

# Address Local Educational Issues

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WITH the promulgation of Constitution of Nepal 2015, the country has adopted federal system of governance, conferring power and functions to local governments (LGs) specifically in the education sector. In the schedule 8, the powers and functions for the management and operation of school education is given to LGs whereas in the schedule 9, education sector is considered to be the concurrent right for all the three tiers of governments. In this context, the constitutional provision is contradictory until Acts and laws clearly define areas of absolute as well as concurrent powers among three tiers of governments.

## Ambivalence

Given this context, the constitutional provision has entailed ambivalence and ambiguities, and this has been more acute as the federal government has not yet enacted education Act from the parliament although it has been passed by the cabinet few weeks ago. Specifically, Education Act could have clearly specified powers and functions for different tiers of governments, clearing any confusion and gearing up their activities. Nevertheless, some local governments have taken up encouraging initiatives in the education sector out of constitutional and legal limitations and confusions, carving way outs in

their contexts.

In this context, Mercy Corps has taken up initiatives cooperating with 6 out of 12 local governments of Kailali district to prepare local education development plans. In particular, a series of workshops have been conducted with local level stakeholders. The workshops are focused at orienting stakeholders on 23 education related powers and functions as enshrined in *Local Governance (LG) Operation Act 2017*, method of writing education plans in their contexts, forming task forces for drafting, sharing and finalising education plans and policies. So far, workshops have been useful to generate local education issues and ways of resolving them, build consensus among stakeholders, and encourage LG to prepare education plans addressing local educational issues.

Thus, the responsibility has fallen on LG's shoulders to bring about required changes in the education sector through collective efforts,

The workshops with local government have been useful to bring forth local educational issues as it provides an open space for dialogues among stakeholders. In the workshops, participant's views, concerns and issues are collected, aiming to address them subsequently in the education plans and policies as appropriate at the local level. The participants have raised some genuine issues, some creative issues and some practical issues. Some of them will be briefly discussed in this article.

The first issue is teachers on private resource. They overwhelmingly point out that LG should work towards providing salary for teachers on private resource. In fact, there seems to be a significant proportion of such teachers as it has been the major issue for most LGs and schools.

While school education is declared free, schools are charging fee or are collecting money from parents in one way or other to pay for teachers on private resource. Therefore, managing teachers on private resource has been genuine concern at the local level.

The other issue that is often raised is introducing English as medium of instruction (EMI) even in the community schools from the early grades. In general, EMI is taken as a tool to compete with private schools and as a survival strategy to retain students in community schools. In addition, EMI is partly perceived as a means for quality education by school stakeholders – parents, teachers and students. However, little consideration is given for the need and availability of human resource, specifically teachers, whether they are capable of doing the work or not.

The third point raised at the local level is that LGs should undertake monitoring and supervision of schools on a timely basis while providing appropriate feedback for further improvement. In fact, this is the tool to make school or teachers accountable. Based on the monitoring and supervision, schools (as well as teachers) need to be rewarded for doing good job and be punished for not doing good. This is likely to create conducive environment for improving the existing school conditions in many ways.

Technical and vocational education is another focus. It is pointed out that technical education should be priority. After some years of school education, students should be able to do something on their own or be able to perform better in the job market from the perspective of

livelihood opportunities and so on. In this way, local education stakeholders see that education should be linked with improving life chances directly or indirectly. These are few examples as raised in the workshops on framing education development plans and policies.

Looking at these issues, some of them could be dealt with at the local level while others are beyond their jurisdiction. For instance, teacher management issue is still under the jurisdiction of federal government, so LGs could not be able to deal with the issue. Some of the issues as discussed are unique or innovative and specific to local contexts in the changing context. In dealing with such issues, there needs to be collective efforts of all three tiers of governments. In this sense, workshops have been useful to generate ideas to resolve them through discussions among stakeholders.

## Initiatives

The reforms in education should and can begin doing minor changes from the below. The measures to reform education sector begins from improving minor things from their own levels, instead of looking for a big support from somewhere else or big shift in policy. Thus, the responsibility has fallen on LG's shoulders to bring about required changes in the education sector through collective efforts, improving the condition of public schools and catering quality education for all.

The LG's effort can bring about positive changes if they wish to do so. There is a need that LG leadership takes up required initiatives of collaborating with stakeholders, communicating as clearly as possible therein creating positive atmosphere. In fact, the will power of LG leadership can contribute significantly reforming the education sector provided that they take up right initiatives in right time through right means.

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