

## **Overview Report of the National Workshop on “Strategies for Quality Improvement in Social Science Education at Elementary Level under SSA”**

New Delhi, 9-10<sup>th</sup> February, 2009

MHRD’s National Workshop on ‘Strategies for Quality Improvement in Social Science Education at the Elementary level’ was held from 9-10<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 at Scope Complex, New Delhi. This theme-based workshop was organized as part of MHRD’s Quarterly Review Meeting of State Pedagogy Coordinators under SSA, in collaboration with the Pedagogy Unit (TSG, SSA). The aim of the workshop was to expose State Pedagogy Teams to a range of approaches, good practices, and materials related to improving social science learning at the elementary level, and to expose them to various practitioners and resource organizations in this field. The Workshop also aimed at giving States a platform to share their own initiatives undertaken for improving Social Science, and to help them plan concrete strategies for improving social science learning under SSA in the coming year. The workshop was attended by State Project Directors, State Pedagogy Coordinators, and Social Science experts from approximately 30 States/UTs. There were also resource persons from various organisations who attended and shared their expertise, including NCERT, Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), Eklavya (Madhya Pradesh), Kathalaya (Bangalore), Pravah (Delhi), Nirantar (Delhi), Khoj (Mumbai), and The Mother’s International School (Delhi). (Programme Schedule is attached as **Annex 1**, and a detailed list of participants is attached in **Annex 2**).

### **Day I: 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2009**

#### **SESSION I: *Inaugural Session***

After a round of introductions, the first session opened with **Introductory Remarks by Mrs. Sarita Mittal (Director, MHRD)**. Mrs. Mittal stressed the urgent need for renewed efforts to bring about visible learning improvement in all subject areas. She spoke of the importance of focusing on Social Science and designing specific integrated plans for improving Social Science learning across the country, which not many States have done till now. Social science is especially important because it is crucial to enable us to nurture citizens who are active and reflective members of society. She emphasised the need to bring a shift in our social science classrooms in light of the principles of NCF 2005, which looks at social science learning from the child’s perspective. It links learning to children’s everyday world and to their community’s experiences and resources. Children should first be facilitated to understand social processes in their immediate surroundings, through explorations, discussions, observing their communities’ practices and traditions, visiting local markets, places of historical significance, etc. Mrs. Mittal reiterated the aims of organizing this National Workshop, in order to help States design a detailed roadmap with strategies for improving social science learning in the coming year. She said that States should include these Social Science Improvement plans in their AWP&B 2009-10, and assured that the Ministry would try to support these plans as per SSA norms.

**Mr. Binay Pattanayak and Ms. Suzana Andrade (Pedagogy Unit, TSG)** next gave a presentation on **‘Social Science learning under SSA: Some points to think and act together.’** Mr. Pattanayak opened by highlighting some of the ideals presented in our Constitution, of equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity. This calls for a sound public

understanding, individual and collective tolerance, and a continuous & rigorous social constructivism. But this practice must first begin in our classrooms. Schools bear tremendous potential as a unit for social change. Social science is a key tool in this regard, in enabling people to think critically and to act collectively for a more peaceful and inclusive society. However our present social science teaching is heavy and burdensome, and children are often forced to memorize large amounts of textbook information that have little connection to their daily lives and community. Social science is often reduced to the static listing of dates & events, of locations on a map, or depiction of idealized governance structures. Most teachers and children fail to internalise the **spirit of social science**. This calls for a significant change in our understanding of social science teaching.

**NCF 2005's recommendations** are crucial for bringing a change in our understanding about social science content, materials, pedagogy and assessment. According to NCF 2005, in History, Geography, Political Science & Economics, **we need to start from children's point of view** (their lives, interest, experience and knowledge), **and move with them to explore their own local surroundings**. Children are the best natural social scientists: they naturally have a desire to explore, to ask questions, to discuss openly, to make friends, to accept every person – which is the spirit of social science. The role of social science education is to nurture these natural instincts in children and support them in their explorations and discussions about the social world around them. For example, from a child's perspective, social science can be seen as learning about 'We and Our Society'; History can be seen as the story of 'Our Journey: From Yesterday to Today'; Geography as 'Our Land and its Status', Political Science as 'Our Path to Progress', Economics as 'Our Market and Growth'.

According to NCF 2005, the **aim of learning social science** is to help children understand processes of change in society around them, and to understand their own role in contributing to positive social change. The aim is not just to remember facts, but to nurture the attitudes & skills needed for contributing to democratic change in society: for example, developing an appreciation for diversity, developing a critical understanding of social practices, a concern for the marginalised, the ability to see things from other people's perspective.

For this, **we need a pedagogy that helps children explore and discuss about their own social world**. This requires participatory methods of open-ended discussions, group-work, debates that encourage the child to question and think for herself. We need to develop a 'social science classroom culture' where diversity is celebrated, where every student feels that what they already know is valued, and feels free to ask questions and express their own thoughts and concerns. The social science classroom should enable children to explore a variety of TLMs like charts, maps, globes, atlas, photographs, etc., and to explore their own local surroundings by visiting local markets, museums, natural sites, etc.

