

Teacher Educators' Role in Ensuring Education for All

Contents

Introduction

The Right to Education: The Global Agenda

Right to Education – The Sri Lankan Challenge

Compulsory Attendance at School Regulations of 1998

Vulnerable Groups of Children

Conclusions

1.0 Introduction

The functionalist theory of the professions (see Hoyle, 1980) holds that the professions are those occupations whose members bring a high degree of knowledge and skill to those social functions, which are most central to the well-being of societies. Teachers perform a crucial function as education is a key social process in both developing and developed societies. Even though the students enrolled in school are the major clientele of the teacher, yet his/her role cannot be limited to the precincts of the classroom and the school; the teacher has a duty towards all children of school-going age who should be ensured the right to education.

Moreover, principals and teachers need to model leadership qualities that provide not only a shared template for the whole school but also that provides support and opportunity to problem solve, risk take and look to create solutions beyond the norm (Caldwell, 2000). If so, they need to be responsive to societal needs, identifying problems and constraints and seeking solutions to address these problems and remove the constraints. As pointed out above, responsiveness is one of the four key dimensions of leadership and a society which continues to have a proportion of its children out-of-school, falls short of the ideal of being responsive and its principals and teachers do not perform their expected role as responsive leaders.

Such a stance is needed as solutions have to be found through encouraging local community participation. Developing countries successful in reducing poverty are increasingly promoting community participation. Within a community teachers occupy a pre-eminent position. As the UN Millennium Declaration emphatically states "Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights". Implementing the policies and interventions required to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) requires the commitment of political leaders but also require sustained political pressure, broad popular support and mechanisms for delivering services directly. Popular mobilization and participatory civic engagement will enable people to exert pressure on their leaders to deliver on their commitment to the Goals.

Several countries figure prominently in the effort to mobilize community support to achieve MDG Goals. Among these are, Paraguay which has a tradition of community

involvement in setting development priorities, including training community leaders; Poland with a project to integrate poverty reduction and environmental protection efforts with its national strategy for achieving the Goals; Kenya which has a partnership with civil society organizations on the Goals. Bangladesh has mobilized huge local and international resources to improve education. Both Bangladesh and India have important women's mobilization efforts and this might well be a contributing factor in the commendable gains in women's education that both countries have made. On other hand, the absence of women's mobilization in this form may contribute with large expenditure on arms, to Pakistan's (the only faller among South Asian countries) fall down the scoreboard (Unterhalter et al, 2004).

The Millennium Development Goals are national political commitments with the potential to provide ordinary people with a powerful tool for holding their leaders accountable for results. But to do so, the ordinary people have to be organized. As ordinary people tend to be less organized, less capable of articulating their concern politically, less able to gain access to public services and legal protection, less connected to influential people and most vulnerable to economic shocks (Human Development Report, 2003), the role that can be performed by teachers, principals and teacher educators become even more critical.

In Sri Lanka, the Compulsory Attendance of Children at School Regulations (CACS) of 1997 paved way for the appointment of School Attendance Committees (SACs) which included among others, the principals of schools within the Division, two representatives from each of the School Development Societies of the schools within each Division, and the Divisional Director of Education of such Educational Divisions. Other members were to be drawn from the local community. The enactment of these Regulations and the composition of the Committees make it necessary for the teachers in the profession to be aware of the background leading to these decisions at the national level in relation to the international commitment to the achievement of MDGs.

The sensitization of officials, principals and teachers to the right of every child to education irrespective of socio-economic background, in conjunction with the incentives offered for educational participation, is essential to make it possible to achieve the universalization of education among the younger age groups as required by the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child which Sri Lanka ratified in 1990 and the Millennium Development Goals.

Pre-Test

In your opinion, should a teacher be concerned about children who are not attending school? Give reasons for your answer.

