



A STUDY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL MERGER PROGRAMME IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt of Primary school merger programme which reflects the policy of rationalization of school in Odisha. With the state Govt. finalizing modalities for merger of schools for system-wise transformation and quality learning, school education in Odisha is all set to go for a complete makeover. As per the roadmap prepared for rationalization of school education, around 4200 schools will be merged with schools located in the same campus or within the radius of 100 meters in the first phase before the next academic session. School listed for merger have students' enrollment of less than 20. The School and Mass Education Department of Odisha embarked on an ambitious program of primary school mergers by shutting down small village school and opening up larger centralized schools. The goal of the programme was to improve the teacher and building resources in an attempt to raise the human capital of students in poor rural areas although it was recognized that students would lose the opportunity to learn in the settings of their own familiar villages. Given the magnitude of the programme and the obvious mix of benefits and costs that such a program entails there has been surprisingly little effort to evaluate the impact of creating a new system that transfers students from school to school during their primary school period of education. In this paper, our overall goal is to examine the impact of the rural Primary School Merger programme.

KEYWORDS: *Primary School Merger Programme, Rationalization of Schools, Lead School, SLMC*

INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of elementary and secondary schools in the state in last two decades has undoubtedly resulted in expansion of access to schools and at present there is hardly any un-served habitation left in the state. But, so far as quality education is concerned there is still much room for improvement. One of the important factors affecting the pace of growth in quality education is lack of adequate number of teachers in many schools. Ironically many schools are running with very less number of teachers in our state although it has a highly favorable PTR i.e. 23:1 against the RTE Norm 40:1. This is the reason why a continuous effort has been made in last 10 years to rationalize the teachers. But rationalization of teachers alone has not solved the acute problem of vacancy of teachers in many schools especially those located in rural and remote areas. The following situations have

been found to be inhibitory in the stride towards the goal of quality education:

(a) Schools with very poor roll strength and those with better roll strength have been provided with equal number of teachers to satisfy the RTE norm.

(b) A large number of schools being there, the state has not been able to provide at least one teacher for each class in elementary schools as required in an ideal situation. Thousands of primary schools are running with only two teachers. This has forced the schools to adopt the multi-grade teaching method which probably slow down the pace of our journey towards the goals of quality education.

(c) Myriad instances are found where two or more schools with same class range or compatible range of classes are running from one campus or close vicinity.



(d) Existence of large number of schools splits and reduces the availability of material and intellectual resources for individual institutions. This also causes problem in monitoring and supervision. Deficiency in monitoring and supervision obviously affects the achievement of quality education.

RATIONALISATION OF SCHOOLS

Rationalization of schools being one of the most effective ways of solving the problems caused due to the above situations, steps have been taken in this direction in recent years by merging schools and closing down many schools with very poor roll strength. Although these steps have been taken in the right direction, a comprehensive and strategic approach to the problem was required to be worked out to ensure rational distribution of teachers in order to bring improvement in quality.

Thus formulating a comprehensive policy of rationalization of schools was under active consideration Govt. for a long period Govt. After careful considerations have been pleased to introduce a "Policy of Rationalization of Schools" with following details:

1. Scope:

All Govt. schools both elementary and secondary schools shall be covered under the policy. The horizontal / vertical integration among Block Grant School and GIA Schools will be considered separately with detail modalities.

2. Initiatives under the Policy:

The following major initiatives shall be undertaken for implementation of the policy:

(a) Merger of Schools:

Schools located in same campus or located within a distance of 100 meters shall be merged so as to form a single institution or a composite institution which may have both elementary and secondary wing.

Further, schools with very low roll strength shall be physically merged with other schools of same range of class or higher range of class even though the distance exceeds 100 meter. A primary school with roll strength less than 20 and Upper Primary School (class I-VIII) with roll strength less than 30 shall be treated as Low Roll Strength School for the purpose of merger. Similarly, in case of Secondary schools, a 2 class Secondary School with roll strength less than 30 and a 5 class / 7 class school with roll strength less than 50 shall be treated as Low Roll Strength Schools. But in case of EBB/TSP Blocks, the Primary Schools having roll strength less than 10, in case of U.P. Schools (I to VII Class) having roll strength less than 20, 2 class Secondary Schools having roll strength less than 20 and

for 5 class / 7 class Secondary Schools having roll strength less than 40 shall be treated as low roll strength schools for this purpose.

However, keeping the RTE distance norms for access in view, Geographical location of school natural barriers and other local factors, Govt. may decide to modify the minimum roll strength criteria for physical merger of Low Roll Strength Schools.

The merger shall be two types such as :

(i) Horizontal Merger:

Schools with same range of classes shall be merged to form a single school. The following mergers shall be treated as horizontal mergers.

- Merger of two or more Primary Schools
- Merger of two or more Primary Schools of any range
- Merger of two or more Secondary Schools of any range

(ii) Vertical Merger:

Schools with different range of classes, i.e. one with lower class range and the other with higher class range shall be merged to form a single or composite school. The following mergers shall be treated as vertical merger:

- Merger one or more Primary School with a 3 Class (VI- VII) or 8 class (I-VIII) Upper Primary School
- Merger one or more Primary School with a 5 Class (VI- X) or 7 class (IV-X) Secondary School
- Merger of one or more 3 Class Upper Primary Schools(VI-VIII) / 8 Class Upper Primary Schools (I-VIII)with a 2 Class(IX-X)/5Class (VI-X) / 7Class (IV-X) Secondary School
- Merger of one or more Primary Schools with a 2 Class (IX-X) Secondary School, provided that the linking classes are opened by Govt. in appropriate time to facilitate continuity of study of the students passing out of the top class of the primary school.

