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Tacit Global Agenda of All India School Education Surveys

AMRUTH G KUMAR

The All India School Education Survey, organised and sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, promotes a new mode of national education governance in tune with the demands of the neo-liberal economy and the labour market that comes with it. It has become a key instrument in India to tailor an education system that feeds the neo-liberal labour market.

Over the past 50 years, the All India Education Survey (AIES)—the first one was conducted in 1960 and the latest in 2009—has risen to strategic prominence in educational policy debates. Until the sixth survey it was known as the AIES and thereafter as the All India School Education Survey (AISES). Organised and sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the AISES has become a key institution for ensuring the juggernaut that pigeonholes students, schools and nations having diverse cultures using the same standardised benchmarks. There are similar institutions functioning at the international level, the most prominent being the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students from more than 70 nations. The OECD is an economic organisation with 34 members but PISA has assumed a new institutional role as arbitrator of global educational governance, simultaneously acting as diagnostician, judge and policy adviser to the world's school system (Meyer and Benavot 2013: 10). The AISES follows along similar lines, thus bridging the gap caused by India's non-membership in the OECD and non-participation in PISA (except in 2009).

From the first AIES undertaken in 1960 by the then Union Ministry of Education up to the eighth and latest AISES held in 2009, the changing objectives mark the structural changes in the nation's vision of education. The report of the first educational survey held in 1960 states its objectives thus:

- (i) identify and enumerate every distinct habitation and every elementary school;
- (ii) map out the location of schools;

- (iii) delimit the area served by existing schools;
- (iv) decide on the convenient location of the new schools and the area that will be served by the proposed new schools by suitable classification and grouping of habitations; and
- (v) prepare district-wise statistical tables showing the result of the survey.

The eighth educational survey conducted in 2009 shows the changes which are structurally different. It mentions its objectives as:

- (i) Describing the current status of school education system at different levels with respect to access, enrolment, retention, participation in school process and achievement;
- (ii) assessing the progress of educational development and indirectly the success of policies, programmes and project interventions by tracking the direction and magnitude of change in the values of the indicators over time, and identifying problems or deficiencies in the system for necessary intervention; and
- (iii) assessing equity in educational opportunities and achievements across relevant levels and sub-populations of the education system for possible interventions needed to remove disparity by administrators, policymakers and researchers.

A close look into the objectives of the first educational survey shows that each is directly linked to the constitutional provision laid down in Article 45 which guarantees free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. No wonder then that the summary of the first educational survey corroborated and advocated the provision of free and compulsory education and provided a baseline data for the policy decisions to be taken in this direction. After 50 years, the thrust of the eighth AIES is on "quality and achievement." The other priority area of this survey is "auditing and accountability."

The AIES has not prompted major reactions from the scholarly and policy-making communities. More interestingly, the views of the various AIES also show palpable differences. The second (1967), third (1979) and fourth (1980) AIES were seen as supportive mechanisms to formulate the Five Year Plan initiatives

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Further, the AIES has also been viewed as a benchmark data for educational planning and administration (fifth AIES 1990) and has been highlighted as the key source to ascertain the country's capacity to accomplish its constitutional provision of education for all (sixth AIES 1999). It has been acknowledged as the key contributor to the micro- as well as macro-level planning of school education and a major source of educational statistics (seventh AISES 2006). Finally the eighth AISES' guidelines say that they "have also provided inputs to make schools more attractive as well as to provide quality education" (eighth AISES' guidelines 2009).

Doubts about Validity

Grave doubts have been expressed about the validity and reliability of the survey findings. Since it is difficult to locate serious studies about the AISES, one has to go back to the same surveys to see how one survey points out the deficiencies of the previous ones. For example, the second AIES criticises the first on the grounds that its findings are partially inapplicable and can no longer be relied upon for the purpose of planning the provision of educational facilities during the Fourth Five Year Plan period (Second AIES 1967: 1). The third AIES (1979) criticises the first and second AIES for their incomprehensive coverage of areas (p 6). While the third AIES was particular about comprehensive coverage, the fourth AIES (1980) viewed the third AIES as being too comprehensive and data-heavy. The third AIES was criticised by the successive for its stress on collection of specific data and thus restricted scope and sharp focus. The fourth AIES was criticised for its methodological flaws as it had only limited terms of reference and was restricted to only two questionnaires for data collection (fifth AIES 1990: 4). The sixth AIES (1999) found fault with the previous surveys for their poor institutional frameworks and inability to use computational devices for precise and accurate findings (p 5).

Any organisation that undertakes a national survey in India must critically look into its own cultural and regional neutrality. It is obvious that questions will be raised about the cultural and regional

neutrality of a national organisation like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which is situated in New Delhi. It uses the same "survey tools" in states where the social, economic, cultural and power relationships are so vastly different. Another important concern is that a syndicate of academics at the NCERT who are theoreticians but non-practising teachers are assuming a national standardising role in the name of accountability. Further, there is uncertainty about the ability of the NCERT to prescribe and monitor the professional standards maintained by diverse educational institutions from centrally funded schools to state-funded schools and from state government schools to aided schools and private schools.

Each of the concerns mentioned above are serious and need immediate attention. However, this article focuses on the role of the AISES in promoting a new mode of national education governance in tune with the demands of the neo-liberal economy and the labour market that comes with it. The AISES has become a key instrument in India to tailor an education system that feeds the neo-liberal labour market.