2.0 The Right to Education: The Global Agenda

In 1948, the UN General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which refers in Article 25 to childhood as entitled to special care and assistance. The Declaration's Article 26 (2) specifically refers to the child's right to education. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its Article 13 also reiterated this right. The Covenant specifically refers to the state's major responsibility:

- "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"
- "Education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding/tolerance & friendship among all nations, all racial, ethnic or religious groups"

Article 29 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

- Enjoins the state to provide compulsory education and free primary education to all and access to different forms of secondary education
- Education must promote personality development, respect for human rights, fundamental freedom, cultural identity and national values and prepare the child for responsible life in a free society

The EFA initiatives originated in the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 placed clear emphasis on the need to promote the broader concept of basic education and not just primary education, which had till then been the target of most national and international efforts. At the end of the Conference all 155 governments represented pledged to pursue the goal of basic education in its various forms and adopted the World Declaration on EFA and a Framework of Action to meet basic learning needs.

The Jomtien Framework for Action suggested six broad EFA target dimensions towards which governments could work. These were:

1. Expansion of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) activities, including family and community interactions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children.
2. Universal access to and completion of primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as 'basic') by the year 2000.
3. Improvement in learning achievement such that an equal percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e.g. 80 per cent of 14 years olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement.
4. Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to say, one half of its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female literacy rates.
5. Expansion of provision of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with progressive effectiveness assured in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity.
6. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge and skills and values required for better living and social and sustainable development made available through all educational channels, including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication and social action, with effectiveness assured in terms of behavioural change (WCEFA Final Report, 1990 p53).

In 2000, the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted at the largest ever gathering of heads of state of 189 countries to do all they can to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality and achieve peace, democracy and environmental sustainability. Emanating from the Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) bind countries to do more in the attack on inadequate incomes, widespread hunger, gender inequality, environmental deterioration and lack of education, health care and clean water.

Goal 2 is focused on the achievement of universal primary education under which Target 3 strives to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Goal 3 focuses on the promotion of gender

equality and empowering women while Target 4 under this goal affirms the need to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Lack of education robs an individual of a full life. It also robs society of a foundation for sustainable development because education is critical to improving health, nutrition and productivity. The education Goal is thus central to meeting the other Goals.

Human Development Report (2003) indicates the time line when the MDG2 would be achieved *if progress is not accelerated in the countries which suffer from human poverty.*

Primary Education	Time of Achievement
Latin America & the Caribbean	Achieved
Central & Eastern Europe & the CIS	Achieved
East Asia & the Pacific	Achieved
South Asia	2020-2050
Arab States	2050-2100
Sub-Saharan Africa	2200

The time of achievement in the Arab States and South Asia will be even later than 2020 even though the target is shown as 2015. Thus even though progress is being made to achieve the Goals, there are stark differences emerging between regions. Similarly, differences occur within countries.

It is relevant to note that the MDG 2 has set a more restricted target than the EFA targets. It is recognized that assessing the achievement of targets such as learning achievement at the global level and setting targets such as training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with progressive effectiveness assured in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity or increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge and skills and values required for better living and social and sustainable development made available through all educational channels, including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication and social action, as stated in EFA targets is difficult due to discrepancies that might arise in assessment. Yet it is relevant to examine the improvements in literacy during the decade after EFA.

Table 1 shows the status of different countries with regard to the achievement of universal primary education and eradication of illiteracy.

Table 1
Achievement of Universal Primary Education and Adult Literacy

	•Net Primary Enrolment Ratio		Adult Literacy Rate*			
			1990		2000	
	1990	2000	Male	Female	Male	Female
Developing countries	80	82	77	58	82	66
Least developed countries	54	60	53	31	61	40
Arab states	73	77	(1)67	(1)41	(1)75	(1)54
East Asia & the Pacific	96	93	88	72	93	80
Latin America & the Caribbean	87	97	87	84	89	87
South Asia	73	79	60	32	66	40
Sub-Saharan Africa	56	59	60	41	69	54
Central & Eastern Europe & CIS	88	91	(2)98	(2)93	(2)99	(2)96
OECD	97	98				
High-income OECD	97	97				
High human development	97	08				
Medium high development	86	88				
Low human development	50	59				
High income	97	97				
Middle income	92	93				
Low income	69	74				
World	82	84	82	69	85	74