## **SESSION II: *Integrated Social Science Improvement Programmes***

**The session opened with a presentation by Dr. Arvind Sardhana (Eklavya)**, who shared about the experiences of Eklavya's Social Science program in Madhya Pradesh. Dr. Arvind began by involving participants in a participatory discussion on what are some of the feasible changes that can be brought in Social Science education in states, and what are some of the challenges in this regard. Some of the points brought out in the discussion were:

*Feasible changes that can be brought in Social Science education:*

- Promoting dialogue and debate, freedom for students to raise questions
- Children's experience being used as a learning resource
- Incorporating contemporary events & local issues into the curriculum, to make it relevant to children's world
- Local explorations and excursion trips
- Skill development thru participatory activities such as project work, drama, puppet shows, observations of the night-sky
- Concretization of different concepts through the use of TLMs related to the curriculum topics, including through computer animation or videos
- Including in-text discussion questions which are not to be memorized. Evaluation questions should be open-ended, giving more importance to the thinking process of children, and less on remembering facts.
- Constituting Social Science Resource Groups
- Providing separate Social Science subject teachers, Social Science labs, Activity corners

*Challenges:*

- How to integrate children's experiences in the classroom, connecting to local needs
- How to design activities related to social science content
- How to create interest and raise the status of social science as a subject
- How to develop life skills through the social science curriculum
- Difficulty in changing the mindset of teachers
- Low co-relation between curriculum content and training programs

Dr. Arvind went on to discuss practical steps States can take in designing a Social Science Improvement Programme, in light of MP's experience. In MP, Eklavya worked on an integrated package rather than a piecemeal approach, to promote changes in three key areas: **curriculum design, teacher training, and evaluation**. The first essential step is to develop a clear vision of the kind of classroom processes needed for social science learning, with clear expectations, and strong monitoring of these classroom processes. For this, an important step is to constitute a Social Science Resource Group, and making this Resource Group an integral part of the program.

Regarding the **curriculum and pedagogy for social science**, this must begin with the State or community's own experience and realities. Local issues become the biggest learning resource in this scenario. One suggestion is to focus the curriculum on the theme of **changes around us**, and their effect on everyday life, which children can easily observe around them. For example, children can discuss the changes in technology around us, such as in mobile phones or computers; and people from the local community who have

actually experienced these changes in their lifetime can be invited to share their thoughts about it. Similarly, in discussing changes in agriculture and related economics, senior farmers from the community can be invited to share their real life experiences. An important place to begin also is topics which have personal significance to teachers. For example, one topic of discussion could be why the number of women teachers has increased over time, which can lead to an interesting discussion on women's role in society. Many teachers will be able to share on this topic from their own life experiences, which will motivate them to go outside the textbook, and talk about issues that touch their own lives.

**In designing the teaching learning material**, one needs to include a wide range of materials needed to take children on a journey into a different place or time. The visual medium can be very powerful in this regard, and must be fully utilised, by taking help from artists in designing good visuals in textbooks and TLMs. Also, **each activity should be designed with a clear purpose in mind**. Children easily get drawn into a story or activity; the role of the teacher/text is to be able to guide children out of the activity towards meaningful analysis of the activity, and a clear learning goal for which the activity is intended. We need to invite what children already know, and use this to lead to a meaningful learning point.

**Teacher training workshops** should include actual discussion of the textbook, and of the kind of pedagogy/activities that can be used for teaching each topic in the text. An important feature of social science training is to bring in the element of **dialogue** during training. The Trainer must be open to hearing teachers' different perspectives, even if they differ from his/her own view, and both Trainers and teachers should be encouraged to look at things from different perspectives. Finally, the **approach to evaluation** also needs to change, by making questions that are open-ended, whose answers cannot be easily found in the text, but require some thinking/ discussion/ research beyond the text. Teachers need to be oriented on how to pose such open-ended questions.

**Next was a presentation by Mr. Upendra Reddy (SPC, Andhra Pradesh) on the activities undertaken for Social Science improvement in Andhra Pradesh.** The State first identified the key issues needing change in social science education: the social science syllabus was too large and mostly exam-oriented, terminology was too complex for children to understand, the content had little relevance to children's lives, and assessment was based mostly on question-answers. Teachers mostly read out the textbook in class, without reading beforehand and being able to call out the central idea in each unit, with the result that learning was not very meaningful from the children's point of view. Concepts like democracy, etc remain only terms and definitions – they still have not entered into the child's experience. Moreover, children who are weak in language often found it difficult to write & express their views, which also contributed to low learning levels in social science.

