International Conference on
Inclusive Quality Education
Towards Sustainable Development Goal - 4
and Lessons from the Kerala Model
17-18 June 2017
India International Centre, New Delhi, India

Dr. M. Hamid Ansari, Hon’ble Vice-President of India (Centre) at the Inaugural Session of the International Conference. From Left: Dr. George Mathew, Ms. Foroogh Foyouzat, Princess Ashwati Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bayi and Dr. Ash Narain Roy
The 1817 edict on education in Kerala marked the beginning of progressive state policies in education. The spread of education set the stage for social and economic progress that contributed to overcoming traditional inequalities of caste, class and gender. It also enhanced the public’s capacity to demand better public services. As demonstrated by the Kerala model, educational and social development can take place even at lower levels of economic growth provided progressive public policies are put in place.”

— Delhi statement adopted at the two-day international conference

The statement said that effective implementation of educational policies, legislation and programmes on equity and inclusion depends on recognition and strengthening of key drivers of change such as good governance, efficient administrative support, transparency and accountability of results, the significance of inter-sectoral cooperation for an inclusive and holistic child-friendly approach to education and partnerships/alliance-building for consolidating efforts towards achieving SDG4 targets including leveraging of resources.

Honourable Vice President of India, Dr. Hamid Ansari was the Chief Guest. Dr. Ansari inaugurated the International conference on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the Royal Rescript by Rani Gowri Parvathi Bayi, Queen of Travancore, (17 June, 1817).

According to the Royal Rescript “The State shall defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects...”

This edict and the numerous social movements that erupted in the region to demolish caste inequities and universalise education among all classes of people resulted in catalysing the educational advancement of Kerala. It was the first Indian state to pass an Act mandating free, universal, and compulsory primary education, enabling it to achieve total literacy in 1991 and the highest ranking on the UN’s human development scale in India.

DAY I: 17 JUNE 2017

Opening Session

Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), welcomed the delegates and other participants at the opening session.

Dr. Anjana Mangalagiri, Senior Fellow, ISS, stated that the broad aim of the conference was to bring together success stories like those of Kerala and ongoing efforts in other countries to guide the achievement of the SDG 4 targets. The specific objectives she said, were to deliberate on the significance of key drivers of positive change in the countries
represented; to develop a consensus amongst participating stakeholders towards an agenda for action which would be reflected in the ‘Delhi statement,’ to encourage the research and development of knowledge and documentation of best practices, undertake research, and promote the creation of networks at regional and national levels.

The guest of honour Princess Ashwati Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bayi of the Travancore royal family, started with the Upanishadic shloka ‘Asadoma sadgamaya...’ (‘Lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality’). She called to remember ‘with gratitude rather than pride,’ the visionary Rescript issued by her ancestor Rani Gouri Parvati Bayi and subsequent reforms brought about by her illustrious successors. She pointed to the early outcomes of Travancore’s education model that had propelled women to the pinnacles of academic achievement and public life - such as Dr. Mary Poonnen Lukose, first Surgeon-General of an Indian state, Anna Chandy, the first woman magistrate and High Court judge, and M. Fathima Beevi, the first woman judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court of India.

Prof. Achuthsankar S. Nair, Professor, University of Kerala, gave a visual presentation titled: ‘A Millennial Scan of Kerala Education’ spanning over 1000 years of educational development and social transformation in Kerala, from the Kanthaloorshala (‘India’s Oxford’) of a 1000 years ago and traditional village schools like the Ashaan Pallikoodams and Kalaris to modern educational institutions set up by British administrators and Christian missionaries, established under the patronage of Travancore’s royal houses. While the rescript of 1817 was a corner stone, from the 1850s onwards, popular movements led by the Catholic priests, social activists, religious reformers created a great churning of opinion against the hierarchical social norms that prohibited access of lower castes to
schools. By the turn of the 20th century, the transformation of the school education sector had been completed with almost 100 percent school-going age-cohorts enrolled in schools.

Renowned Malayalam playwright and winner of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award, Prof. Omcherry N.N. Pillai, spoke about the influence of literature on social development in Kerala, highlighting two phases. The first was the shift from classical Sanskrit influence to the popularly spoken Malayalam language by the Father of the Malayalam language, Ezhuthachan, who revolutionised the Malayalam language. The second was with writers like Thakazhy, Kesava Dev, Ponkunnam Varky, V.T. Bhattathiripad and they wrote what was called progressive literature which reflected the realities of life, challenging the social system that existed then. This phase was followed by a number of renowned novelists, playwrights and poets.

**Inauguration**

The inaugural ceremony began with the National Anthem.

Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences in his welcome address said that if Kerala today stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Western nations in human development and quality of life, it is largely thanks to the socio-political legacy of women rulers of Travancore. How to make education inclusive? He quoted philosopher Hannah Arendt as saying, “meritocracy contradicts the principle of equality”. The challenge before educational institutions is to generate knowledge appropriate to India.

