squarely on their shoulders.

If this nation is to get the advantage of the young people in this country, we are trying to unveil the National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) where we are trying to bring vocational education within the school system. The states have to come on board because ultimately vocation has to be decided by the state government depending on the localities where this is to be provided. This again cannot be provided by the central government. So we are telling them to reach out, find out where the vocations are, find out where the industry is, look at the school system around the industry, like the community colleges in the US, and get those children whose parents are working in those industries, get them involved in the vocation of their parents, and the syllabi in those schools should be changed for the purpose of getting those children into that vocation. But this is not an exercise that can be completed in one to two years. So I think seven to eight years down the road you will see change in quality, but I think much of that will depend on the level of commitment that we will see from the state governments and from the localities in which these schools are situated. And much of it will also depend on the School Management Committees (SMCs). Under the RTE now all School Management Committees consist of 75% of its members from the locality, 50% of which have to be women, which means mothers whose children are going to that school are part of the SMC, they are part of the School Development Plan, so I think that if they get fully involved in the school system, you will see that levels of outcome will improve.

But in the ultimate analysis, it is the quality of the teaching community that is recruited by the state governments which determines the quality of the school.

What happens in most situations is that the moment there is a plan for recruitment there is a stay order from the court. Because they question: how can you recruit somebody from outside the locality? The teacher if he belongs to the community will be far more committed than someone who does not belong to the community, if he/she lives 200 kms away, there will be absenteeism. Now if you start recruiting from within the community, they say its a violation of Article 14 of the

Constitution because you are not allowing someone who lives 800 kms away to compete. But he/she is not going to be committed to that school. So the entire system of recruitment of teachers as far as states and localities are concerned, has to change. You have to get that teacher to commit himself to that school and that can happen only if he belongs to the community... but of course it sometimes also happens that people of quality may not belong to that community. These are therefore very complex issues and when you deal with 220 million children it is not easy. It is easy to blame, and of course you are the people, you are the republic, not us, I concede that, but remember [when] you sit on my chair and take those decisions, you realize how difficult it is and how easy it is to blame the person who is sitting on that chair.

So while we accept everything that you say, while we agree that much needs to be done, the fact is much needs to be done at all levels. At our level - by providing a policy framework which has been done under the RTE, by providing money... Which government in the past has allocated 2 lakh 31 thousand crores in a 5 year term for elementary education? No government in the history of this country has done that. We are trying to change the processes of examination, of learning, we have launched the Aakash only for this reason because we know it is impossible to get teachers in every school in adequate numbers and at least of some quality. So at least through the Aakash we'll be able to send material to the children – starting from university level to the school level. We are trying to connect every Gram Panchayat with fibre optics in the next 2.5 years so that syllabi can flow to the student community in the institution in which they are sitting and learning and maybe some of the gaps can be filled through the flow of data and the flow of information. All this we are doing in parallel and simultaneously urging states to come on board, agree with us. We are looking at skills like communication – what is the point of a child rote learning if he is unable to express himself. This is the part of the new programme of the GOI, communication skills, the ability to understand and relate to the subject matter that the child is trying to absorb, ability to deal with other children in the classroom, to have a system of collaborative learning. The textbook is not an end in itself, it is the beginning of the process, these are things that we have talked about in the last 2.5-3 years which were never spoken of in the last 60 years. But you cannot hope to get those results in the last 2.5 years. This is going to happen 5-7 years down the road.

I have to share with you that I am an optimist by nature and I know that we will rise to the occasion and if institutions like yours, ASER and others, with young people that I see in this hall, and with the levels of commitment, I see absolutely no reason why we will not be able to translate that into real outcomes and make sure that our children reach the levels of expectation that we have for them for their own future.