(1) Middle East & North Africa (2) CEE/CIS & Balkan States

Sources: Human Development Report (2003) & * UNICEF (2003) The State of the World's Children

The Human Development Report (2003) points out that while across developing regions, more than 80 per cent of children are enrolled in primary school, some 115 million

children yet do not attend primary school. Enrollments are woefully low in Sub-Saharan Africa (57%) and South Asia (84%). Similarly, the comparison of male and female adult literacy rates indicate that even though the literacy rates have improved, the gaps exist between men and women.

Gaps within Countries

National performance indicators presented above are only indicators of average performance. They are midpoints of internal differences that average out economic, social, cultural, gender and ethnic cleavages within borders. They do not reflect the living conditions of many inhabitants. In most developing countries, income disparities occur between people at the top of the income distribution and people at the bottom, mostly rural residents or ethnic minorities. Disparities in education thus are a result of inequality between wealthy and poor households. In many countries children from poor households are much less likely to attend school and are more likely to drop out if they do. Human Development Report (2003) cites examples of such disparities in income and education in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America and countries like Vietnam.

Similarly, there occur widening gaps between urban and rural areas and rural-urban divides which reflect uneven progress in education. Parents in rural areas are much less likely to send their children to school and when they do, the schools have less teachers and other requirements. Thus South Asia is home to the largest urban-rural disparities.

Thirdly, as Table 1 already indicated, gender gaps in education persist and obstruct the achievement of MDG2 and 3. In most cases, gender discrimination is accompanied by biases against other characteristics such as location (urban-rural), ethnic background and socio-economic status. In many developing countries, gender gaps in primary and secondary education are much higher among the poorest fifth of the population.

The Report also identifies the factors that prevent or constrain the assurance of the right to education to all children. Among these are

1. Inequitable provision of basic education, with the poorest 20 per cent of the people receiving much less than 20 per cent of public spending,

2. Household costs for education such as user fees and uniforms, discouraging enrolment, especially in the poorest families,
3. Lack of schools in near proximity to the home, school schedules not accommodating household chores or farm work, low percentages of women teachers which discourage girls from being sent to school,
4. Operational inefficiencies leading to many children repeating classes and dropping out of school, lack of early childhood education programmes to help prepare children for school, use of a foreign language as medium of instruction hampering learning achievement,
5. Difficulties in managing recurrent costs to strike a balance between teacher wage bills and other costs and
6. Decline in donor support to education

3.0 Right to Education – The Sri Lankan Challenge

The right of all children to education was recognized in Sri Lanka in the 1940s, many years before International Conventions were introduced, universal goals were set and even meeting 'basic needs' was perceived to be a priority in programme formulation. Policy makers of the State Council administration in the years preceding the recovery of political independence established 54 Central Schools in rural locations to provide secondary education, linking them with primary 'feeder' schools in the locality through a system of Grade 5 scholarships that provided an avenue of educational opportunity through secondary and university education. The Grade 5 scholarship programme expanded over the years, currently offers 10,000 bursaries and in addition 15,000 additional places in well equipped post-primary schools on the basis of a scholarship test.

Free primary, secondary and university education was introduced in 1945. The stated objectives of this policy were to ensure the democratic right to education and to provide opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility through education to all strata in the population. Its rationale was the need to reduce the socio-economic inequalities that had been hitherto widened by education policies. (Jayaweera, 1989) Free mid-day meals were provided in different phases of education policy as well as subsidised transport. These incentives were increased in more recent years with the provision of free text books from Grades 1 to 11 in 1980 and materials for a school uniform for each child in 1993. At present, school meals are provided to children attending deprived

schools and transport is provided free of charge. The mother tongue was enforced as the medium of instruction in the primary school in 1945 and progressively in the secondary school from 1953 to 1959 in an effort to eliminate privilege through language. Regrettably the role of English was undermined concomitantly with the result that English proficiency continues to be a 'badge of distinction' as stated in 1943 (SP XXIV of 1943) and an agent of socio-economic inequality. Short falls in achieving 'Education for All' have been due largely to the economic constraints of a population of whom around one third are enmeshed in poverty.