In response to the above issues, Andhra took three major steps to improve social science education in the state: 1. **identified major social science competencies**, 2. **developed indicators of effective social science classrooms**, and 3. **changed the assessment methods** to better reflect the competencies identified. Andhra's social science curriculum focuses on four major competencies: reflection on social issues, collecting and analysing information, mapping skills, and undertaking graded projects in Social Science. Based on these, clear indicators have been designed that depict the kind of classroom processes

needed for effective social science learning: **classrooms which provide a space for children to think and express.** This is promoted by beginning lessons with interesting questions to encourage children to think and express; engaging children in discussion and debate; conducting brainstorming sessions on social issues and their impact, and displaying children's ideas and work in the classrooms through wall magazines. **The community and natural environment are seen as the main source of knowledge.** Concepts are understood through exploring supplementary TLMs, library resources, projects, and field trips to nearby historical places, agricultural farms, etc. Finally, learning is assessed regularly based on the identified competencies, and graded project cards are developed based on which every child takes up at least one project per month. This organised approach has allowed the State to touch on the essence of what they hope to achieve through social science education, and to implement and track changes based on predetermined indicators which they aim to bring about in their classrooms.

Following Andhra's presentation, various questions were posed, for example, on how we can ensure changes in classroom processes from the textbook-centred approach, to promote more discussion on local issues and facilitate children themselves to think and ask questions? The Andhra representatives shared that this was done through experiential teacher training programs where a culture of discussion was modelled during training itself, so that teachers could experience it for themselves. Also, during the training, school grading data records were brought in and shown to teachers, in order to disprove their assumptions, and show them that learning quality was not dependent so much on physical factors such as condition of schools, number of teachers, etc. Rather, children performed well in those schools where teachers were committed and motivated for ensuring children's learning. Finally, the State also undertook external evaluations of classroom processes, teachers' performance and children's performance with the help of their Subject Expert Forums (members were trained for this through teleconference mode for 2 days). This rigorous monitoring also helped improve classroom processes and learning.

### ***SESSION III: Approaches to teaching Social Science in Elementary classrooms***

**The afternoon session opened with a presentation by Ms. Geeta Ramanujan (Kathalaya, Bangalore) on the use of Storytelling as a technique for Social Science teaching at the primary level.** She began by narrating an interesting story about a group of animals losing their home due to the construction of a road, using animated gestures and sounds that drew the audience in as they imagined the animals' experience as it was being narrated. She then discussed with the audience how such a story can be used to bring up discussion in the classroom on a variety of social issues such as environmental care, urbanization, etc. In this way, instead of going straight to the textbook, any concept can be introduced in the form of an interesting story. This is a powerful tool that can make the learning process lively and exciting for children, nurturing the element of wonder. This also helps children to remember things more easily, when they hear it in the form of an interesting story.

The story can serve as a basis for discussion about social science concepts. Children can be encouraged to ask questions about the story, and they often come up with questions and answers that we would not anticipate. The teacher can also motivate children to narrate their own stories using their experiences and imagination. Storytelling is a tool which also

allows the teacher to bring in subtle values through the medium of the story. Kathalaya has been involved in various activities for reviving the art of storytelling as an educational tool. They have set up story labs, libraries, developed resource materials for teachers such as story kits, and trained teachers on techniques of narration, story reading, picture Stories, toy theatres, clay modelling, puppetry, shadow play, role play and craft activities.

**This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Kamala Menon & Ms. Yashika (The Mother’s International School, New Delhi), on Approaches to Geography learning at upper primary level.** Dr. Menon and Ms. Yashika shared how geography is about understanding the earth we live in and the way we use the earth. Geography is not found in a textbook – it is found in the local area in which we live, our people, our customs. **Geography is learned through the sole of one’s feet.** We need to go beyond the story, beyond the text, beyond the classroom, to make geography learning possible. This can be done by generating materials about children’s local area, and this material can come together to form the ‘textbook’. At the Mothers’ School, each teacher looks at her own children, their interest, what experience they carry, and moves with children to explore their surroundings through lots of hands-on activities. The approach is based on the principle that nothing can be taught. Children are encouraged to build on their existing knowledge, from near to far, from real to imaginary. Being a teacher means first of all being a human, who facilitates a process of discovery where teacher and children build knowledge together.

Dr. Menon and Ms. Yashika discussed how children learn geography. According to NCF, the social science curriculum must enable children to find their voices, to nurture their curiosity—to do things, to ask questions and to pursue investigations. This can be nurtured if the teacher asks open-ended questions and allows wait time for responses. Students can be encouraged to frame their own questions and issues, and then go about analyzing and answering them. Students should be engaged in dialogue with the teacher and with each other. They should be encouraged to think independently, by being given the right to disagree with their teacher’s or classmates’ opinions. The teacher should also design different types of learning activities for different types of learners in the class. For example, Kinaesthetic Learners learn better through hands-on experiences with materials, laboratory experiments, handling and building models. Visual learners learn better through taking notes, seeing words in books, on the chalkboard, in workbooks, etc. Auditory Learners learn better through audio tapes, lectures, and class discussions. The teacher should combine a variety of methods to ensure a holistic experience for each child in the class. There was also a discussion on how craft can be integrated as part of geography learning, both as a creative and aesthetic activity and as work. Mapping is also another important skill in geography learning, which can be taught by encouraging children to create maps or sketches of any area they know, for example the way from the school to their house, or even of an imaginary place. From this starting point, children can then learn about perspective drawing as used in scale maps, and also the skills of reading maps to find their way around.

