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C Raj Kumar | New education panel will help implement NEP more effectively



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The NEP captured the collective consciousness of India's education fraternity



📷 Even before the NEP was announced, it had undergone a comprehensive consultation process with all stakeholders that was reflected in the policy. (AFP Photo)

It has been a year since the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was announced by the Government of India. It was indeed a red-letter day in the history and evolution of education as the NEP sought fundamental transformation of India's education system. The vision of the NEP 2020 was crystalised in these words: "This National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower." Few would argue on the aspiration that is embedded in these words. Even before the NEP was announced, it had undergone a comprehensive consultation process with all stakeholders that was reflected in the policy. The NEP captured the collective consciousness of India's education fraternity.

It is important to establish a National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) as a nodal institution that will be responsible for implementing the NEP. This could be within the education ministry, but it should have separate institutional apparatus and identity, which will recognise its role and responsibilities for effective implementation of the NEP.

Assessing NEP's One-Year Journey

In the run-up to the launch of the NEP, wide ranging consultative exercises were held in the last one year. However, the complexity of the education sector requires internalising the vision of the NEP by all stakeholders. The two major initiatives that were promoted during the last year include strengthening online education and establishing an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). We also witnessed extraordinary innovations in the use of technology and technological platforms to offer academic programmes. While our digital divide is a continuing challenge in access to education, it is also the only mode of education that is feasible and democratic during a pandemic. The seriousness in which the Indian government has approached the formulation of the NEP was also equally matched with the impetus provided by the highest echelons of the government, including discussions led by the Prime Minister and the education minister, underscoring the significance of the NEP.

Overcoming challenges

An important aspect of policy implementation is the level of institutional preparedness within all the relevant organisations. Michael Hill and Peter Hupe, senior scholars in social policy and governance, in their influential book, *Implementing Public Policy: An Introduction to the Study of Operational Governance*, have observed that "(...) designing institutions is an important public task. Implementation, then, refers to that part of governance that involves activities in relation to public tasks that follow the legitimate, directive decisions on those tasks. In the beginning of the third millennium, the "implementation of public policy" takes various forms, but they all can be approached as concerned with the operational

part of governance. In short, implementation can be seen as operational governance...”

The NEP expects the highest degree of operational governance as far as its implementation is concerned.

Many good policies run the risk of poor implementation if efforts are not taken to develop robust mechanisms for operational governance. It is important that we put in place the following five institutional mechanisms under the aegis of the proposed National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) that will help in the implementation of the NEP:

1. Inter-ministerial coordination for implementing the NEP: There are many aspects of the NEP that requires participation and involvement of other ministries and departments within the Government of India. This requires a continuous coordination and monitoring mechanism to ensure that the issues leading to the timely implementation of the NEP are addressed.

2. Inter-regulatory body coordination for implementing the NEP: The higher education sector has more than 15 discipline-based regulatory bodies, all of whose functioning impinges on the vision articulated in the NEP. There is an urgent need for a strong and substantive engagement with all these regulatory bodies for effective coordination for implementing the NEP.

3. Intra-government coordination for implementing the NEP: It is important that any effective institutional mechanism is designed to connect and collaborate higher education departments and the state higher education councils of state governments. Removing duplication while delineating roles and responsibilities of institutions that are involved within a state government will be the key.

4. Funding and resource allocation for implementing the NEP: The issue of funding and resource allocation is almost central to the successful implementation of the NEP. The NEPC should be empowered to ensure that it is able to work with all government departments to ensure that the necessary funds are available in a timely manner.

5. Statutory legal reforms for implementing the NEP: Certain areas of the NEP requires legal and statutory support. The NEPC should be working to identify these aspects of the NEP to initiate reforms at the earliest. It is important that all efforts are undertaken with the necessary legal and statutory frameworks in place for effective implementation of the NEP.

The establishment of the National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) within the education ministry of the Government of India is a step in the right direction that will provide new impetus to the efforts that are needed for the implementation of the NEP. The first anniversary of the launch of the NEP should create a certain degree of expediency to focus on our collective efforts towards the effective implementation of the National Education Policy.

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