

Issues for consideration

1. Incomplete Civil works

During the visits of the Commission to schools and hostels across the state, we have found incomplete works, which on enquiry are stated to be pending with the LSGI's engineering wing. We have tried to ascertain as to how many such cases are pending in the State, and have been informed by the DPI that they do not have such details and are finding it difficult to compile one. As suggested by them, would the LSGD be able to help us compile such a list of hostels and schools for which capital works are pending with LSGD Engineers, along with some details like names and locations of these schools, since when these works have been started, and difficulties, if any, being faced, in the case of stalled projects. It may be appreciated that unless there is such a list, it is well nigh impossible to monitor their progress.

2. Maintenance of buildings and providing basic infrastructure and facilities

Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporations are supposed to provide adequate allocation in their Plan Budgets for regular maintenance and upkeep of the schools and hostels (including pre metric hostels for SCs). At the moment the Commission is looking into the planning and spending pattern on issues relating to children in LSGIs, as mandated by the Legislative Committee on Sub ordinate legislation. In the case of schools, what is emerging is a complex web of spending in part by the LSGIs, the SSAs and by the concerned departments. However, what we are beginning to see, is that there is hardly any co relation between the needs of a school, the School Development Plans (comprising 3 Annual Plans) and what finally happens. There are serious maintenance issues and unevenness in spending between schools. The gaps appear to be more when the institution has been transferred to a Block Panchayat, a District Panchayat or a Municipality or Corporation .There appears to be

a little more immediacy in tackling these issues in at least some of the gram panchayats, even though resource problems exist. In many schools, scant attention is being paid to providing many basic amenities and requirements, including maintenance, furniture, drinking water facilities, toilets etc. It is necessary to improve the existing process of planning, linking the School Development Plans with the Planning process in the panchayat system and take up important issues on priority basis. It is also necessary to have some kind of linkage between actual needs and the SSA's plans so that resources are optimally utilised in areas where they are most needed.

3. Upkeep of infrastructure

In almost all cases, it is seen that schools have a problem with the upkeep of toilets. There are many complaints that children are made to wash the toilets first thing in the morning in the absence of manpower to do this work. While the children can be held responsible for keeping the toilets clean, there has to be some arrangement for the toilets to be cleaned on a daily basis, especially since there are so many users. Further, with so many schools not having compound walls, it is learnt that miscreants break into these toilets after school hours, destroy and dirty them and in some of these schools, children are made to clean this mess also in the morning.

Hygiene is an important issue on which our children have to be educated from the point of view of their personal health and hygiene as well as to help develop a civic sense in them. Therefore LSGIs need to address this issue of upkeep of school toilets and surroundings and providing compound walls where none exist.

4. Maintaining the list of children eligible for education under the RTE Act.

Section 9(d) the RTE Act clearly states that all LSGIs must have with them a complete list of children eligible for education under the RTE Act in their jurisdiction, including details of children with disabilities in

the eligible age group. It is gathered that none of the LSGIs have prepared such a list by undertaking a household survey to identify the beneficiaries. This needs to be got done and the data base maintained and updated regularly so that one can say with surety that 100% of eligible children have been enrolled in school. LSGIs need to be advised to take this up in a time bound manner.

5. Identifying unrecognised schools

Sec 18 & 19 of the RTE Act 2009 require all unrecognised schools to be given notice for closure and penalised if they continue to function. We have been receiving complaints about schools functioning without any recognition and without even the most basic of facilities - some claiming to be "prospective" CBSE affiliated schools, or part of the NIOS!! There are some such schools which exist without even a name board for the school. In almost all cases, the victims are young children whose parents are misled into sending the children to these schools in pursuit of that ephemeral thing called English Education, paying high fees in the bargain. . As an enlightened State, we cannot allow such exploitation to happen in Kerala. Every school must be made to comply with the basic requirements spelt out in the RTE Act.

The General Education Department made an attempt through the SSA to map all the schools. They in turn used their Block Resource centres. This exercise is an incomplete one because in the Commission we have handled complaints about schools which do not feature in the SSA's list of unrecognised schools. The most optimum way to tackle the unrecognised schools is to prepare a complete list of schools in the jurisdiction of the Panchayat, Municipality or Corporation. . Ideally, since the LSGIs are required to map all beneficiaries under the Section 9(d) of the RTE Act, they would be best placed to also collect the list of schools all eligible children in their area are attending, or the list of schools functioning in their jurisdiction. This is a very important input

needed to curb many child Rights violations that are coming to the attention of the Commission.

Transport Related Issues

The RTE Act, vide Sec., requires the LSGIs to make arrangements to provide access to children who live beyond the distance parameters specified for elementary education. This problem exists in far flung areas and in the mountainous areas, backwaters etc where access and modes of transport are limited. The Gotrasarathy project in the tribal areas has not taken off due to lack of timely and adequate allocation. Lack of transport in vulnerable areas results in increase in the drop out rate among children. This happens mainly in vulnerable areas. This issue needs to be addressed in coordination with the ST Department so that the Gotrasarathy project functions without interruption and any issues pending between the LSGIs and the ST Department sorted out.