Vice-President of India, Dr. Hamid Ansari, inaugurating the conference said, “education played an important part in Kerala’s transition from a caste-ridden society into one of our most egalitarian states. The initiative was taken two centuries earlier and forms the backdrop to this conference.”

Dr. Ansari cited Kerala’s high rankings on the human development index owing to its consistent emphasis in public policy on education. According to Dr. Ansari, ”Kerala’s socio-economic indicators approximate to those of developed countries - a testimony to the transformative nature of mass education. However, in the present global scenario, for transition of Kerala into a true knowledge society, it needs to remain competitive and focus on economic activities which make use of its educated workforce, democratic institutions and favourable natural environment. Dr. Ansari stated that developing “twenty-first century skills” like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, digital literacy, familiarity with new technologies and ability to cope with rapidly changing workplaces are important. He emphasized that “robust, inclusive and high quality education systems - underpinned by qualified, professionally trained, motivated and well-supported teachers - will be the cornerstone of this effort.”
In her opening statement, Ms. Foroogh Foyouzat, Chief, Field Services, UNICEF-India, said that “Equity is at the heart of the SDGs - reaching out to the disadvantaged, leaving no one behind, to make a world that is more inclusive and equitable.” She reiterated the criticality of early childhood development and quality pre-school education as the foundational stage for learning and elimination of disparities right from the start. She noted that while significant progress has been made in enrolling children in primary education, there are still 6 million children out of school in India. Child marriage and child labour continue to pose critical barriers to access and completion of the elementary education cycle, particularly for children belonging to marginalized communities. Further, the need today is for a greater focus on learning and in addressing factors contributing to inequalities in learning. “The world is looking to India,” said Ms. Foroogh, “because achievement of the SDGs in India is important for the success of the SDGs globally.”

The plenary session-I: Significance of Governance, Cross-sectoral Cooperation and Alliance-building in delivering quality education for marginalised and neglected children and youth

This session was chaired by Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer, former director, UNESCO, Bangkok. According to Dr. Sheldon, “not that the parents are too poor, it’s the school that’s too expensive. It’s not that the parents are not aware of the importance of education; the school is not demonstrating the importance of education to the parents. It’s not that the children are too far from the school; the school is too far from the child. It’s not that the children don’t speak the language of the school; it’s that the school doesn’t speak the language of the child.” He underlined the necessity of a shared understanding between families and the government on reasons for failure and design programmes from this basis. Children do not usually drop out of school — rather, many are pushed out of school. Sheldon concluded that “equity, inclusion and sustainability have moved from human
resource development to a fundamental position of rights – ‘education’ means education for all, at all times, and under all circumstances.”

Dr. Cream Wright, president and CEO, Redi4change and former Global Chief of Education, UNICEF, gave a historical overview of the various platforms that held stakeholder deliberations on education and sustainable development. According to Wright, Global Encounters for Education for All highlighted major milestones - from the optimistic enthusiasm of the Jomtien EFA Declaration of 1990 to the sober deliberations on country failures to achieve EFA targets at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, which led to inclusion of educational goals as an integral part of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in September 2000.”

Ms. Ameena Mohammad Didi, Education Specialist, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), Kathmandu, gave an overview of the regional context of education in South Asia using the UIS data on out-of-school children, primary and lower secondary enrolments, student achievement levels and public investment in early childhood and school education. Projections from historical trends suggest that over 20 million children may still be out of school in 2030 and the ‘learning crisis’ affecting secondary education may deepen if countries do not accelerate efforts and investments to meet SDG4 targets.

Mr. Abhimanyu Singh, chair, Foundation for Education and Development, Jaipur, and former director, East Asia Cluster, UNESCO, Beijing, gave a view from the ground based on work with communities in rural India where the programme, Doosra Dashak works to empower marginalized adolescents. Detailed social mapping of villages is undertaken,
with involvement of the most underprivileged communities to identify causes for lack of demand for primary education and the discriminatory social constraints they face. Recounting his experience in international forums from Dakar to the MDG deliberations, he asserted the need to move from national levels to the ground where communities live. Prof. R. Govinda, J.P. Naik Distinguished National Fellow (ICSSR), Council for Social Development, New Delhi and former Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, spoke on issues, challenges and the road ahead for India to deliver on SDG 4. He called for a change of narrative by moving the focus from enrolment figures to assessing learning outcomes. To achieve quality with equity, the increasing inequality within the education sector needs to be addressed. The roles of the state and private agencies need to be redefined and controls, regulations and investment restructured to develop a new paradigm of public provisioning. Curricula needs to be re-focussed to strengthen mathematics and science across all levels as in other countries. Technical education that merely produces low levels of skills and cheap labour for international markets must be replaced with innovation and R&D-oriented education.