**Prof. Kumkum Roy (Jawaharlal Nehru University) next presented on Approaches to History Curriculum and Learning Materials,** in light of her involvement in writing the new NCERT History textbooks. Prof. Roy highlighted some of the key elements of the approach to the history curriculum as discussed in NCF 2005. First of all, in order to reduce the burden of rote learning present in the majority of our history classrooms, we need to do away with the notion that history is about remembering dates and facts. Facts

do not speak for themselves - facts only get their meaning from particular contexts. **The role of the history curriculum/teacher is to contextualise facts.** For example, whether the Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757 or 1758, may not be as important as understanding the impact that British rule had in India. Secondly, we need to move away from the notion of a single history of India, and be open to a **range of perspectives and interpretations of historical events.** Different groups experience the same event in different ways. Instead of the traditional top-down approach that focuses on history from the perspective of rulers, we need to look at how historical events were experienced from the point of view of different groups, especially marginalised groups. Thirdly, we need to look at democracy as a process, and view the **social science curriculum as a tool for strengthening democratic practices in our day to day lives.** The curriculum should be seen as a tool for promoting appreciation for diversity (in gender, caste, class, religion), to challenge traditional stereotypes, etc.

Dr. Roy outlined some key principles for selection of what content is important, in planning the history curriculum:

- **Change:** history allows us to understand changes in our society
- **Continuity:** looking at not only what changes, but also what remains constant over time
- **Context:** Facts get their meaning from context. The same item (eg. an item of clothing) may carry a totally different meaning in a different context.
- **Causality:** understanding why something happens, and looking at connections between past and present events wherever possible
- **Contingency:** history is also about the unpredictable – events are not necessarily inevitable or bound to happen (For eg. was partition inevitable?)
- **Complexity:** giving children a sense of the diversity within which they can locate themselves.

Dr. Roy also shared about some of the **positive elements that went into the writing of the NCERT History textbooks.** First of all it was a collective effort, which involved a wide range of members from universities, school teachers, NCERT, etc. The textbook writers tried to keep children who are as diverse as possible in mind. In designing the textbooks, they tried to divide the chapter into small sections, keeping the lessons as interactive as possible. Flexibility in the structure of the lesson was encouraged, through the use of different boxes that provided background information which the child was not expected to remember. The text also included exercises for open-ended evaluation, through a section called ‘Imagine’ at the end of each chapter with completely open-ended questions that children could discuss, or projects that children could undertake. Dr. Roy’s presentation was followed by a lively discussion on the nature of history, whether historians can claim to be presenting a ‘true’ history, whether history is conceptual or factual, whether history topics should be chosen from local or global contexts, and from contemporary or ancient history.

#### **SESSION IV: *States’ Activities for Social Science Improvement***

**Mr. Surya Mishra from SSA Orissa** shared about some of Orissa’s efforts towards Social Science improvement. The State has designed various self-instructional modules, such as Eklavya (for Class III to V) which focuses on hard spots of social science. The self-instructional module Bibhaba (Class I to V) was developed with different techniques of puppet making and the development of content based scripts on Environmental studies

and the technique of handling them through role play by children. The Unmesh-IV module focuses on how to use local knowledge and previous experiences of children in the teaching learning process. The Barnalli booklet has been developed for helping teachers design learning activities inside and outside the classroom environment. These and other resources have all contributed to gearing social science learning towards greater activity-oriented learning related to children's own local surroundings.

**Mr. Bhupender Singh Negi from Uttarakhand** along with his colleague gave a demonstration of some of the computer-aided learning materials that have been developed in Uttarakhand for social science. For example, a computer program has been developed for learning about terrestrial planets, which visually shows the movement of different celestial bodies, thus attracting the students' attention and interest facilitating their understanding of different celestial phenomena. Similarly, interactive maps were created to help students learn about states and capitals of India, different natural regions, rivers, and other geographical topics. These were designed in the form of an interactive game that would allow students to guess the correct answers and then move on to the next level.

