

International Policy Perspective for Universalisation of Primary Education in the Era of Globalisation

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Abstract

Education is considered as a critical instrument and an effective means not only for improving the level of human well-being but also for the growth and development of any country. It is considered as a central element for poverty reduction, economic growth, sustainable development, for the realisation of other fundamental human rights and human resource development. Due to these benefits of education, the United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 well recognised right to education as a basic human right. After UN Declaration, the right to education especially right to basic or elementary education is marked priority on the agenda of international policy planning. In 1966, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights re-affirmed the right to education as a fundamental human right. In 1989, the right of every child to free and compulsory education is again recognized by a human right treaty namely United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child. Under the influence of globalisation, a strong emphasis is placed on knowledge society and so the universal basic education became a topmost priority in the international policy planning. The World Conference on Education in 1990 is a major milestone in this direction. After that the goal of universal primary education has been enshrined in various international policy documents such as World Education Forum (2000), Millennium Development Goals (2000), World Summit on Education (2002), World Bank Education Strategy (2011), Incheon Declaration (2015) and Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (2015). This paper seeks to review these international policy documents regarding the goal of Universal Primary Education in this era of globalisation.

KEYWORDS: Education, International Policy Perspective, Universal Primary Education, Globalisation

Introduction

Education is considered as an effective instrument not only for improving the level of human well-being but also for the sustained development of a nation. The right to education is also helpful for the realisation of other human rights. The critical role of education in poverty reduction, economic growth of a nation and improving overall development of a nation is recognized by many from time to time. Parallel to it, education is critical for functioning of the democratic society; education provides political voice and social empowerment to the people. The positive effects of education on human beings can be easily seen in all the aspects of life such as individual, cultural, social, economic and political aspects (Dreze & Sen, 2013: 83-84).

The United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 well recognised right to education as a basic human right. Article 26 of this declaration states: (i) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary Education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of

merit. (ii) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (United Nations General Assembly, 1948:6). After UN Declaration, the right to education especially right to basic or elementary education is marked priority on the agenda of international policy planning. In 1966, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights re-affirmed the right to education as a fundamental human right. Article 13 and 14 of this document deals with education and this covenant has been ratified by 160 governments. Article 13 highlights the importance of education for the development of human personality, sense of dignity, realisation of other human right and also for promoting global peace. Due to such role of education, it should be free and compulsory at elementary level. Article 14 directed the states to make efforts to provide free and compulsory education to all for a reasonable number of years (United Nations, 1966).

In 1989, the right of every child to free and compulsory education is again recognized by a human right treaty namely United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child. Article 28 and Article 29 of this convention deals with right of free and compulsory education of all children and responsibilities of the states for achieving this right. With the help of international cooperation, education in developing countries should be provided to all for elimination of illiteracy and ignorance. This convention realises the critical role of education for the preparation of the child to live in this free society, for protection of the natural environment, for equality of sexes, promotion of peace, tolerance and other such national values among all people.

1. International Policy Perspective in the era of Globalisation

In this era of globalization, the success of economy of a country depends upon the well-educated and skilful workforce to meet the increasing demands of specialization in production and distribution of goods. Now-a-days, the future of countries depends upon their ability to compete in knowledge-based global market where knowledge is traded as 'commodity'. The role of basic education is critically important due to the linkage of knowledge with the economy in this globalized society. Education acts as a foundation for development by increasing the value and efficiency of the labor and helps to improve the overall productivity and intellectual flexibility of the labor force (Ozturk, 2001: 39).

And due to these reasons, the role of education especially basic education has been re-affirmed by the various international policy initiatives. These policy initiatives are quite important as these play a significant role in national policy makings in various countries as well as support the respective countries by technical and financial means. It is therefore quite pertinent to study different international initiatives for universalization of elementary education. An account of the international policy perspective regarding universal elementary education has been given below:

2.1 World Conference on Education, 1990

The major milestone in international efforts regarding universalisation of primary education was the Jomtien Conference, held in Jomtien, Thailand in the International Literacy Year (ILY-1990) from 5-9 March 1990. This conference was organized by Inter-Agency Commission established by UNDP, UNSECO, UNICEF and World Bank. Approximately 1500 participants which include delegates from 155 governments, officials from 20 intergovernmental bodies and 150 participants from nongovernmental organization were gathered and discussed the major aspects of

Education for All. The main objectives of World Conference on Education for All had to highlight the importance and impact of basic education on human lives and to raise a global consensus to renew commitment to make basic education available to all (Rao,2011 pp:21).

The ‘World Declaration on Education for All’ includes a Preamble and ten articles in it. In Preamble, the current situation of primary schooling and adult illiteracy especially lack of functional literacy among women has been pointed out. Then the document highlighted the problems and issues, such as increasing population, uneven economic growth, debt on various countries etc., in the way of meeting basic learning needs of all individuals. The situation of education further deteriorated due to cutbacks in education expenditure by governments of least developed countries in the 1980s. The document further recall that the basic education is a fundamental right of every person either a male or a female and the goal of basic education for all should be attained with the help of greater cooperation among different nations and cumulative experiences of various countries with remarkable education progress (UNESCO,1990:1-3).