(b) Up-gradation of Schools:

In order to implement this policy of rationalization of schools Govt. may upgrade a primary School to Upper Primary School or an Upper Primary School to Secondary School in the following situations:

(i) To open link classes (VI-VIII) where it is decided to merge a Primary School with a two class Secondary School, the Primary School may be upgraded to an Upper Primary School.

(ii) Selection of Schools for Merger

The selection of schools for merger should be based on the following criteria-



- (a) All schools being merged need to be located in the same district
- (b) The schools must be Govt. managed schools
- (c) Madrasa, Sanskrit Toll, Special Schools shall not be selected for merger
- (d) The schools should be located in same campus or within 100 meter radius. In case of Low Roll Strength Schools, the 100 meter distance restriction shall not apply
- (e) Schools separated by State High Way, National High Way and Railway Line shall not be taken for merger.
- (f) Schools separated by rivers, forests, hills or any other natural barriers shall not be merged.
- (g) All aided School shall not be considered for merger with a Govt. School
- (h) In case of physical merger of Schools not located in the campus, the availability of class rooms in the School to which students to closed School shall be shifted must be verified by properly through the higher authorities.
- (i) In case of non-availability or required of class rooms to accommodate the students after physical merger, administrative merger may be taken up for the time being till construction of the additional Classrooms.

03. Implementation Modalities:

- (i) The Schools to be merged / upgraded shall be selected on the basis of UDISE data Vis-à-vis the above mentioned guidelines by a District Level Merger Committee (DLMC) under chairmanship OF Collector of the district. The DEO, DPC and all BEOs shall be the members of the committee and DEO will be the member convenor. If the committee so decides fresh verification of UDISE data may be made.
- (ii) The Schools considered for merger shall form the merger group and the School with highest class in the group will normally be the Lead School with which other Schools will merge. The Schools which will merge with the lead School shall be known as Satellite Schools. In case, there is more than one School to be the lead School DLMC will take a decision taking into account the number of classes, infrastructural and will strength in the order of such School, to select the lead School.
- (iii) The list of Schools for merger / up-gradation approved by the DLMC.
- (iv) A State Level Merger Committee (SLMC) under the chairmanship of SPD, OPEPA with SPD, RMSA and DEE as members will scrutinize the list. The Officer in charge of Access in OPEPA will convene the meetings of SLMC.

(v) After notification of Schools for merger, steps will taken by the DEO or BEO.

(vi) The records, stores, accounts movable properties of the Satellite Schools shall be handed over by the Headmasters of the concerned Schools to the H.M of the lead School.

(vii) The subsequent adjustment / transfer of employees in the Schools notified for merger shall be made as per instructions in the notification of merger.

(viii) In case of dispute in naming in the Nodal School after merger, the H.M of the Nodal School shall organize a joint meeting of the SMCs of merger group-.

(ix) After merger the Headmaster of the Nodal School will take steps to record the land and property of the all merged Schools in its name in revenue records.

04. Applicability of provisions of RTE Act

The distance norm for access for children from catchment villages / habitations as prescribed in RTE Act shall not be deviated in any case of physical merger of elementary Schools.

05. Applicability of Odisha Elementary Cadre Rules

The provisions of Odisha Elementary Cadre Rules in so far as service conditions of the teachers of elementary Schools are concerned shall not be deviated in any manner after the merger.

CONCLUSION

As per the roadmap prepared for rationalization of School Education around 4,200 School will be merged with Schools located in the same campus or within the radius of 100 meters in the first phase before the next academic session. Schools listed for merger have students' enrollment of less than 20. The decision after merger of Schools was taken under the Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital (SATH) programme launched by NITI Aayog in three states including Odisha. Director of Elementary Education, Chudamani Seth said earlier Schools with students' strength of less than 10 were closed, but now Schools having less than 20 students will be merged with nearby Schools. "Tentatively we have found 4200 Schools which can be integrated with the next Schools. If it is a Primary School, it will be merged with Upper Primary and the latter will be clumped together with High School. Work has already begun and we are planning to complete the merger process by end of March" he said.



It was found that more than one Govt. Educational institution having different heads are functioning from one campus or adjacent campuses with independent identities and there was lack of co-ordination among these institutions while undertaking different activities like annual functions and sports meets.

The Director informed that along with the merger they would go for reduction of out of School children and dropouts in ten identified districts including Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Bolangir, Subarnaopur, Kalahandi and Nuapada besides Gajapati and Kandhamal. The School and Mass Education (SME) Department is, infact, planning to merge around 21,300 Schools by March'2020 as per the S A T H guideline. Though Odisha has 25,477 primary Schools and 2,554 upper Primary Schools with students' enrollment of less than 60, the priority will be given for merger of Schools located within the radius of one K.M.

The state has prepared a roadmap for conducting a detailed diagnostic exercise and designs a customized School Education system. The roadmap will be implemented through the State Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) which will do tracking, monitoring and course correction. Apart from Odisha, the SATH Programme is also being implemented in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.

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