At the end of the day, **Ms. Suzana Andrade (Pedagogy Unit, TSG)** summarised the day's proceedings, by highlighting the following key points that were brought out through the day's discussions:

1. According to NCF 2005's recommendations, we need to **start from where children are** (their lives, interest, experience and knowledge), and move with them to **explore** their surroundings
2. **Content: Processes of change** in different social contexts need to be identified, studied, compared and analysed by children and teachers.
3. **Materials:** Only textbooks may not be sufficient to promote such pedagogical processes. Supplementary **interactive materials** along with **exploratory analytical activities** are needed.
4. **Pedagogy: Discussion** on various issues and experiences helps the children and teacher to strengthen their critical thinking abilities. Social science pedagogy should bring in the culture of **exploring, critiquing, reasoning, sharing and consulting.**
5. **Assessment** should be used to strengthen used to strengthen learning, needs to be open-ended, assessing process and thinking skills
6. **Local experience and expertise** can be used as an useful learning resource. This can be done by inviting **local experienced persons** (artists, farmers, artisans, etc) and dialoguing with them

## **Day II: 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2009**

### ***SESSION I: Social and Political Life towards a better society***

In the first presentation of the day, **Ms. Dipta Bhog (Nirantar, Delhi)** shared from her experience in helping develop NCERT's **Social and Political Life textbooks**. Some of the key issues found in the older Civics textbooks/ pedagogy were that concepts were rarely linked to children's real life experiences. Institutions and structures were presented as outside of us, without clearly depicting how these impact children's lives, how they relate to the child's world. In contrast, the new textbooks sought to **pull in elements from the**



**social and political world around the child, building on their everyday experiences, and then linking these to larger concepts & institutions.**

The **focus was not on presenting ‘topics’** as fragmented bits of information, **but on presenting larger thematic concepts** - for example, exploring the idea of equality or diversity in different ways. This helps teachers keep in mind the larger framework or concepts which we are trying to help students understand through their journey from Class 6 to 8 – by building on each concept across the years. We can then **draw linkages between different social science subjects**, by looking at how these concepts connect in geography, history, and social/political science – for example looking at diversity both in cultural context, and geographical context. In designing the textbooks, the concepts were **presented in an exciting manner that would draw the child in** – through the use of personal stories (eg. Ambedkar’s own narrative of his childhood), cartoons, advertisements, case studies, photo essays, poetry, fiction, films, and locally available materials. The language and content were kept simple according to the level of the child, without over-simplifying or ‘dumbing down’ the concept itself.

**The new books sought to go beyond simple dualities**, of seeing the world in black or white, seeing something as either completely good or completely bad. For example, colonialism had its negative aspects, but it also brought positive contributions to our nation such as cricket. Similarly, any achievement also has its difficulties and challenges. An inclusive society means that we keep our minds open to new things, while also being critical of the negative aspects. Similarly, the textbooks tried to **avoid presenting idealised images, instead depicting society as changing and dynamic, not static**. The focus was on depicting **changes** in our lives - whether new policies, technological changes, etc. Also, instead of didactically telling children how they ‘should’ be, based on very idealised, fixed notions of citizenship, the books focused on **illustrating the role of individuals in contributing to change** – by giving examples of not only the famous leaders of society, but also how ordinary women and men – including domestic workers – have the power to make change happen, through their everyday actions.

Ms. Bhog also discussed some of the challenges and ways forward for the states, in rolling out a similar process in their own state. The first important step is to create such diverse **Resource Groups at the State level**, including not just experts, but teachers, teacher educators, NGOs, activists, designers. These groups can start developing **learning materials that respond more directly to the reality of the state**, located in the everyday world of children, relevant to the needs and interests of children in the state. Moreover, **teacher training** should not be a top-down process of just imparting information, but needs to be an interactive discussion with the teachers. It needs to empower teachers to use these innovative textbooks effectively – by identifying their own learning gaps, helping them really understand the concepts, discussing with them how to use the text narrative to pull out these themes in creative and interactive ways. In the discussion that followed, Ms. Bhog clarified that the change in the subject name from ‘Civics’ to ‘Social and Political life’ is discussed in the Social Science NCF Position Paper, where the colonial legacy of the notion of ‘civics’ is pointed out, in the colonial agenda of educating the native child to become a good colonial citizen. She also discussed how teachers can be oriented through workshops for developing storyboards, which are a lively enjoyable way to introduce children to new concepts or wisdom, through the form of an interesting cartoon story.

**Next was a presentation by Ms. Teesta Setalvad (Khoj, Mumbai) on Khoj's initiatives for linking social science to social issues around us.** Ms. Setalvad pointed out that we live in a dynamic and plural society with intense social disparity of wealth and opportunity. She questioned whether the present education system matches this situation, and whether features like learning by rote and a standardised exam system gives scope to celebrate this variety and diversity in our society. Every child is naturally curious, and eager to learn about new things, new beliefs, new practices. Before inducting opinions in their minds about what is good or bad, we need to let children explore and find out for themselves. If children are given that freedom, they will make better decisions.

