

**Minutes of the Third Meeting of the SSA Sub-mission on
'Defining Learning Outcomes and Assessment/
Monitoring of Students' Achievement Levels'**

1. Introduction

1.1 The third meeting of the SSA Sub-mission on 'Defining Learning Outcomes and Assessment/Monitoring of Students' Achievement Levels' was held on 8th October 2009 at Scope Complex, New Delhi (List of participants attached as **Annex I**).

1.2 The meeting opened with introductory remarks by Ms. Neelam Rao (Director, MHRD), who welcomed and thanked all the participants for being present at this Sub-mission meeting, and noted with regret the considerable time that had elapsed since the previous meeting. She discussed the importance of the task ahead, especially in light of the recently enacted 'Right of children to free & compulsory Education' Act which has far-reaching implications for providing quality education to every child in the country. This brings to the forefront the challenge of ensuring that each child learns well, but in an environment that is free from the trauma anxiety and fear of examinations. MHRD through SSA has recently initiated dialogue with the state governments in the form of four Regional Workshops on 'Education of Equitable Quality', to help States move towards achieving this vision by ensuring harmonization between the various core and enabling components of quality, such as curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, pedagogical processes, teacher training, assessment and monitoring systems.

1.3 NCF 2005 in particular stresses the need for a shift from the current system of assessment towards a child – friendly approach that tracks the learning progress of each child in a continuous and formative manner, as an integral part of the teaching learning process. NCERT has helped lay the groundwork for this through initiatives such as the development of appropriate and verifiable learning indicators, publication of five Sourcebooks on Learning Assessment, regular tracking of learning achievement through the Quality Monitoring Tools, and periodic National Learning Achievement Surveys. The task of this Sub-mission will be to deliberate on how these initiatives can

be successfully rolled out and strengthened within the States, in order to translate this vision across all the different core and enabling components within States in a holistic manner. The Sub-mission was requested to reflect on the recent recommendations of the 10th SSA Joint Review Mission, and accordingly to discuss a roadmap of how these processes can be taken forward.

2. Appropriate and verifiable indicators for classes III, V and VIII

2.1 Prof. R. S. Sindhu (DESM, NCERT) gave a presentation on the measurable and verifiable learning indicators that have been developed by NCERT, which can be used to assess students' learning levels for Class III, V and VIII (Annexure- II). These include observable indicators of not only cognitive development but also skills like reasoning, questioning, discussion, cooperation, sensitivity to others, concern for equity and justice, etc. Prof. Sindhu also gave an overview of the tools that have been developed by NCERT for assessing students against the Science and Maths indicators at the end of Class VIII, in the form of question papers involving both objective multiple choice and descriptive items. Ms. Lata Pandey (DEE, NCERT) also gave an overview of the Hindi indicators developed for Class III, and the innovative approach to language learning that is implied by these indicators.

2.2 Ms. Rao inquired in what ways the Class VIII testing tools are different from the ones that are already being used by states. The ensuing discussion brought to the table some of the challenges involved in rolling out the indicators and tools in tune with the principles of NCF 05 and the Sourcebooks. These include:

- Ensuring that the tools are used not only at the end of the term or year, but that the teacher is equipped with tools to assess students on a continuous basis
- The limitations of paper-pencil multiple choice tests since they tend to measure mostly cognitive aspects; how do we assess more practical skills such as questioning or application skills, and more affective skills such as cooperation or sensitivity to others?
- The multiple choice tool developed for Class VIII can be seen as just one among a variety of tools to assess learning in an ongoing and holistic manner, which

are further elaborated in the Sourcebooks

- How to effectively integrate continuous and comprehensive assessment at the upper primary stage, where a competitive examination mindset still tends to predominate
- Ensuring that the indicators do not get viewed as minimum learning levels prescribed by experts, but are looked at in a more open-ended and flexible way
- The need to carefully analyse the answer scripts that children produce, not to judge as right or wrong, but to better understand their learning process
- How the indicators can be extended to help children themselves plan and design their own rubric, to allow each child to learn at their own pace
- How to ensure that the tools are not seen as a stand-alone, but that the philosophy underlying the Sourcebooks also gets internalised
- How to ensure that this approach to assessment gets translated into the textbooks as well as the current exam systems in States
- The challenge of how states will actually translate this into practice at the classroom level