Thus the AISES is to be understood as a harbinger of a larger reform emanating from the global market with specific demands for educational outputs from third world nations.

Since the dawn of the new economic policy in 1992, reforms in education have accounted for its effectiveness. Every national level educational project demands serious auditing due to the financial investment involved in it. Take, for example, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched towards the end of the Ninth Five Year Plan (2001-02) and the outlay and expenditure on which was nominal with a total allocation of ₹500 crore. During the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07), the initial total outlay was ₹17,000 crore. During the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12), it went up to ₹71,000 crore. This exponential growth in funding made the SSA a very crucial project under the audit scanner of the economy. A palpable result is that public schools are no longer shielded from the pressure of accountability and efficiency. As the

government-controlled education system responds unprofessionally to the demands of efficiency and audits, the gap thus created by the state's withdrawal (also in other areas like housing and health) (Strange 1996; Bourdieu 1998) is filled by for-profit organisations which stand ready with well-defined management policies and methods. The profit-based education "industry" works in tune with market forces and follows a model that religiously practises the principles of efficiency. As market forces are inherently international (Meyer and Benavot 2013: 12), the Indian school education system suffers from the pressure of accountability and adoption of governance which has its roots in profit orientation. This has led to loosening of the government's control over the education system to be replaced by global forces. The global market forces are eclipsing individual private enterprise with their powerful and omnipotent policies. These policies will in turn enable educational institutions in developing nations, especially India, with a potential workforce to hatch out labourers for the labour market for the smooth functioning of the global market. The purpose of education will inevitably shift from nation building, citizenship training, and development to "employability."

The first AIES in 1957 was intended to support the constitutional provision of universalisation of compulsory education. However, it became a statistical prop for the five year plans. The results were not very promising as is evident from our continuing efforts to provide "education for all." All assessment surveys quantify abilities to categorise the students as "good," "average" and "bad." What is the purpose behind such categorisation? Is the aim to support those students who are classified as "average" and "bad"? If such is the case, we need to have more remedial teaching institutions than for regular teaching. Since this has not happened, what purpose have these surveys accomplished? This needs to be debated in the context of the neo-liberal juggernaut and global market conditions. In the present context the national school education surveys which have been going on for 50 years are only helping the global market forces rather than the youth of India.

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Resource Optimisation for Tuberculosis Elimination in India

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The World Health Organization's "End TB Strategy," envisages a tuberculosis free world, with a target to end the TB epidemic by 2035. For this, its member states, including India, have to secure sufficient resources. Despite India's high economic growth in an otherwise gloomy global economy, it struggles with a resource crunch to support its national strategic plan for effective TB control.

India has the highest number of tuberculosis (TB) patients in the world, followed by China and Indonesia; 23% of the global total of TB cases are reported from India, followed by China and Indonesia (both the countries account for 10% of the global total each) (WHO 2015b: 8). Despite being a preventable and curable disease, TB kills nearly a thousand people every day. India and Nigeria accounted for one-third of all global TB deaths in 2014. Global TB Report 2015 states "Progress in TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment requires adequate funding sustained over many years" (WHO 2015b). In this context, the Government of India's (GoI) contribution needs to be appropriate.

Inadequate Spending on Health

Twenty years back, the groundbreaking and at the same time controversial World Development Report (World Bank 1993) emphatically urged all governments to invest in their population's health, if they needed to achieve economic growth. India as a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals was also committed to increase its public spending on health to up to 3% of its gross domestic product (GDP). It is considered to be one of the suggested benchmarks (6% of GDP) for universal health coverage.

However, spending on population's health from public funds in India remained dismal at merely 1.34%, while other countries, namely, Brazil, Thailand

and South Africa spend 4.5% of GDP on health on an average. Smaller and economically constrained countries like Rwanda, Swaziland, Lesotho, Samoa, Kiribati and Micronesia too invest more than 6% of their GDP on health (WHO 2015a). This underspending on health translates to inadequate funds for various disease control programmes, including the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates, India requires \$788 million, to give a full response to its TB epidemic in 2015. However, current spending on TB prevention and care in India is merely \$261 million, indicating a gap of 66% (\$527 million). Interestingly, this spending includes a World Bank loan and support from international donors to the tune of \$141 million. For example, in 2013 the Global Fund contribution to India was \$165 million (WHO 2015a). India's neighbouring countries like China, Brazil, Indonesia and Bangladesh are investing much more in their national TB programmes (Table 1). This indicates a reluctance on the part of the government to invest in TB prevention and care.

Table 1: TB Budget Reported by National Programme in 2015
(Current prices, \$ millions, exchange rate as on 16/11/2015)

	Resources Required for TB Care as Per WHO Estimate	TB Budgets Reported by National TB Programmes	Gap (%)
China	340	340	0
Brazil	126	77	49 (20%)
Bangladesh	49	48	1 (2%)
Indonesia	165	133	32 (19%)
India	788	261	66 (66%)

Figures in brackets are percentage.
Source: "Global Tuberculosis Report 2015," WHO (2015).

It is interesting to note that, as per WHO estimates, India requires \$788 million for 2015 alone. However, the GoI

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