Khoj was a program developed in Maharashtra which has now also been tried in Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala. Focusing on upper primary social science classrooms, it seeks to relate learning to the children's own personal identity and to current social issues that affect them, thus bringing the subject to life. For example, history is explored by tracing the migratory history of children and their own families, through which children begin to understand narrative, stories, the notion of cross-checking facts, appreciation of the diversity of different children's stories. Values for a more peaceful and inclusive society are promoted through critiquing negative stereotypes in the media, promoting conflict resolution skills, or through undertaking cross-cultural field trips, for example visiting different places of religious worship. Children learn to first understand their own social identity by creating self-portraits, which reveals the child's vision of herself, her emotions, etc. From the child's portraits, conversations, etc, the teacher extracts issues which are conflicting children, and presents them back to the class for discussion. The classroom is held to be an open space where children are free to say whatever they feel. Even controversial statements are allowed to be made, and then are deconstructed by the teacher, without making the child feel that it should not have been said. Rather than avoiding issues of conflict, it is instead important to bring them to the classroom to make sure they are debated and dealt with. The child's right to question is always respected, and noisy classrooms are seen as something positive in the learning process.

**Ms. Meenu Venkateswaran (Pravah, Delhi) next shared about Pravah's approach to nurturing Young People as Active Citizens.** The program focuses on helping students to understand the link between themselves and society, to locate themselves in the process of social change, and to understand their own role in contributing to change in society. This notion of active citizenship is promoted by having **students themselves develop and implement social action projects**. Instead of accepting the current situation around them as it is, they realize that they can take active steps in constructing alternative situations. Some examples of social action projects include health campaigns (where students investigate why certain children are not accessing health services); campaigns on issues such as immunisation, child labour; exposures to rural-urban diversity; debates and discussion across ages in the school and in the community; transforming existing spaces such as school assemblies, clubs, student councils, bal panchayats, etc.

A key element that is promoted is a process of **"refl-action" (action and reflection)**, where students are encouraged to reflect on their vision for self and society in light of the action projects they have undertaken. In this process, students are led through different stages of feeling, reflectively watching, thinking and doing (Kolb's learning cycle). To enable this sort of classroom culture, it requires first promoting that element of reflection during teacher training programs, for example by getting teachers to discuss and debate on controversial statements, such as "Diversity creates chaos in India. Agree or disagree."

During such discussions, differing view points are invited, since conflict is seen as a positive process that can lead to creating greater balance in society, and is not seen as something to be avoided. Through these processes of lively discussion, debate, and respectful dialogue, both in teacher training programs and ultimately in classrooms, we can nurture skills such as discussion, listening, negotiation, and building agreement – which are at the heart of social science.

**The next presentation was by Prof. Savita Sinha and Ms. Mili Roy Anand (NCERT, New Delhi)**, who shared about the new approaches to Social Science that were incorporated in the new NCERT textbooks, and the implications thereof for changes in curriculum, teacher training, and assessment. First of all, children should understand how they themselves are part of the world around them. Thus learning should start with children’s immediate surroundings, and emphasis should be on application of concepts – understanding how different facts affect our lives, and how we should act based on these facts. For example in geography while learning about maps, children can be asked to identify how they go to school, what they see in their surroundings, how things look from different perspectives, etc. Another major shift is from history as the mere accumulation of facts, to an emphasis on the ability to **analyse socio-political processes**. Thus evaluation also must shift from testing knowledge of ‘when and who’, to assessing whether students understand ‘how, what, and why.’ Prof. Sinha and Ms. Anand gave various practical examples from the NCERT textbooks that illustrated how these shifts in the theoretical approach were translated into practice. Most importantly, teachers’ approach must be changed to encourage more participatory discussion in the classroom. While many government schools many not have high end facilities or resources, there are a lot of potentially creative teachers who can make a significant difference in social science learning even despite limited resources.

## **SESSION II: *Building capacity for better social science teaching***

**SSA, Kerala opened the session with a presentation about Kerala’s approach to social science teaching and evaluation.** Kerala demonstrated its very open-ended approach to social science learning, where concepts are understood through a constructive manner of discussion and dialogue. The state has redesigned its curriculum based on ‘critical pedagogy’, which seeks to encourage students to think and question for themselves about issues that are important in their own communities, in order to find constructive solutions. Based on the belief that education is a powerful tool for social change, social science learning is seen as an opportunity to help students construct knowledge about their real world and social issues around them, so that they can actively contribute to constructing a better society. Through a process of collaborative discussions, eight major social issues were identified that were relevant to students’ own community and local context. The whole social science curriculum has been organised around these major issues, elaborated at different levels of complexity according to the class level. Classroom transactions focus on discussions about these issues, through open-ended questions posed to students, in order to think together and find out solutions to the issues. Textbooks and sourcebooks have also been developed to support teachers in helping learners construct knowledge in the classroom. But in addition to the textbooks, teachers’ and learners’ own local texts are created and used, by collecting newspapers, CDs, magazines, paper cuttings, wall magazine, advertisements, etc and creating new texts. The Kerala representative also shared sample copies of the assessment papers that are used to assess student learning, which also

