

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF JOMTIEN.

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I. The expanded vision of Jomtien

Emergence of a SYSTEMIC approach to basic education provision.

Primacy of the primary school as main delivery system - with SUPPLEMENTARY ALTERNATIVE programmes for unreached or poorly served children.

Recognition of provisions for YOUTH AND ADULTS as a separate component to be met through variety of non-formal delivery modes.

Jomtien promoted idea of INTEGRATED SYSTEM with emphasis on acquisition of LEARNING.

Although there was reference to different delivery systems and programmes, these remained associated with specific INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, which have social and economical significance.

As a result the problematical existence of HIERARCHIES and BOUNDARIES within the system, and corresponding socio-economic segmentation, received less attention than might have been necessary.

Children and youth have had to continue to adapt to the structure and culture of the existing school - or face the consequences of marginalisation.

Thus the full potential of the expanded vision has not yet been realised.

II Elaborating the 'expanded' vision of Jomtien

* An elaboration of the vision may need more explicit attention for what it takes to develop an integrated system of learning that is fully inclusive by offering a range of modalities to ensure that all children and youth, regardless of circumstances, have access to relevant education that equips them for life in their rapidly changing societies and helps them to develop their potential.

* Such modalities need to take explicit cognisance of a flexible and appropriate use of time, place, methodologies, and available technologies for learning.

* Learning outcomes need to be defined as required profiles of basic skills and competencies, to be assessed through standardised instruments leading to common and recognised certificates.

* Within such framework: of vision, of learning areas, of approaches to learning, and of essential learning outcomes, other aspects such as modalities, locations and organisation of learning cease to be defining factors - even though they remain subject of political contestation.

* Such framework begins to stimulate the development of systemic linkages among sub-systems of learning ('primary education', 'non-formal education', 'adult education', and the like), thus promoting continuity and complementarity.

* Thus the notion of 'what makes a system (or parts of it) formal' will take on a different meaning.

- * In the above context it becomes possible to focus more on diversity of circumstances of learners, different learning needs, and diverse purposes for which learning is pursued.
- * For example: it may become more useful to distinguish between (diverse forms of) 'INITIAL EDUCATION' for children and youth versus 'ADULT EDUCATION'.
- * Within both bands of education non-formal and distance education or mixed mode arrangements become different routes to reach equivalent learning outcomes.

Starting points for a systemic approach

- * NFE is not just a separate provision for the dropouts.
- * NFE can be an alternative but equivalent PROVISION for basic 'Formal' education or for adult learning within the mainstream.
- * NFE can also be an APPROACH to the organisation of learning that has relevance across the system as a whole.
- * Each conventional sub-system must re-define itself in relation to the education system as a whole (in terms of purpose, clients, methodologies, etc.).
- * Re-defining and re-positioning is a slow and difficult process; clarity of direction is the first priority.
- * Emphasis needs to be simultaneously on different principles that may form strategic entry points into the debate:
 - *inclusivity*
 - *diversification*
 - *responsiveness*
 - *relevance*
 - *flexibility*
 - *going to scale*
 - *cost-effectiveness.*
- * The above implies an effort to pursue integration without falling (or remaining) in the traps of standardisation, regimentation, inequities, and marginalisation!

IV Integration and linkages

Both concepts need to be unpacked in order to make progress in fully tapping the potential contributions from NFE and other non-conventional approaches to education towards EFA in the years to come.

INTEGRATION, as an effort to bring disparate elements together in a bid to promote inclusivity and equity, could take different meanings depending on the level at which it is promoted:

Systemic integration: this would promote structural linkages between sub-systems: for example in equivalency of learning outcomes and certification, and in making official arrangements for 'ladders' and 'bridges' - such as for re-entry into the formal school.

Institutional integration : here it concerns possible integration of conventional and non-conventional elements within the same learning organisation: for example, introducing open learning approaches into 'formal' schools, distance education methods into non-formal schemes, or arranging fast-track options using multi-media provisions.

Programmatic integration: at a micro-level it is conceivable to bring elements together within a single course or programme of learning: such as work-experience or community projects into formal education, or sharing use of laboratories between 'formal' and 'non-formal' classes.

LINKAGES are the manner in which forms of integration can take shape.

It is worthwhile to indicate in what areas linkages can be considered to pursue different forms of integration:

- curriculum structure and content
- teaching / learning methodologies
- educational technologies
- the organisation of learning
- learning outcomes: cross-cutting essential ones and more specific supplementary ones (such as skills development and life orientation)
- learning styles and epistemologies places and use of spaces/resources for learning
- management and provisioning
- ownership and control of institutions or programmes
- mechanisms / formulae for funding or subsidisation.

* Linkages in the above kinds of areas between sub-systems could take various formats: one can ensure similarities, or one can explicate complementarities for the enhancement of learning experiences. The latter are particularly important in areas of methodologies, technologies, locations of learning.

* There is also a relationship between different types of linkages pursued at different levels of integration. Linkages arranged at institutional or programmatic level will strengthen the drive towards ensuring essential forms of systemic integration, which in turn would stimulate more collaborative work to be done at lower levels.

* Furthermore the linkages between sub-systems, programmes or elements of education provision can differ in terms of distance: for example they could range from easing transfers from one to the other, through a juxtaposition of programmes within the same institution (e.g. as parallel streams or mixed modes), to a full merger of elements within the same learning programme.

It can be argued that, while non-formal initiatives and similar non-conventional schemes to provide basic education need to strengthen their operations and the quality and effectiveness of their work, at the same time it is imperative to pursue efforts to become integral parts of a broader basic education system. The efforts to link up with the mainstream is not a recipe for obliteration but a possibility to constitute oneself as a credible and highly appropriate avenue for large numbers of children and youth to obtain basic education of acceptable standard,

Major mutual benefits for strengthening systemic linkages could include:

- (1) Securing strategic support for improving quality and effectiveness from within the system.
- (2) Demonstrating the necessity of making a specific, tailor-made contributions to the EFA effort, that can be of high quality and effectiveness.
- (3) Exchanging and adopting relevant innovations in specific areas so as to effectively operationalise the principles as outlined under III for the benefit of all learners.

The challenge is to devise the most effective strategies to build or strengthen the linkages and thus make a better chance to achieve the expanded vision of Jomtien.

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