Rights based international instruments have assisted in reinforcing the commitment to the extension of educational opportunity. Sri Lanka endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratified the Covenants on Political and Civil Rights, and Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. More specifically, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified in 1981 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. The momentum for protecting the rights of the child has stemmed from CRC, beginning with the Jomtien Declaration on 'Education for All', establishing goals and monitoring progress. The Millennium goals have reinforced this concern, through its inclusion of universalising primary education and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015. International instruments once ratified are legal obligations but they need to be translated into national legal enactments.

The legal system has introduced changes very recent years that have been supportive of providing the goal of universalising education among the 5 to 14 age group. The Constitution of Sri Lanka (1978) guarantees fundamental rights but the specific concern for education is confined to the Policy Directives for 'the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels' (Art 27 (2) h) and 'to promote with special care the interests of children and youth so as to ensure the full development, physical, mental, moral, religious, social and to protect them from exploitation and discrimination.' (Art 27 (13)).

4.0 Compulsory Attendance at School Regulations of 1998

Despite assumptions to the contrary Sri Lanka did not have legislation to enforce compulsory attendance in schools till 1998. The enabling provision in the Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939 to introduce such legislation was not availed of, for six

decades until regulations were proposed as a component of the education reforms initiated in 1997 and enforced from January 1998 by Gazette notification No 10003/5 of 25 November 1997. These regulations enjoin parents to enroll children from 5 to 14 years in educational institutions unless they could make adequate and suitable provision for the education of their children.

For monitoring of compulsory attendance, two Committees were to be appointed at local level by the Minister of Education.

- (i) A School Attendance Committee for each Grama Niladhari Division or two Committees if there are less than five schools in a Division, comprising the Grama Niladhari, a Principal of a school, two representatives of School Development Societies, and the Samurdhi Niyamaka (Facilitator for Social Welfare) of the Division.
- (ii) A School Attendance Monitoring Committee for each Divisional Secretariat Division comprising a Divisional Director of Education, Probation Officer of the Division, a Police Officer of the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police at least, and a prominent social worker resident in the Division.

The Provincial Director of Education is authorised to appoint Chairmen of the Committees from the members and an official of the Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service in the Division who would receive lists of non-school going children and their parents from the GN Committee, conduct inquiries, instruct parents to admit children to schools, grant exemptions where reasonable, monitor progress after three months, and report non-attendance to the School Attendance Monitoring Committee (SAMC). The Committee is empowered to summon parents of non-school going children and advise, counsel and instruct parents to send their children to school and ensure regular attendance. The regulations identify a parent who does not comply with it as guilty of an offence but does not prescribe any penalty.

A letter/circular issued by the Secretary, Ministry of Education on 29 April 1998 instructed all Principals to admit children who have applied to their schools with the number specified for classes. Non Formal Education officers were instructed to assist parents to obtain affidavits or other documents if children had no Birth Certificates and to seek the collaboration of non governmental and community based organisations to assist parents to enrol children in schools. The Non Formal Education Unit was

instructed to organise Non Formal Literacy Centres for non school going children in each locality.

These regulations appear to be non operational. By 1999 the Non Formal Education Unit of the Ministry of Education had issued letters from the Minister appointing the Divisional and GN level Committees. The NFE Division conducted a survey in selected Divisions with UNICEF support and identified over 60,000 out-of-school children in these Divisions and was able to admit around 38,000 of these children to these schools through the efforts of their officers at Divisional level. Awareness campaigns were reported to have been carried out by the NFE Unit with UNICEF support and the slogan "All Children Go to School" was adopted from the first day of school in January 2001.