**SSA Tamil Nadu next gave a presentation about Innovative Social Science activities under ABL and ALM.** In the ABL (Activity-Based Learning) program, social science learning is seen as a joyful experience for the child with ample opportunities to explore the environment, to interact with it and talk about it. The main aims include to arouse the child's curiosity about the surrounding world, to engage the child in exploratory and hands-on activities that lead to the development of basic skills, to develop a strong feeling towards community living. To achieve these goals, the pedagogy used is based on activities in and out of classroom as well as other methods such as stories, poems, plays and other kinds of group activities. The focus is on interaction with the natural world, enabling the child to appreciate the similarities and differences in nature (in sounds, colours, sights, shapes etc.), activities cultivating concern for the environment (planting of seeds, protecting trees, not wasting water, etc.). The atmosphere in the class room aims not to stress the child to perform; but rather to allow learning to take place at individual pace and permit free interaction among children and the teacher. Activity cards are distributed with different logos depicting different kinds of activities – for example songs, questions relating to a picture, storytelling, conversation (guided by the teacher), reading exercises, dramatic roleplay, etc.

Similarly at upper primary level, Active Learning Methodologies are utilised for learning social science. Students' tasks involve reading about a topic, mind mapping the visually depict the key concepts, summarizing, discussion, presentation, and writing about the topic. Teachers' tasks in turn involve introducing the topic, facilitating understanding, consolidation, reinforcement, assessment, and remedial support if needed. One activity that particularly drew interest from participants was the use of Social Science Mobile Labs, which are used to enrich the curriculum, promote application of scientific concepts learned, provide access to contemporary research thru audiovisual modes, and evoke a spirit of enquiry, wonder and curiosity.

**Next was a presentation by SSA Karnataka on Social Science initiatives in Karnataka.** The Karnataka representative began by posing the question: who is the owner of the school? It is not the community or the teachers who own the school; it is the children who own the school. The classroom should not be controlled by the teachers – the classroom is of the pupil, by the pupil, and for the pupil. The challenge is to make the child most prominent in the classroom, and shifting class time from being the teachers' time, to getting students to utilise the most time. SSA Karnataka has tried to promote this shift by focusing more strongly on students' learning, through its ABLAC program (Activity based learning approach of Chaitanya). First of all, based on analysis the students' achievement results through KSQAO, the State identified specific competencies and learning difficulties of students. Based on these specific difficulties, the State designed Class-wise *Activity Banks* for Class 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, and also conducted teacher training focusing on these difficult competencies in which students performance was found to be low.

The Activity Banks include a list of Pre-preparatory activities, Pre-learning activities, Learning activities, Reinforcing activities (practicing), Usage activities (Application), and Evaluation activities. In each phase of the lesson, the teachers design activities of their own to suit the different developmental stages of the students (based on Piaget's theory of developmental psychology), and all the above activities help the students to gain mastery over a selected competency. Moreover, tele mode training programme was organized for

EVS/ social science concentrating on KSQAO's results, and the teachers' felt needs were addressed through follow-up activities by supervisory staff. Training focused on topics such as the role of social science teachers in handling controversial issues, integrating into the curriculum current affairs and a sense of national integration, etc. Other steps that Karnataka has taken for social science improvement include hiring Social Science teachers at the upper primary level, setting up Geo-Lab, *history museums*. In the discussion that followed, it was brought up that one challenge in Karnataka's approach is how to integrate the open-ended and constructive principles of NCF 2005 with the structured approach of Chaitanya. The danger is that if a program is too structured around pre-determined minimal levels of learning, teachers tend to focus on rushing to complete the syllabus without ensuring whether students actually understand or not.

**Ms. Neelam Rao (Director, MHRD)** next shared some guidelines for the States as they prepare the Annual Work Plan and Budgets for 2009-10. She emphasised that States need to plan with a long-term vision for at least the next three years, in order to ensure sustainability of initiatives. Quality Plans need to be integrated, by analysing learning difficulties in different subject areas, and strengthening all inputs and processes related to those, in order to focus the plans towards learning enhancement. Moreover, the focus should be not on mere provision of funds but on actual utilisation of funds. Clear mechanisms must be designed to ensure that the proposed changes will actually be translated into practice and have an impact on the field. This requires outlining clear implementation schedules with a break-up of each proposed activity and its timeline. It also requires a thrust on proper evaluation & monitoring, to supervise the implementation and ensure that interventions are having actual impact on the field. This should include a system of independent monitoring, in order to 'monitor the monitors'. The planning process itself should be decentralised and contextualised in order to respect the diversity within the state, by undertaking generative exercises starting from the school & cluster level upwards, rather than prescribing solutions from the top down.

