Transforming Education Outcomes in India

What is the issue?

- Improvement in learning outcomes is an immediate goal for India to fulfil its aspirations of playing a greater role in the global economy.
- It is crucial that the states adopt a systemic approach to transforming education outcomes, drawing lessons from the successful models.

How significant is the education department?

- The education department certainly has the largest share of employees in the State governments in India.
- Besides frontline service providers (teachers), there are a number of other officials and administrators.
- They form an important part of the overall educational set-up.
- So having proper educational reform policies in place is essential to effectively utilise this human resource to achieve higher learning outcomes.

What are the challenges?

- Education transformation programmes by the States are often not designed in a way to be agreed upon by all key actors.
- Any effort at education reforms must ensure that the incentives of all stakeholders are aligned throughout the system to ensure their participation.
- A successful example of implementing such an all encompassing road map can be seen in Haryana.

What is Haryana's model?

- Haryana has created a race among its administrative blocks to be declared as ‘Saksham’ (Hindi for abled/skilled).
- This means that they should have 80% or more students who are grade level competent i.e. the appropriate level of competence for a particular grade.
- Under this campaign, officials take up remedial programmes, teacher training and internal assessments.
- Consequently, if they are confident that their block has achieved the 80% target, state officials nominate their block for the ‘Saksham Ghoshna’.
- This self-nomination is then followed by rigorous rounds of third party assessments to check their claims.

- If a block is found to be ‘Saksham’, the block officials are recognised and honoured by the State administration.
- Further, when all blocks in a district are declared as ‘Saksham’, the entire district is also accorded the ‘Saksham’ status.
- According to the latest third party assessment, 94 blocks out of a total of 119 in Haryana have been declared ‘Saksham’.
- The overall grade competence has been assessed at 80%, a giant leap from 40% in 2014.
- Given these early successes, many other States are also embarking on such programmes.

What does this imply?

- Inducing competition among administrative units helps encourage the key stakeholders to work in tandem to achieve the intended outcomes.
- Competition also makes abstract goals such as ‘learning outcomes’ more real by defining exact ‘actionable’ metrics of improvement.
- Further, with encouragement from above, such campaigns lead to a shift in the mindset of a State’s education administrators.
- Otherwise, generally, there is lack of motivation to believe and work towards the achievement of high learning outcomes.
- So political commitment to improve the education quality along with proper review and monitoring mechanisms can spur meaningful activity in States.

What is NITI Aayog's approach in this regard?

- Since its inception, the NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) insists on competitive federalism.
- Competitive federalism puts pressure on policymakers across States to perform better on pre-defined goals and metrics.
- **SEQI** - To translate the above into education, NITI Aayog has now developed the State-level ‘School Education Quality Index’ (SEQI).
- The index gives scores to States based on their educational performance and puts this data out in the public domain.
- SEQI uses 3 data sources, including the National Achievement Survey.
- It comes out with 33 indicators to measure education outcomes, of which the largest weightage (48%) is given to learning outcomes.
- It adopts a two-fold ranking system -

i. an overall performance score recognises well-performing States
ii. a delta ranking that measures the level of improvement made by States from their base year

- In effect, the NITI’s Aayog’s State ranking encourages competition among

States and thus motivates other States to consistently improve.

- **ADP** - The NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts programme (ADP), launched in early 2018, also draws from the model of competition.
- Here, under-served districts across the country compete with each other in order to achieve targets in 5 crucial sectors.
- These include education, which has among a weightage of 30%.
- These districts are monitored on a real-time basis and ranked on the basis of their progress.
- The follow-up for each indicator is handled by the respective Ministry, while NITI Aayog handles the data compilation and dissemination.
- Significantly, there is a constant focus on recognising and disseminating best practices of select districts to other States.
- This acts as a reward for well-performing local administrations.
- This strategy has already shown success with districts that were ranked low in baseline surveys showing remarkable progress in subsequent rounds of assessment.
- These include Virudhunagar (TN), Nuapada (Odisha), Gumla (Jharkhand), Siddharthnagar (UP), Vizianagaram (Andhra Pradesh).

What lies ahead?

- Evidently, the right incentive structures for stakeholders lead to administrative efficiency, thereby improving the quality of service delivery.
- States therefore need to induce competition and encourage all key actors in education to improve the learning levels.
- This systemic approach can go a long way in transforming education in India.

Source: The Hindu

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