In the Article 1, it was resolved there that education is a fundamental right of all people of all ages across the world. The Article 2 deals with the ‘expanded vision’ to fulfil the basic learning needs of all. The Article 3- *Universalising Access and Promoting Equity* is considered as heart of this declaration (Haddad et al,1990). For universalizing the access of basic education, it should be provided to all children, youth and adults. Special emphasis should be given to the quality of basic education. The Framework for Action serves as a reference guide for translating the commitments of the Declaration into action (UNESCO,1990). Thus, the Jomtien Conference has proved to a turning point to draw the attention of the all the nations to the importance and impact of basic education for all. And also, able to forge a global consensus and commitment to recognize education as a fundamental right of all children, youth and adults. It is also important because for the very first time the nature of basic education has been diagnosed so well in its social, cultural and economic dimensions.

2.2 World Education Forum Dakar, 2000

The World Education Forum, held in Dakar from 26 to 28 April 2000 was a wake-up call and an invitation to act urgently and effectively to ensure education for all. It was second World Conference on Education to reaffirm the EFA agenda. The purpose of this three-day gathering was to turn the vision of ‘Education for All’ into a reality by assessing the progress made after Jomtien conference by presenting comprehensive data regarding the state of basic education around the world. In EFA 2000 Assessment, in-depth evaluation and detailed review of current status of basic education in 180 countries has been conducted to help the governments and their partners to know their progress towards the goal of Jomtien and to identify strategies for future gains (UNESCO, 2000:10)

The EFA Assessment presented its highlights by reporting that from 1990 to 1998, the number of school-going children rose from 599 million to 681 million. The number of children who have no access to primary school has been reduced but even in 1998 more than 113 million children were out of school. Despite the high access rates in primary education, educational disparities due to gender, ethnicity, urban versus rural location, disability etc. continues to exist (ibid.:12-13). The basic learning needs of all must be met with utmost urgency and so World Education Conference in

Dakar chose six main goals as the following-up to the Education for All 2000 Assessment. The three main goals with respect to Universal Primary Education are Goal 2, 5 and 6. The Goal 2 is related with free and compulsory education of good quality by 2015. The idea of gender equality in basic education is expressed in goal 5. The goal 6 deals with the quality of education and excellence in education. The forum emphasised that education is a fundamental human right and so efforts should be directed to meet the basic learning needs of all individuals. The role of strong political will, national leadership, national planning and financial aid has been pointed out in this forum. Based on the progress made in one decade after the Jomtien Conference, the forum described the present status of basic education worldwide. It also outlined a blueprint for the future action for achieving universal basic education around the world (UNESCO, 2000).

2.3 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

A 'Millennium Declaration' was adopted by Heads of Governments at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, where the Millennium Summit was held in September 2000. In this declaration, commitments were made for ensuring universal freedom, dignity, rights and access of basic services for all human beings across the world by the 147 heads of state and governments and this declaration is adopted by 189 nations. All the member states in this Declaration resolved to make this world more peaceful, just and prosperous. It is recognized that it is important responsibility of the governments to ensure that globalization should act as a positive force for all the people. The 'Declaration' identified six main values such as freedom, equality of men and women, solidarity, tolerance within and between different cultures/ societies, respect for nature and shared responsibility for social and economic development all over the world are required for international relations in this twenty-first century.

To reach at desired outcomes outlined in these values, the Summit also identified certain concrete objectives. The gathered world leaders made commitment to promote peace, security and disarmament and also to promote cooperation among United Nations and regional organization. Regarding primary education, it is resolved that by the year 2015, all the children will be able to complete universal primary education and both boys and girls have equal access to all levels of education (United Nations, 2000; 1-5). Several of these commitments got translated into eight quantifiable and measurable goals with twenty-one targets and in these goals special emphasis is placed on 'Education for All'. The two goals namely Goal 2 and Goal 3 are directly related to education while the other goals emphasised the role of education for interrelated development areas and also to as a catalyst for achieving the other goals.

These goals represent a global partnership between developed countries and developing economies to create a conducive environment at the national and global level. Since the linkage of EFA with Millennium Development Goals, strong emphasis has been exclusively placed on the achievement of universal elementary education and elimination of gender disparities in education. The universal elementary education is considered as top priority in international agenda (UN, 2001). The role of education especially basic education for the overall development of a country is emphasised in Goal 8. So, the realisation of these goals to a greater extent depends upon the development of education in a particular country (Singh, 2012; 33).