It appears however that the Non Formal Education Unit in the Ministry of Education is under resourced and adversely affected by the administrative changes brought about by the vicissitudes of policy direction. Consequently, the progress made by the Compulsory Education Committees has not been monitored, and the majority of these Committees are perceived to be inactive. It seems inevitable that the implementation of the compulsory education regulation has been stymied since 2000. Legislation exists but there are lacunae inaction by the Central government, Provincial governments, Divisional administrations, Committee established specifically for the enforcement of regulations, voluntary organisations and committees.

Perera (2004) found that by 1999 April, except in the case of the Divisional Secretary Divisions (DSDs) in the North-East Province, 8034 School Attendance Committees (SACs) (National Education Commission reports the figure to be 8459) and 240 SAMCs had been set up at Grama Niladhari level. He concluded that there has been an improvement in enrolment and a reduction in the incidence of dropping out of school. The majority of children who had dropped out were in the conflict affected areas, estimated as 3000,000 among the internally displaced (NIE/UNICEF, 2003). As there was no possibility of obtaining information on attendance, the impact of the Regulations on school attendance could not be assessed.

Perera also concluded that the Committees had become dysfunctional soon after they were formed and also that the SACs and the SAMCs had no convening authority and as such were not destined to be effective. Overall, the stakeholder (officers, principals,

teachers and parents) appeared to be aware of the legislation, that is, the year of effectiveness, age group and related grades, compulsory admission, non-insistence on birth certificate, admission rights of children born out of wedlock and alternatives to formal schooling.

As a consequence of the South Asia Sub-Regional Ministerial Conference held in April 2001 in Kathmandu, Nepal, a three-year plan for 'Education for All' was developed by the Ministry of Education for 2002-2004. (Ministry of Education, 2001). The activities planned are,

- (i) identifying children who will reach school entry age in 2001-2004 and ensuring their enrolment,
- (ii) activating the School Attendance Committees,
- (iii) awarding scholarships to children from households facing economic difficulties,
- (iv) strengthening the monitoring of the implementation of the Compulsory Education Regulations,
- (v) targeting programmes for disadvantaged communities,
- (vi) sensitising parents,
- (vii) monitoring school attendance, and
- (viii) providing education to refugee and displaced children.

However, there is no evidence yet of purposeful activity in implementing this plan. In the early 1980s stagnation in enrolment as a consequence of the implementation of structural adjustment programmes led to the establishment of non formal literacy centres for out of school children under a Non-Formal Education Unit created in the Ministry of Education. Curricula were prepared for an accelerated programme in literacy and numeracy conducted in schools, community centres or religious institutions three times a week after school hours. There was provision for transfer from these centres to formal schools according to competency levels reached by learners.

Regrettably these Centres did not consistently receive official support and survived largely due to the commitment of a few officers and support from UNICEF. These centres have been promoted in the last few years to meet the needs of children in the 5-14 age group who despite the compulsory education regulations, are outside the ambit of the formal school system. The education reforms introduced in 1997 proposed also

Activity Schools for out of school children which would offer a wider range of activities beyond literacy and numeracy.

An island wide network of primary schools was developed in the 1950s and 1960s so that around 85% of children had access to a school within two kilometres of their homes. Secondary schools were also organised in all districts but as the principle of establishing 'centres of excellence' in all parts of the country as Central Schools was abandoned in the 1960s and has been revived only in the 1990s and promoted as Navodaya Schools as a part of the on-going education reforms, there is an inequitable distribution of education facilities in the country.

As presented in Table 2, there are currently four 'types' of schools. Most schools have primary classes, but IAB and IC schools have classes up to GCE (Adv. Level), type 2 schools have classes to GCE (OL) and type 3 schools are confined to primary education, and in the case of a very few schools, to primary and junior secondary education. These schools differ not only by type but also by the quality of education provided and by size of schools. Two thirds of the type 3 schools have less than 100 students and are small primary schools in disadvantaged locations. At the other end of the spectrum, 9.1% of IAB schools have over 3500 students and are the most prestigious and popular schools in the country and 85% of them have between 1000 and 3500 students.

