

REPORT OF THE 1ST SHARING MEETING OF THINK TANK

Venue : Hotel Excellency, Bhubaneswar
Date : March 29, 2014

The first meeting the Think Tank-TE, Odisha was held under the Chairpersonship of Ms.UshaPadhee, IAS, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of School and Mass Education, Government of Odisha at 11.00 a.m. on March 29, 2014. The following members of the Think Tank were present:

1. Prof. Shyam B. Menon, Vice-Chancellor, Ambedkar University, New Delhi
2. Prof. R.S. Khan, Formerly, Vice-Chairperson, NCTE, New Delhi
3. Prof. (Ms.) JanakiRajan, IASE, JamiaMilliaIslamia, New Delhi
4. Prof. Shashi Nair, Policy Planning Unit, AzimPremji Foundation, Bangalore
5. Dr. M.M. Mohanty, Formerly, Director SIEMT, OPEPA, Bhubaneswar
6. Dr. D.C. Rana, Formerly, Retd. Reader in Education, Bhadrak Autonomous College, Bhadrak
7. Prof. B.N. Panda, Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar
8. Dr. M.K. Pathy, Formerly, Principal, PMIASE, Sambalpur
9. Mrs.LalitaPatnaik, Education Specialist, UNICEF State Office, Bhubaneswar
10. Prof. S.L. Jena, Formerly Director SCERT, Bhubaneswar

Among other distinguished government officials, ShriPremanandaKhuntia, Director, RMSA, Prof. D.P. Nanda, President, Board of Secondary Education, Odisha, ShriKedarnathAcharya, Deputy Director (nominee of Director Secondary Education) and Dr. (Ms.) SupriyaMallick, Deputy Director (nominee of Director Elementary Education) attended the meeting. Dr. R. Begur, Education Specialist, Unicef Country Office, New Delhi attended the meeting as a special invitee. The faculty of DTE and SCERT in-charge of various academic programmes, Principals of IASEs and CTEs, and selected faculty of DIETs also participated in the meeting.

The following Think Tank members, however, could not attend the meeting due primarily to their pre-occupation with other academic engagements and to the closure of the financial year:

1. Prof. Santosh Panda, Chairperson, NCTE, New Delhi
2. Prof. (Ms.) Padma Sarangapani, IESC, Bangalore
3. Dr.Sitanshu S. Jena, Chairman, NIOS, New Delhi
4. Prof. M.A. Khader, Formerly Director, SCERT, Kerala
5. Prof. (Ms.) Sharada Jain, Director, Sandhan, Jeypore
6. Prof. Thomas Vadeya, Baroda
7. Dr. (Ms.) Latika Gupta, Asst. Prof. CIE, University of Delhi
8. Prof. Rajaram Sharma, Joint Director, CIET, NCERT, New Delhi

These members, while expressing their inability to participate in the meeting, have requested for informing them of the decisions taken in the meeting.

Dr. (Ms.) Snigdha Mishra, Deputy Director Teacher Education, DTE and SCERT introduced the members of the Think Tank and Prof. S.L. Jena spoke about the objectives of the meeting. In her brief address, Mrs.LalitaPattnaik spoke about the developments, most notably the JRM-TE-Odisha (2013), which set in motion a slew of exercises for refurbishing the teacher education system of the State. The Think Tank-TE-Odisha was put in place, she said, to spearhead the movement for

reforming the teacher education system. The Think Tank – TE was conceptualised as an academic advisory body to help the State in making its teacher education system work.

The opening session started with Ms.UshaPadhee, IAS, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of School and Mass Education, Government of Odisha releasing the document 'Envisioning Teacher Education in Odisha : A Roadmap for Reform'. Along side this, Prof. Shyam B. Menon released the video documentary on the process of vision-building exercise, and Dr. R. Begur released the photo documentary on Teacher Education and Support. These documents captured the entire spectrum of exercises involved in the process of vision-building. In her presidential address, the Commissioner-cum-Secretary made the following observations:

