

Title of the Study : **An Evaluation of the Divisional Schools Development Project & the Programme to Revamp Central School**
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Objectives / Terms of Reference

The Evaluation of the DSD Project and the programme to revamp central schools was conducted with the following objectives as specified in terms of reference related to this study –

1. Asses the objectives and scope of the two progammes
2. Evaluate the extent to which progress has been made in the implementation of the programmes with respect to
 - (a). upgrading of infra structure and physical facilities
 - (b). adequacy of physical facilities
 - (c). adequacy of qualified principals and teachers
 - (d). improvements in the qualitative aspects of education
 - (e). improvements in the performance of children in these schools
 - (f). acceptance of the schools by the community as “centers of excellence”
3. Identify reasons for shortfalls/ delays in implementation
4. Propose measures to expedite implementation of the program

Methodology

Selection of schools

School selected for this study comprised of all the 134 DSD schools where a programme of fast track development is reported to have been implemented and the 54 Central Schools established during the 1940 s. out of these to which the data collection instruments – the questionnaires, were sent, only 79 DSD schools (59%) and 28 Central Schools (51%) responded. Schools that responded included 12 Tamil Medium DSD schools an 6 Tamil Medium Central Schools.

A sample of 16 schools, two from each of the 8 provincials was selected for gathering data related to performance of students in any grade 10 classes in Mother Tongue and Mathematics in the year 1997 and 2001. Achievement score were received only from 9 of the 16 selected schools.

In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with the principals of purposively selected 3 DSD and 3 Central Schools.

Instruments of data collection and data collection procedure

Two questionnaires were developed to collect required data from the DSD and Central Schools. (Appendices, A and B) Sinhala and Tamil versions of the questionnaires were sent to principals of the Sinhala and Tamil medium schools. A letter form the Secretary, NEC requesting principals cooperation and a stamped addressed envelop for sending the competed questionnaires were also enclosed. In-depth interviews fixed after prior appointment were conducted in the schools with the principals of the selected schools and some key officials involved in the project by the consultant himself. These scope and implementation of the project. During the school visits, and effort was made to make general observations of the school plant and the physical facilities provided under the project.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Physical environment, buildings and other physical resources

1. An attractive physical environment is the first feature of a school that enables it to gain attention of its community.
2. another external factor that draws public attention to a school is the availability of facilities for co-curricular activities of varied sorts, including a good playground, active student

participation in these and public performances and displays that provide opportunities to children to display their talents and achievements.

3. it is necessary to undertake a case by case assessment of needed improvements to buildings (additions, repairs, class-room partitioning etc.), infra-structure facilities, school furniture and instructional and learning resources and to implement these improvements according to a plan that spells out targets, standards and time lines that should be adhered to.

Human resources

1. Considering the nature of special effort and commitment required during these formative stages, the schools should be treated as special as a special category deserving special attention in matters related to appointment, transfer, education and conditions of service of principals and teachers. This implies that,
 - a). these school need be equipped promptly with adequate numbers of these personnel with proven leadership, managerial and instructional skills and that the authorities responsible are impelled to give highest priority to this task,
 - b). the personnel are assured of a reasonable degree of stability in their stations of service,
 - c). the personnel are exposed to continuous programs of retraining/awareness raising to upgrade their skills for meeting the special demands and challenges placed on them, taking into consideration the fact that the children are mostly from poorer homes with low educational aspirations and poor educative environments,
 - d). the personnel are assured of suitable incentives for efforts made and rewards, for results shown.
2. The school deserve special attention in providing non academic staff, including a full complement of staff required for setting up an administrative unit-clerk, computer operator, peon etc; librarian, hostel staff (in case fo Central Schools); watcher and laborer.

Project Management

1. Project management capability of the Central DSD Unit a the Ministry of Education need to be strengthened with the appointment of adequate staff with appropriate qualifications and educational experience and empowering it to hold regional authorities at various levels accountable for effective implementation of specific tasks related to the project that have been devolved on them
2. An effective system of school supervision and project progress monitoring at various levels, with the primary responsibility assigned to the Central DSD Project Unit should be worked out and implemented
3. DSD Project Unit in collaboration with the other central and regional authorities should work out and implement regularly, education/awareness raising programmes for principals, teachers, regional level officers and the general public. Possibility of using mass media for sensitizing the general public to the new lease of life that is being injected to the DSD and Central Schools and the promises they hold for the people, should be explored.

State Policy

1. The policy with respect to admission of 5th standard scholarship awardees to popular schools and the financial benefits attached to this scholarship scheme seems to be in need of review.
2. The process of anticipated development is likely to take several years. This calls for relative stability of policies and practices that are being followed, irrespective of political changes.
3. The schools should continue to receive political leadership and patronage, whatever party is in power, taking note of the fact that these projects are national endeavors undertaken in our march to progress, in educational equity and excellence.