2.3 In response to the last point, Mr. K. K. Shukla (SCERT Uttarakhand) shared the example of how Uttarakhand has developed some resource books based on NCF 05 listing activities based on daily lives of children and accompanying assessment, and are in the process of rolling this out through teacher training. Similarly, it was highlighted how Maharashtra came out with a book of suggested activities based on the textbook, which could be used for the ongoing teaching learning process as well as for ongoing assessment.

3. Learning outcomes as reported in Quality Monitoring Tools

3.1 Next was a presentation by Mr. Yogesh Kumar and Mr. S.C. Mehta (DEE, NCERT) regarding the analysis of children's learning achievement levels as captured through the Quality Monitoring Tools (Annexure- III). These tools provide grade, subject, gender and social category-wise quarterly data on achievement levels. The participants expressed general concern that in several states, the data shows alarming learning levels in language and maths, with over 40% of students scoring below 50% at the upper primary level in States like Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Daman & Diu,

Goa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura; and over 40% of students scoring below 50% in both primary and upper primary levels in states like HP, MP, Manipur, Mizoram, Orissa, Uttarakhand. This points to some persistent issues either in the way that the content is being taught, or in the level of the content being not age appropriate high for students, or in the way it is being assessed; which needs to be better understood. Ms. Rao suggested that perhaps a dialogue can be initiated with a selected number of these states, to identify what issues need to be addressed, and to offer extended support to these states in addressing these issues in a holistic manner. It was decided that this form of specialised support would be offered by the Sub-mission members, along with NCERT and additional Resource Persons, to the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, and Orissa.

3.2 Following this, Prof. K.K. Vashishtha (HoD, DEE, NCERT) shared some of his thoughts on the matter being discussed. He pointed to the need to differentiate between assessment and examination; doing away with examination does not mean we need to do away with assessment. What is needed is to change the approach to assessment, and the Sourcebooks provide us with good suggestions in this regard for how to assess in a child-friendly manner. Multiple choice testing cannot be the only form of assessment – rather, the method will be determined by the nature of the activity and of the child. With every innovation that we encourage, we need to reflect in what way the innovation is actually benefitting the child. Prof. Vashishtha remarked that the problem is not just with assessment – but rather with teaching learning itself. This can only improve once we look also at teacher education, and once in-service teacher training becomes contextual and is rigorously followed-up.

4. Capacity building of State teams for rolling out Sourcebooks

4.1 Ms. Sandhya Paranjpe (DEE, NCERT) gave a presentation (Annexure IV) on the Sourcebooks on Learning Assessment at primary level, developed by NCERT for Hindi, English, Maths, EVS, and Arts. These documents aim to shift assessment methods at primary level towards the quality and extent of a child's learning, construction of knowledge and his/her interest and attitude towards learning as manifest in different activities. A large-scale programme has been planned in partnership with UNICEF for

popularizing the Sourcebooks and facilitating implementation of the same within primary classes across the country. Three national workshops were held in 2009 at Tirupati, Guwahati and Lucknow, to help States develop action plans for implementation. Nearly every State (except J&K & Andaman) has prepared a plan of action for rolling out these Sourcebooks through the SSA program. The next steps will be the development of state specific learning assessment materials/tools, organisation of teachers' training to orient them to the use of the Source Books, and parallel research work relating to use and impact of the Source Book and its efficacy.

4.2 In the discussion that followed, Prof. Tharu appreciated that the Sourcebooks involved a commendable process of first going to the teachers to find out what they need, rather than coming to them with a ready package to be implemented – thus it is meant not as an imposition but as a means of empowering the teacher. He also pointed out that rolling this out will involve a complex process of not only setting up proper monitoring mechanisms, but also changing the attitudes especially of those who are close to the ground. Ms. Rao emphasised that in order to look at whether or not this is impacting the classrooms, the key players in this will be BRC/CRCs, who will need to be adequately equipped to do so. She also noted the importance of developing good partnerships with the private or non-government sectors at the District levels, involving diverse people in the DRGs to carry this forward.

