

As one among many factors, Education is expected to contribute to the total development of the human being. This contribution is made through making the person

- ◆ refined
- ◆ well informed and able to be well informed
- ◆ skillful in the broadest sense
- ◆ self-disciplined, and
- ◆ able to communicate through effective and pleasant speech.

Because a person has to live in a society, the ability to use correct speech is particularly important. For this reason an educated person is defined as one who can get what she or he wants from others through discussion and negotiation, and not through the use of violence.

In addition to these personal goals, education must prepare persons to have the competencies and attitudes that enable the realisation of essential social goals. These goals can be identified in terms of three characteristics of a good society. These may be stated as follows:

- ◆ The weak, the innocent and the aged must be protected, and their right to life must be ensured.
- ◆ The social and physical environment must be conducive to the peace of mind and bodily wellbeing of every person.
- ◆ Every person and community should have the resources and support to cope with unforeseen disasters and crises.

A recent study has shown that the formal learning and training as found in our country has not promoted productivity, national competitiveness and good governance. It has also been demonstrated that those with so-called higher 'educational' qualifications have not contributed significantly to the national economy and social development, as done by their counterparts in other countries, through helping to create opportunities for others by their own efforts.

The policy proposals on which the education reforms are based were made to the President by the National Education Commission (NEC). In formulating these proposals, the NEC went through a process of receiving written and oral submissions from the public, consultation of expert opinion, and discussion of specific aspects of education and training with special interest groups, including students and teachers. The policy proposals were drafted with the help of working groups consisting of specialists in education, child development and in subject content

An action-oriented strategy towards implementation of the policy was identified by the NEC. In this task, educators, academics, professionals and administrators, covering a broad range of interests assisted the Commission. Both the policy proposals and the action-oriented strategy were presented to the President in the latter part of 1996. After receiving these submissions, the President having realised their national significance, declared 1997 as the Year of Education Reform and Restructure. During that year many historic initiatives were taken by the government.

This paper includes information regarding reforms in the three main sectors of formal education, i.e.: 1. general education; 2. university education; 3. technical education and vocational training. Task Forces have been appointed by the President for each of these sectors. For sectors 1 and 2 the Task Forces are chaired by Hon. Richard Pathirana; and for sector 3 the Task Force is chaired by Hon. Amarasiri Dodangoda. The Task Forces are active at present.

The Task Forces have identified a comprehensive set of Action Programmes. These are intended to bring about changes in the entire education in keeping with the needs and aspirations of the people. The Action Programmes will put into place the numerous infrastructure and procedures that are necessary to give effect to the policy. During this process the Task Forces and implementing agencies will give due consideration to suggestions for improvement from all stake holders at all times.

Policy recommendations regarding Education in the Plantation Sector have been made to the President and a set of action programmes identified. Details are being worked out. As a result there will be development thrusts specifically targeted to the Plantation Sector.

Reforms in General Education

These reforms are focused on: i. Expansion of Educational Opportunities; ii. Quality Improvement in Education; iii. Development of Practical and Technical Skills; iv. Teacher Education and Training; v. Management and Resource Provision. There are action programmes in each of these broad areas. Whilst the government is using its resources for various aspects of reform, donor assistance and loans are being deployed for quality improvement and the development of teacher education and training.

Early childhood development and improvement of pre-school education will be under the purview of the Children's Secretariat of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Actions include programmes targeted at mothers, persons concerned with early childhood development in the field, and the public. Raising

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awareness, strengthening the role of the mother, and preparation delivery of specific training programmes are included. Provincial Councils will be active in enforcing standards for day care centres and pre-schools, and facilitate the training of persons working in them.

Regulations for Compulsory Education of those in the age group of 5 to 14 years will be enforced. A survey has been conducted to determine the reasons for non-participation. Strategies to enable participation include issuing documents in lieu of the Birth Certificate, providing material assistance through voluntary organisations, establishing alternative arrangements for those who have missed schooling for a significant period, public awareness campaigns, and establishing official committees to bring pressure on erring parents/guardians & employers of children.

The Primary stage of education is considered particularly important. Reforms in Primary Education are intended to bring our school education to a high standard. This stage spanning five years will be arranged into three key-stages to improve delivery and management of the curriculum. Education will be effected through a mix of organised play, activity and desk-work. A set of five Basic Competencies will provide the framework for the syllabus. School-based assessment (SBA) will be done to provide feedback and help to identify the interventions needed for each child. English will be used in spoken communication during activity-based learning starting from Grade 1.