Table2
Distribution of Schools

School Type	1991						2001					
	Total		Urban		Rural		Total		Urban		Rural	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1AB	513	5.1	196	23.2	317	3.5	600	6.1	237	28.0	363	4.0
1C	1510	15.1	159	18.8	1351	14.8	1767	17.9	185	21.9	1582	17.5
2	3582	35.8	297	35.4	3285	35.9	4190	42.4	292	34.5	3898	43.1
3	4393	43.9	194	22.9	4199	45.9	3334	33.7	132	15.6	3202	35.4
Total	9998	100.0	846	100.0	9152	100.0	9891	100.0	846	100.0	9045	100.0

Source: Annual School Census, 1991, 2001, Ministry of Education.

There is clearly congruence between the poor socio-economic background of children, sub-standard facilities in the schools they attend and their low achievement levels and consequent poor life chances. Urban-rural differences are reflected in Table 1, since

28% urban schools and only 4% rural schools are IAB schools and 15.6% urban schools and 35.4% rural schools are type 3 schools. The increase in the percentage of the IAB schools from 1991 to 2001 was higher in the urban environment than in the rural sector.

Ethnic-wise there are no disparities in education provision except in the plantation sector where a legacy of educational disadvantage has prevailed since the nineteenth century. Donor inputs chiefly from the Swedish International Development authority and the Netherlands Development Co-operation have enhanced the quantity and quality of provision of schools for children of plantation labour families although equal educational opportunity has yet to be achieved.

The pattern that has prevailed over the last six decades of a majority of co-educational schools, 96.8% in the 1990s, has contributed to gender equality in access to school education.

The resource constraints of a 'developing' economy have affected adversely the financial provision for educational facilities. Nevertheless other factors such as the reduction in social sector expenditure as a component of the structural adjustment programme since the early 1980s, and the subsequent escalation of defence expenditure in a context of civil war have contributed to a decline in the expenditure allocated for education. National expenditure on education declined from 5% in the 1960s to between 2% and 3% in the 1980s and was around 3.5% in the 1990s. Similarly the expenditure on education as a proportion of the national budget declined from around 20% in the 1960s and is currently around 10%. (Alailima, 1995; Aturupane 2000). Resource limitations clearly militate against the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of education facilities.

The Sri Lanka Country Assessment for the World Conference on Education for All held in 2000 to assess progress since the Jomtien Conference in 1990 used population projections to compute participation rates in 1998. It was estimated that (i) 94% of five year olds were admitted to Grade I in primary schools (ii) the net enrolment rate or age specific participation rate of the 5-9 age group was 95% and (iii) the survival rates of entrants to primary education in Grade 5 at the end of primary education was 96.5% in 1997 (Ministry of Education, 2000).

These micro studies have surfaced four-fold causes of non-schooling that demand remedial policies and action including supportive intervention programmes.

- (i) Despite the availability of free education and a wide range of incentives parents in low income communities are unable to bear the costs of other necessities such as exercise books, stationery and shoes. In the CENWOR Study (2001) children were willing to go back to school if these expenses were met. Parents or caregivers also claimed that fees were demanded despite state circulars that prohibited such requests. The poverty status of families also creates a demand for child labour to augment family income and for household labour for care of young siblings when mothers are employed.
- (ii) Conflict, illness or death in the family, often disrupt the education of children as they are deprived of family support. While parental aspirations for the education of their children are generally high in Sri Lanka as a consequence of reliance on schooling as an agent of upward mobility, a malaise regarding educational opportunities appears to pervade the households of the ultra poor in their perceptions of the intrinsic or instrumental value of education.
- (iii) School related factors have high visibility in predisposing dropping out of school or non-schooling. A gap exists between policy and action as a consequence of lethargy in implementing compulsory education regulations and assisting children to obtain affidavits in lieu of birth certificates where necessary. Children appear to be demotivated by the poor quality of instruction and facilities in their schools and their consequent failure at examinations, and as importantly, by the lack of empathy for the poor on the part of teachers, and the harsh punishment meted out despite circulars prohibiting corporal punishment. In remote rural areas and in large plantations distance to school exacerbated by lack of public transport facilities and security is a barrier to school attendance particularly for girls.