- The JRMTE, Odisha (2013) was the turning point, which, in fact, provided an accelerated momentum to the reform initiatives already unleashed by the Department. With JRMTE's observations and recommendations in view, the Department's reform initiatives began to fall in place in an unified and structured pattern.
- The Think Tank-TE represents an academic advisory body, comprising a select group of outstanding scholars drawn from different parts of the country. This meeting provides a unique opportunity to leverage the expert views of the members on various aspects of the teacher education reform agenda.
- The pervasive disconnect among three major structures for improving the quality of school education viz. SSA, RMSA and DTE and SCERT is disturbingly disconcerting, leading to ineffective organisation of training programmes. The linkage and convergence among these state level structures need to be strengthened to make the training programmes more cost-effective.
- The restructuring of DTE and SCERT in the light of MHRD Guidelines (2012) has been at the centre stage of reforming the teacher education system, which is to be taken up as number one priority of the Department. It is urgent and important, and to be acted upon now and here without brooking any further delay.
- The Department is firmly committed to transformation the teacher education system of the State and is posed to implement the reforms suggested in the vision document with accelerated pace and intensity. On the basis of a review of suggested reform proposals, the Department has already initiated actions on a few first-order action points.
- There is no obstruction or opposition from the State's Finance Department or from the highest decision-making authority to the proposed reforms. Government being pro-active to make the teacher education system work more effectively, there exists a favourable climate to ground several reforms in the State's teacher education system.

The opening session was concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair, the august members of the Think Tank-TE and others by Sri K.C. Behera, Deputy Director (Admn.), DTE and SCERT.

Business Session

The business session started with a presentation on the Think Tank-TE, Odisha by Prof. S.L. Jena, Lead Coordinator, Think-Tank. In his presentation, Prof. Jena covered several dimensions, which included: the concept, objectives,

composition, role definition, expected outcomes and deliverables of the Think Tank. He also highlighted the bases and processes of the vision-building exercise. The document: "Envisioning Teacher Education in Odisha - A Roadmap for Reform" is the consummate outcome of a series of consultations which is characterised by eclectic viewpoints and perspectives, he said.

With this presentation and the vision document released, the session was open for observations, comments and suggestions from the distinguished members of the Think Tank-TE and other representatives. A brief account of such learned observations are:

Prof. S.B. Menon made the following observations:

- Reforms in education get grounded and take roots only when they are legitimately owned by a wide range of stakeholders, who are genuinely involved in the processes underlying envisioning reform. This aside, concerted advocacy in support of reforms needs to be mounted at all levels to create a climate for acceptance of reform initiatives.
- Access to quality education, particularly at the elementary level, received premium due to the rights perspective of the landmark legislation—the Right to Education (2009). Quality of school education, he observed, essentially depends on the quality of the teacher preparation and teacher development programme. Quality is inextricably linked to access to education.
- Quite a few externally-driven projects such as DPEP, SSA, and RMSA introduced a series of changes in the school education system bypassing the Department of Education. Aligning project mode of implementation to departmental mode of functioning is difficult. Sometimes, the two modes are found to function parallelly.
- Teachers are the frontline providers of quality education. They should be professionally trained with ample opportunities for their continual professional development. Alternatives for professional development of teachers need to be explored. No single mode will stand them in good stead in all contexts. Alternatives such as brainstorming, mentoring, peer-tutoring etc. could be exploited.
- Think Tank-TE is an innovation to strengthen the teacher education programme of the State. It is to be viewed as an interim and transitional mechanism. In order to make it sustainable, the Think Tank-TE should have a balanced composition i.e. having equal number of in-state members.
- Ideally, the meetings of the Think Tank-TE should be held in teacher education institutions, which would provide the members with an opportunity to observe their functioning and their linkage with the sub-district level academic support structures such as BRCs and CRCs.

Prof. JanakiRajan's observations were mostly on restructuring of SCERT. A few notable observations include:

- Restructuring DTE and SCERT should take cognisance of the needs and expectations of the academic support system down the line – IASEs, CTEs, DIETs, BRCs and CRCs. The role definitions of the support structures should inform the tone and texture of restructuring of the DTE and SCERT.

- The DTE and SCERT, being the apex State level academic authority, need to be developed as an organisation to oversee the quality of teacher education institutions. For this, it should be structurally as well as functionally appropriate, keeping in view its expanded roles.
- The teacher education institutions need to work in close association with a diverse group of actors – students, teachers, parents, community and civil society groups. In other words, they have to reach out a wider world outside, which would be mutually beneficial.
- The Divisions and Departments proposed to be in place in the restructuring of SCERT appear to be truncated, ignoring the enormity and complexity of their intended roles. Therefore, the State should adopt the MHRD framework for restructuring of SCERT. What is crucial is to put right kind of people in right places so as to make SCERT functionally vibrant.
- Student-teachers of teacher education institutions need to be assiduously observed, monitored and mentored. The quality of teachers, therefore, depends on the quality of nurturance the student-teachers are exposed to.
- The proposed restructuring of SCERT should have space for pre-school teacher education, which is missing in the existing structure.