The reforms were introduced to schools in the Gampaha District in 1998 beginning with Grade 1. This was done to facilitate the introduction of primary stage reforms island-wide from 1999. The process of bringing about island-wide changes in the Primary stage will be completed in 2003. The teacher orientation & training, supply of textbooks printed in colour on better paper and modifications to the school infrastructure are important aspects.

Surveys done in the Gampaha District this year to study the effects of reforms show that the children are more motivated and self-reliant. They also show a higher level of attainment in basic literacy and numeracy as compared with their seniors. The teachers' attendance figures show a general improvement. A majority of teachers reported an increase in job satisfaction. Inexpensive and innovative strategies are found in many schools for putting in place the changes in infrastructure. Such schools are also consistently showing better attainments by the pupils.

Commencing from Grade 6 in 1999, reforms will be introduced into the Junior-secondary stage. In this stage the content is separated into subjects: Mother tongue, English; Mathematics, Science & Technology, Social Studies, Life Competencies, Religion, Aesthetics, Health & Physical Education, and Tamil/Sinhala as the other national language. Aesthetics will be differentiated into Art, Music, Dance & Drama from Grade 7 upwards. Issues of peace education, national unity, democracy, human rights and gender equality will be addressed through Social Studies.

Facilities for Practical and Technical Skills Development (PTSD) will be provided for children in the Junior-secondary stage to introduce them to a widest possible variety of skills in five broad areas of: food and agriculture, making and doing, information and organisation, performing arts and movement, and visual arts and design. Counselling and Guidance will enable pupils and parents to identify more advantageous directions of education and for remedial interventions.

Grade 9 will be end of the Junior-secondary stage and of compulsory education. A school-based end of year test will be conducted under the purview of the Provincial Authorities and the Department of Examinations. A transcript will be issued on request indicating school-based in Grade 9 and the test results. Those who wish to proceed to Grade 10 will be allowed to do so without any hindrance as done now irrespective of the results of the Grade 9 end of the year test.

Ordinary-Level reforms include confining studies to a two-year period, and having the following subjects: First Language, English, Science & Technology, Mathematics, Social Studies & History, Aesthetic subject, and one Technical subject. Candidates may select two more subjects from a given list which includes Tamil/Sinhala as a second language, History, Geography, Literature etc.

Commencing with the 1999 GCE O-L Examination candidates may select one of two question papers in Mathematics and Science. The two papers each subject will be based on the same syllabus. This is to minimise the failure rates as they occur now. This would be advantageous to the majority of candidates because they need not be burdened by having to study topics which are needed as a prerequisite for higher studies only in certain disciplines,

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At the Advanced-Level stage a candidate has to offer only three subjects. Those who wish to be considered for admission to a university will also sit the Common General Paper in which a minimum mark has to be obtained to qualify. Through this paper the candidates' General Awareness, and mental skills of problem-solving, logical thinking, comprehension and communication will be tested.

School-Based Assessment will be a feature of all stages of General Education. Pupils will do projects to make learning more effective and as a means of developing induction skills. Pilot programmes in the Junior-secondary grades and the Ordinary-Level stage show that pupils are highly motivated to participate in projects, are valuing the spirit of co-operation they have developed in themselves, take lesser time to complete the series of lessons for the year, and show consistently better performance in tests of the conventional type.

At the Advanced-Level stage pupils have to do practicals, assignments, an individual project and a group project, to qualify to appear for the GCE A-L examination. Schools have been adequately equipped for practical classes. Teachers have been briefed regarding procedures. Zonal Monitoring Panels have been put in place to monitor the school activities and take corrective action. Each child and teacher will keep records of performance. The pupils will have at the time of leaving school a worthwhile record of their performance in the form of a Pupil Record Book.

School-Based Management (SBM) will be progressively introduced to enable more effective utilisation of resources. The provision of funds for quality improvement will be increased during the coming years so that eventually 6 percent of recurrent budget will be available. Funds will be allocated on a norm referenced per pupil basis.

Education beyond the School

As referred to earlier two Task Forces are at work to plan and initiate reforms in the fields of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and University Education. These two major fields will be subjected to major reform so as to match national requirements. Increase of intake of students, creating a strong nexus with employment opportunities especially in the private sector, providing incentives and resources for orientation and training to fit modern industries, guidance and counselling based on labour market information and trends, are some of the areas that are receiving urgent attention.

In the coming years more resources will be directed to the expansion of institutional arrangements and staff development. Already planning and development activities are under way so that optimum use can be made of these resources. It is heartening to note that the private sector is taking an active interest in all these activities.

The reforms that have been started in General Education in 1997 will bear fruit when the country and its people become more productive and the competitiveness of Sri Lanka becomes more competitive in the global market place. ■