Factors that constrain individual participation are chronic illness and physical disabilities, and in a few instances, the reluctance of conservative families to send girls to school after menarche. The negative attitude to education on the part of children noted in studies appears to be a cumulative result of factors identified earlier as well as of the lack of role models in impoverished environments that would raise levels of individual aspirations.

5.0 Vulnerable Groups of Children

Among vulnerable groups of children whose educational needs require special consideration are the plantation children, children in families affected by armed conflict and disabled children as well as the less visible children who have been relegated to the shadows of educational policy and are victims of destitution or exploitation. They too need to be mainstreamed in educational institutions and in the case of some of these groups to be reclaimed from neglect and obscurity.

'Plantation children' or children of resident plantation labour families in their enclaves created by colonial policy were by-passed by the positive education policies implemented since the 1940s. They have been integrated in the national system of education during the last two decades and have benefited from special donor assisted programmes implemented to extend education opportunity and to improve their quality of education. (Jayaweera 1998; Gunasekere, 2001). Girls in these families were the most disadvantaged in access to education but recent enrolment data indicate that almost half the students in Grades 1 to 8 are girls (Table 3). Age specific participation rates are not available but they clearly continue to be a group that needs special support.

Table 3
Enrolment in Plantation Schools (2001)

	Grade 1 – 5	Grade 6 – 8	Grade 9 - 11
Total	92,514	38,187	24,499
Male	47,917	19,612	11,400
Female	44,597	18,575	13,099
% Female	48.2	48.6	53.5

Source: Annual School Census, 2001, Ministry of Education

Children in families affected by armed conflict, particularly death and displacement have been deprived of access to even basic education facilities and are denied the right to education. They need priority consideration in the on-going process of rehabilitation.

"Differently-abled children' or children with physical or mental disabilities have had little specific attention till the 1980s when the SIDA funded Special Education programme attempted to integrate children without severe disabilities in the formal school programme. Regrettably this programme has stalled with the removal of donor funds

and technical assistance. Special schools for the blind, deaf and dumb and mentally retarded have been organised by voluntary organisations over the years but are too few to meet the needs of children with such disadvantages. Household data in many studies indicate that such children in non-affluent families or conservative families tend to be made invisible by families and are denied access to education and to training programmes that would assist them to develop their potential. It has been estimated that 5% to 10% of the child population have special disabilities but that educational provision is adequate for less than 5% of them.

Child labour has become a subject of concern largely due to the activities of international organisations such as ILO to eliminate or at least reduce its incidence. Education has been effective as a major agent in reducing child labour as it is apparent that non-schooling predisposes child labour. Nevertheless children are perceived to be an economic assets in families in poverty and as seen in studies such as Jayaweera , Sanmugam and Ratnapala (2001). Child labour is a part of life in such families.

Overt child labour is likely to decline as a consequence of the introduction of compulsory school attendance for the 5-14 age group in 1998 and the amendment of labour legislation in 1999 making 15 years the minimum age of employment. Nevertheless the persistence of poverty among one-third of the families prevents its elimination. It was found in the Child Activity Survey and micro studies that schooling and economic activities continued in juxtaposition and the relative time devoted to economic activities would determine the difference between limited family help or children's need to supplement their own resources and physically exhausting and exploitative child labour.

It has to be noted too that children in low income families tend to be absorbed into the informal sector activities in their environment, such as vending or petty trade in urban locations, assisting cultivation in the rural sector and domestic service and manual wage labour everywhere. These low income low skill unstable activities merely perpetuate the cycle of poverty in their families and deprive them of educational opportunities that would improve their life chances. An even more critical problem is the use of children in what the ILO Convention terms 'hazardous occupations' such as those that expose them to pollution, ill health and death, and in "worst forms of child labour" such as commercial sex work, transport of illicit liquor and drugs, pornography, and petty thieving. It appears that the paltry information that studies have surfaced is the "tip of the iceberg."