Prof. Shashi Nair viewed restructuring of SCERT from three standpoints: diagnosis, design and system strengthening; educational change / reform; and educational leadership and management. He made the following observations:

- Educational institutions tend to remain stubbornly resistant to change. This problem is systemic in nature, and cannot be solved without systemic solutions. Educational change cannot take place unless we are able to change the practices of individuals, institutions and the system. In this context, leadership and management plays a very important role.
- Improving the quality of education depends on effective support system. It has to be designed to work as a system, and it has to be managed to make sure it works as a system.
- Academic support system works effectively when there is role clarity of each part of the system (SCERT, IASEs, CTEs, DIETs, BRCs and CRCs). The restructuring of SCERT cannot, therefore, be seen in isolation. The structure of SCERT will be determined by what other parts do and the roles expected of them.
- The different parts of the support system have a different focus, and they complement each other. The principle of subsidiarity suggests that work must be performed at the lowest possible level at which it can be completely and effectively done. The underlying message is to decentralise roles and devolve authority to decentralised structures with an element of faith and freedom.
- Change is the product of dissatisfaction. Change can only happen when we cease to do the same things. Therefore, systemic changes require us to do different things.
- Mandating change to happen does not take place through command and control. While restructuring is necessary, it is not sufficient for bringing in change. Therefore, there is a need for re-culturing, which

depends on the quality of the leader, his team and the institutional environment.

- Leading change by re-culturing the academic support system in the state through developing a shared vision and strategy and implementing the same is of significant importance.

Open-house Discussion: The presentation session was followed by an open-house expression of views of the participant members. Some of the viewpoints expressed included:

- Curriculum renewal should be a continuous process i.e. curriculum at all levels needs to be reviewed and renewed at regular intervals involving a range of stakeholders, particularly the practitioners.
- Commitment approach to educational reform is more effective than the control approach. Unless one is strongly passionate about change and committed to it, change does not take place. Commitment also guarantees sustainability.
- Institutional autonomy is an essential condition for their effective functioning. Autonomy, with an overall framework of authority, helps institutions to bring in improvement.
- SCERT as the academic authority should have a mechanism in place to provide onsite academic support to the support structures down the line.
- The teacher education institutions should strengthen their linkage with the sub-district level structures such as BRCs and CRCs, and schools.
- The State does not have a policy on school education as well as for teacher education. This leads to initiating changes largely due to some external forces. There is an urgent need to have a State Policy on School Education, and Teacher Education.

Prof. JanakiRajan initiated a comprehensive discussion on making SCERT an autonomous institution, based on her own experiences as the Director, SCERT, Delhi, which is an autonomous institution. She made a threadbare analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of an autonomous institution. With the exception of a few ideal autonomous institutions, she observed, weaknesses outweigh strengths unless adequate care and safeguards are ensured.

In-house meeting of the Think Tank:

An in-house meeting of the members of the Think Tank was held at 05.00 p.m. on March 29, 2014 under the Chairpersonship of the Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of School and Mass Education. The meeting exclusively focused on the restructuring of SCERT in the light of MHRD's Guidelines (2012). However, some other issues and concerns were also taken up for discussion. After a detailed discussion on various issues, the following decisions were taken:

- The restructuring of SCERT is to be made in conformity with the MHRD Guidelines to avail the financial support from Government of India. Expeditious steps may be taken to restructure SCERT, to create posts and to put appropriately qualified people in position to make SCERT functional.
- The Think Tank-TE located in the SCERT premises may have a separate website, other than the SCERT website.
- The position papers and the action points need to be thoroughly examined by the members of the Think Tank and expert advice may be sought for further action.
- The composition of the Think Tank needs to be broad-based to include experts representing different disadvantaged and marginalised social groups, children with disabilities and linguistic minority groups to take care of their specific concerns.
- SCERT and its teacher education institutions may adopt a few schools and try out innovative practices so as to demonstrate changes.
- A Resource Group with large number of experts may be constituted and their support could be leveraged for improving the quality of school education and teacher education.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair and the august members of the Think Tank-TE.