5. Major findings of the NCERT's Learning Achievement Surveys

5.1. As presented in the next session by Dr. Santosh Kumar and Mr. R.N. Sahoo (DEME, NCERT), NCERT has conducted the Round 1 Assessment Survey, Round II Assessment survey and proposes to conduct Round III survey in 2010 to study the status of improvement at three points during the course of implementation of SSA. The presentation highlighted some of the changes that have been reflected in learning levels from Round I to Round II, and also some of the intervening variables that were found to correlate to learning achievement (eg. factors related to teachers, PTR, use of TLMs, children's background, etc). Prof. Vashishtha noted that the intention should not be to compare the achievement of one state to another, or to compare achievement in one subject to another, but to track the improvement in each subject within each

state. Moreover, he proposed that perhaps we need to look not only at the average achievement at Class 3, 5, or 8, but also obtain a more graded; nuanced picture – for example, how many children in class 8 are at the level of class 5, how many at class 6 level, etc. Mr. Binay Pattanayak (Chief Consultant, Pedagogy Unit, TSG) pointed out that at present most states are undertaking a large number of tests, and we need to think of how this can be made simpler so that things are more tuned and integrated. Moreover, it was felt that states should be encouraged and equipped to undertake their own sample surveys in a quick way, to obtain analytical information on what are the reasons for low learning, which can be utilised for further planning and policymaking.

6. Discussion on Way forward

6.1 Based on these discussions, the Sub-mission members proposed the following recommendations that could be considered for improving the approach to assessment and student learning outcomes in the coming months under SSA:

1. The verifiable learning indicators that have been developed for Classes 3, 5 and 8 should be extended to look at other classes as well. The dialogue should be initiated with the States, so not to reduce them to rigid MLL.
2. There is a need to move towards assessment which is built on graded categories of items linked to indicators, providing us with a rubric that allows us to make more qualitative reflections about each individual student's progress
3. The principles of the Sourcebooks need to be extended to the upper primary level as well.
4. The guiding principles of the Sourcebooks on Learning Assessment pertaining to pedagogical processes should be built in as an integrated part of the overall Annual Quality Plan development under SSA. MHRD may encourage States to do the same.
5. The progress of action by SCERTs and SPOs regarding implementation of the Sourcebooks in each State needs to be regularly tracked. This may be discussed at the next National-level meeting of State Pedagogy Coordinators.

6. The above should include tracking of progress of States in reviewing their existing syllabus and examination schemes in tune with the principles of the Sourcebooks.
7. One person in each State should be specifically responsible for coordinating the progress relating to Sourcebooks and changes in assessment systems.
8. There is need for capacity building of SCERTs and SPOs (particularly State Pedagogy Coordinators) for undertaking Sample Surveys in States. DEME (NCERT) will prepare a Concept Note describing processes related to undertaking these Sample Achievement Surveys, and also highlighting good practices in this regard. DEME will follow up with workshops for capacity building of SCERTs and SPCs for undertaking State level sample surveys.
9. There is need for greater discussion with states on how the data generated by Achievement Surveys and QMT can be more carefully analysed and constructively utilised at different levels for improving the system. Some good examples of how this is being done in different places need to be highlighted.

6.2 In addition, it was agreed that the Sub-mission will extend additional support in the area of learning assessment and improving learning outcomes, to the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, and Orissa. A Regional Preparatory Workshop may be held with these 5 States involving members from both Sub-missions, as well as other Resource Persons with expertise in this area, to help these States design their plan of action.

6.3 It was also agreed that the next meeting of the Sub-mission will be held within the next three months. At the next meeting, greater participation from State representatives should be invited, as well as additional Resource Persons with expertise in this field.

6.4 The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Mr. O.P. Nautiyal (Pedagogy Unit, TSG), who thanked participants for their useful contributions in the day's deliberations, and invited their continued support and involvement.