It is increasingly evident that only 'Education for All' can even envisage the elimination of all forms of child labour resulting in economic and sexual exploitation in the household in domestic service and in work places.

Orphans, abandoned and destitute children are among those vulnerable to non-schooling, particularly as the few State Receiving Homes, the Children's Homes organised by voluntary organisations and the SOS villages are limited in number. Studies (Wijetunge, 1991) have observed that children in these Homes are sent to the nearest school and that even those whose education has been disrupted by family breakdown have been able to re-enter the school system. Education at least may help to compensate for the sense of isolation from family life experienced by these children and offer them a window of opportunity. The problem at issue is the inadequacy of such provision and the need for vigilance to protect children in some of these Homes from economic or sexual exploitation.

A different and negative scenario is seen in studies of Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools to which children guilty of often petty offences are sent by court order, ostensibly for rehabilitation. Children who are guilty of both minor theft and more serious vices and crimes are placed together in a common environment. Not only are these institutions under resourced, congested and impoverished in the quality of the services provided, the need for security measures to prevent the children from escaping from them has deprived them from access to schools in the neighbourhood while no facilities are provided for classes within the institutions. (Dias, 2001).

The last and most neglected group are the 'street children,' those who live alone or with their families on the streets. They have been driven to this situation by lack of housing for families in towns, pauperisation of families, conflict, and dysfunctionality in families. They work in ad hoc occupations in the urban informal sector and are exposed to incorporation or exploitation by gangs, to commercial sex exploitation and to substance abuse and crime. Organisations such as Redd Barna, UK Save the Children, and Sarvodaya have provided drop-in centres and even limited facilities for living to meet the needs of these children for food, security, basic literacy and numeracy and medical assistance. It has been estimated that there are around 10,000 street children, visible or invisible in urban streets, especially in Colombo, and facilities available to assist them to enter mainstream society are as a drop in the ocean.

Often the rubric 'Education for All' is concerned with school education but specially vulnerable group of children such as those identified in this paper need also to be brought into the ambit of the conceptualisation of 'education for all' from the perspectives of human rights and human dignity.

Summary

In this Session, we examined the commitment of Sri Lanka to ensure Education for All and the factors that constrain its achievement. We found that even the Governments' commitment has been particularly high and focused, as evidenced by the various measures that attempted to achieve this goal, especially by approving Compulsory Education Regulations, that the SACs and SAMCs had become dysfunctional by 2000. The National Education Commission had thus identified that the factor that contributed to this situation was the lack of active involvement by provincial education authorities and the reliance chiefly on officials of the under-resourced Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry and local Non-Formal Education Division officers to implement the regulations.

We also noted that drop-out rates had decreased and retention rates in 2001 were 97.6 per cent at the end of primary education and 83.0 per cent at the end of junior secondary education. Micro studies have found that out-of-school children in the country are concentrated in low income urban neighbourhoods, disadvantaged and remote villages, plantations and in recent decades, conflict affected areas. Reasons for non-attendance are chiefly poverty, and negative factors within the education system – distance to schools, lack of empathy on the part of teachers and principals, harsh punishment and poor quality of teaching, particularly in the "schools of the poor" (National Education Commission, 2003).

Only the effective implementation of Compulsory Education Regulations and the sensitization of officials, principals and teachers to the rights of every child to education irrespective of socio-economic background, in conjunction with the incentives offered for educational participation, will make it possible to achieve the universalization of education among the younger age groups as required by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which Sri Lanka ratified in 1990 and the Millennium Development Goals.

Objectives

Having gone through this session, you would be able to

- a) Explain why Education for All has to be given priority by any education system, from the global, national and local perspectives,
- b) List measures implemented by successive governments to achieve universal basic education,
- c) Specify the factors that impede the achievement of the above goal, and
- d) Identify measures which you as a teacher educator can take to raise awareness among student teachers to inculcate a commitment in their local school communities to improve enrolment in school.

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