2.4 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

The World Summit for Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from August 26 to September 4, 2002 in which the main issue was environmental degradation and its impact on economic growth and overall progress and prosperity of human race. The final product of this Summit is 'Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development' and it was resolved that all the participants must commit themselves to build a humane, equitable and caring global society, cognizant of the need for human dignity for all. It was especially important to reaffirm the role of education in the process of sustainable development. The WSSD members were committed to "*Ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and will have equal access to all levels of education*". Education acts as an important agent of behavioral change and so it should be promoted for sustainable development (UN,2002 ;16-17). The national programmes and strategies for the achievement of universal primary education for both boys and girls alike should be developed, so that internationally agreed goals regarding education such as the goals listed in Millennium Declaration should be attained (UN,2002 ;50).

2.5 World Bank Education Strategy 2020

World Bank perceives education as an instrument and as a means for a nation for its growth and development. The recent efforts of the Bank for universal primary education has been presented in a new education strategy named as "Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to promote Development". It is presented in 2011 with a ten-year agenda for 'Learning by All' across the developing world by the next decade. The strategy emphasised that overall goal is not mere increasing the enrolments but actual learning. It has been highlighted that with the different international goals and proper investment in education by the Bank, the number of out-of-primary-school children fell from 106 million children in 1999 to 68 million in 2008. The Bank recognized these gains in access of primary education also accompanied with some challenges such as poor quality of learning and slow learning in schools.

So, the Bank devised this new education strategy with priorities such as targeting the poor and vulnerable, creating opportunities for growth, promoting global collective action and strengthening governance. The main objective of this Strategy is learning for all as highlighted in the text, "*The new strategy focuses on learning for a simple reason: growth, development, and poverty reduction depend upon the knowledge and skills that people acquire, not the number of years that they sit in a classroom*". It is found that learning levels in many developing countries are alarmingly low especially for disadvantaged children (World Bank, 2011: 1-3). This Education Strategy with the objective of Learning for All will be helpful to elevates the education MDGs by promoting equity goals in access and completion of education. This strategy involves three major areas namely knowledge generation and exchange, technical and financial support to the countries and partnership among the different stakeholders of education sector to ensure better learning of all children irrespective of their caste, gender, economic level and any other inequality. The Bank also devised different kinds of indicator namely performance, outcome and impact indicators to measure the success of this strategy (World Bank, 2011:73-74).

2.6 Incheon Declaration for Education 2030

UNSECO organized the World Education Forum 2015 at Incheon in Republic of Korea from 19-22 May, 2015 with UNICEF, World Bank and other such

intergovernmental agencies. More than 1600 participants from 160 countries participated and adopted the ‘Incheon Declaration for Education 2030’, a historic and huge step for the realization of commitments made by Jomtien Conference, Dakar Framework, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals and this declaration is also important for setting a new vision for the education for the next fifteen years. This Declaration namely ‘Incheon Declaration-Education 2030: towards the Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All’ reaffirmed and recognized education as a fundamental human right and realized that this right is necessary for the enjoying other rights.

In Point No. 2 of the Preamble, it is stated that “*We also reaffirm the vision and political will reflected in numerous international and regional human right treaties that stipulate the right to education and its interrelation with other human rights*” (World Bank, 2015: 5). The participants recognized that in past efforts have been made for education but despite these efforts the goal of education for all has not been achieved so far. There is an urgent need to set a single, renewed, transformative and holistic educational agenda as outlined in SDG 4 which can attend to the unfulfilled educational goals of EFA Framework and MDGs. The participants ensure that provision of free and compulsory education for nine years leading to quality learning outcomes.

2.7 Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable development goals, officially known as Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are an intergovernmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets. World leaders gathered on 25 September 2015, at the United Nations in New York to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals were generated as a parallel concept to the MDGs at the Rio+20 summit in 2012. A timeline of 2015-2030 was set for 17 SDGs, ratified by 193 nations. The Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Post 2015 Development Agenda (IGN) began in January 2015 and ended in August 2015. Following the negotiations, a final document was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit September 25–27, 2015 in New York, USA. The title of the agenda is ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. Out of these 17 goals, 4th goal is related to education. It has been observed that progress has been made in the access of education but the quality of education remains poor in many developing countries. The stress is placed on quality education as it has been stated that, “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.*” This goal targets that by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (United Nations, 2015).

2. Conclusion

Education is considered as an effective instrument not only for improving the level of human well-being but also for the sustained development of a nation. Due to these benefits of education, the United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 well recognized right to education as a basic human right. After UN Declaration, the right to education especially right to basic or elementary education is marked priority on the agenda of international policy planning. At international level in 1966 and in 1989, right to education is re-affirmed as a fundamental human right. Under the influence of Globalisation, a strong emphasis is placed on knowledge society and so the universal basic education became a topmost priority in the

international policy perspective for overall development across the world. The World Conference on Education in 1990 is a major milestone in this education policy planning. After that the goal of universal primary education has been enshrined in various international documents. These policy initiatives are quite important as these play a significant role in national policy makings in various countries as well as support the respective countries by technical and financial means.

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