### **SESSION III: Overall Planning for Social Science Improvement**

**In the afternoon session, Dr. Vashishtha (HoD, Elementary Education, NCERT) shared some thoughts about quality improvement in SSA.** Dr. Vashishtha talked about the education system as a system of excellence intended to produce learning: "Let the teachers teach, let the children learn." But when even the basic condition of learning is not happening in many of our classrooms, then we completely lose our voice. We cannot talk about higher things like critical thinking when even the basic learning for which schools are meant is still not taking place. If one provides the enabling conditions, learning will take place – but someone has to ignite that spark, whether teacher or parents or friends. Thus our starting point is determining how we can adequately prepare our teachers for this, and the solution lies in the thinking process, in how we visualize education. The basic element is that we need to start by understanding the child and looking at her needs. The child is a curious learner by birth, and our role is simply to help her understand the environment around her through exploring and experimenting for herself. This requires an environment where children feel free to express themselves freely, to make decisions and act for themselves. You cannot force someone to express themselves – communication starts when there is no fear. Moreover, just as we cannot bifurcate the child's mind, our approach to different subjects should also be integrated.

Dr. Vashishtha also shared some comments about the Quality Monitoring Tools. The idea behind the tools is to promote a culture of self-monitoring rather than external inspection, by encouraging teachers to set their own targets. Quality will not function without ownership of quality. Moreover, QMT data needs to be consistent, and needs to be analysed and utilised effectively, especially at the school, cluster and block levels. The QMT provides very rich feedback (eg. about which schools are performing well, which require more support, etc) which can be incorporated into training programs for better performance. Finally, Dr. Vashishtha also discussed the NCERT Sourcebooks on Learning Assessment, which he pointed out is not a panacea, but merely a broad suggestive framework, which needs to be adapted and modified according to the specific context.

**Mr. Binay Pattanayak (Pedagogy Unit, TSG) next presented a Broad Framework for Quality Improvement in Social Science under SSA.** Mr. Pattanayak began by urging States not to get carried away by a long list of activities which may be difficult to implement. Instead, the more important first step is to **boil things down to their essence, and try to capture what is the spirit of social science**, that we can actually bring into each classroom. For example, a true science classroom requires a spirit of hands-on exploration; a maths classroom requires a culture of lots of practice activities applied to real life.

Similarly, in essence social science involves a **scientific exploration of society** – looking at society with critical eyes. The ultimate reason for learning social science is so that we can critically understand the processes of social change in our society, and understand how we can each contribute together to create positive change, by thinking and acting together. Thus, the essence of a social science classroom lies in bringing in a culture of **discussion** – a culture of appreciating the unique contribution of each person, and of **thinking and acting together for change** – something that is presently missing in our society but strongly needed for India to come up.

**What is the nature of classroom processes required in order to bring about such a culture?** The major shift we need to bring in our classrooms is from a textbook-and teacher-centric mode, to a **mode of discussion** – where twenty people each say something, everybody listens, and in the process we really discuss and think together, and come up with something better. This requires creating a space for every child – a truly democratic atmosphere where every child has the space and freedom to express her own opinions, and to sincerely listen to others. It is through this process that we can together begin to explore social processes of change around us, to discuss and critically analyse social issues affecting us, and together think of solutions for creating positive change around us.

**How can we facilitate this sort of change in our social science classrooms?** First we each need to take this essence into our own practice, to bring in that culture of democratic discussion at every level, starting from the State Offices, and every level down. It is a collective process of sensitising, discussing, making everybody think, and working together to bring change. A simple framework that can help us plan for bringing these changes in our social science classrooms can be:

1. **Promoting cooperative learning through collaborative activities:** let us explore together, think together, and do together.
2. **Narrating own experiences in own words:** This is not in our present culture, which is more tuned to memorizing and repeating what the textbook says. We are

not in the habit of saying in our own words, what we feel, what is our experience – this is the element that is needed for a social science culture.

3. **Study of local social science phenomenon** (eg. local market, weather, time, sunset/sunrise, etc.): We need to develop a scientific attitude to observe, think and discuss common things that we observe around us, and how these things change over time (for example, how the sunrise changes from place to place, from season to season). If we observe for ourselves, study and discuss, we can learn better, and appreciate the differences around.
4. **Relating local social concepts to external social science concepts**
5. **Interacting with social activists and community members:** For example, going to a cultural program and discussing with an artist; going to a football field and discussing with the players; discussions with older members about things they have experienced – these types of discussions can bring social science learning to life.
6. **Visits local historical sites and discussing about these:** Historical sites do not include only monuments – even a pond in our village, or a pile of stones, may have local significance which can be explored.
7. **Practising cultural activities/ skill-based activities** such as games, singing, creative activities, sports, cultural celebrations, which can all help promote a more collective spirit of working together and celebrating diversity

Ultimately children's social science skills can be strengthened thru such processes. These may be some doable activities that can be done in any classroom. If we can bring a school that tries to bring these changes in the classroom, it can bring a dramatic shift in social science learning in our country.

The Workshop ended with a Vote of Thanks to all the participants and resource persons in the workshop, and a suggestion that we should stay connected by email to continue the discussion. It was noted that we need to write more, and share these everyday classroom experiences of teachers and trainers, in the form of films, slides, etc. Good examples of such experiences can help us more, by giving us examples of what a culture of social science can look like in practice, and how it can be nurtured in each of our classrooms.