The plenary session-II: Kerala Model of Educational Development - Lessons in Governance, Cross-Sectoral Linkages and Partnerships

Chairing the session Mr M. A. Baby, former Minister of Education, Government of Kerala (GoK), pointed out two factors that had led to the widespread demand for education. The first was the role played by early social and religious reformers such as Ayyankali and his crusade to get dalit children, especially girls into schools, Nidhirikal Mani Kathanar, the Syrian Malabar Christian priest who had asked churches to melt their gold and silver assets to pay for schools for the poor, Vaikom Mohammad Bashir who pointed out the contradiction between rich churches and poor parishioners, and Sri Narayana Guru who exhorted underprivileged communities to acquire their social and economic strength through education. Secondly, two landmark interventions by the state government on a) land reforms, and b) educational reforms raised demands for schools following the newly-acquired land entitlements and legislation that made primary education free and compulsory. During 2006-2011, the LDF government encouraged three-tier panchayats (local governments) to support the initiatives to improve the quality and infrastructure of schools. This had a remarkable impact in improving school education.

The state government projected an alternate trajectory for education by building alliances and partnerships between the strong cooperative movement in Kerala with the state government instead of involving private and corporate profit-makers which could adversely impact educational values.
Dr. Michael Tharakan, Chairperson, Kerala Council of Historical Research, outlined four distinguishing features of education that the Royal Rescript 1817 promised: universal, free, modern and primary. Nominal freedom was however denied to a significant number of people of the state because it took a few decades to release them from slavery. The educational efforts by the state following the Rescript, was modern (different from the traditional schooling available in the Kudipallikoodams), relatively free and mostly primary. The schools run by Western Protestant Christian missionaries and those partly by government aid followed this pattern. It was only in the second half of the 19th century that a remarkable increase in the number of schools was witnessed, promoted by the vernacular primary school scheme introduced by the then Dewan Sir T. Madhava Rao with a further impetus in the early twentieth century.

The Kerala State Planning Board member Dr. B. Eqbal presented a critique of the current state of education in Kerala. Despite having the highest density of research institutes in the country and the highest public investment in social sectors, the state has reached an unsustainable level of support to educational development due to an absence in the growth of both agriculture and industry. Stagnation in primary and secondary sectors has meant a disconnect between productive sectors of the economy and the educational sector. In Europe, the US and China on the contrary, economic wealth generated was pumped back into social sectors and employment opportunities created. He also felt that the state had missed the bus in developing information technology and biotechnology, despite its rich traditional knowledge systems and its wealth of natural biodiversity. Graduates have been de-skilled in traditional knowledge, skills and competencies, including in agriculture, despite the existence of a research institute on crops in Kerala.
Dr. Prerna Singh, Mahatma Gandhi Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Brown University, USA, drew parallels between educational reform and social development in diverse settings in India, contending that a high degree of social development was achieved in Kerala in spite of relatively low levels of economic development for a number of reasons. She contended that there is a critical but under-appreciated link between cultural and social policies in post-independent India. Policies for cultural revival in modern Kerala underpinned by state support, created a sense of pride and common identity among hitherto diverse groups of Malayali-speaking people of the three regions of Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. She asserted that Kerala’s nascent social development at independence reached its present high level due to a strong degree of sub-nationalism in the state.

The day’s proceedings closed with an evening recital of Hindustani classical, Kirana Gharana and Nazrul Geet by Dr. Samia Mahbub Ahmad, an exponent of Hindustani classical vocal music.
The Plenary Session III: Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for implementing the SDG4 Agenda

This session was chaired by Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives & Sri Lanka.

Mr Aoyagi spoke of the international coordination mechanism for education in the 2030 Agenda, a coalition of UN and multilateral agencies. Its steering committee was due to meet in New York to discuss how developed countries could support planning and implementation of SDG4 in developing countries. UNESCO had been working closely with SAARC countries since 2014 when the Second SAARC conference of Education Ministers had met and adopted the New Delhi Declaration for SDG4 goals. The third meeting will be held in August 2017 in the Maldives. It would announce an Action Plan for the South Asia region. Hence the present conference was both timely and critical.
Ms. Rasheda Choudhury, Executive Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh, argued that although the Dakar Declaration of 2000 had paved the way for civil society's involvement in policy making and implementation, in reality this has been at best, a tokenism. While governments, donors, CSOs, academia and media frame or influence policies, the real stakeholders - students, parents and teachers are being left out of the dialogue. Was it really possible to ‘work together’ across the hierarchy of institutions as several panellists had suggested, she asked? The major challenges she identified were: 1. Indiscriminate commercialization of education, treating it as a commodity to be sold, not a public good; 2. digital divide between well-endowed schools and most government schools; and 3. rapid expansion of school networks, a consequence of which was reduction in quality of teaching and learning. Speaking of the ‘democratic deficit’ in developing countries, Ms. Choudhury said it posed a challenge for resource mobilization on quality education for all. She had filed a writ petition in the High Court of Dhaka when the son of a poor rickshaw-puller was refused admission in a non-government secondary school that was subsidized by the government. Many such schools preferred to return their subsidies to government rather than admit children from disadvantaged families. This phenomenon becomes a challenge for the poor families and also for governments having limited budget for education.

Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi pointed that the difference between SDGs and the MDGs is the greater involvement of people as stakeholders. The message that ‘we can do it’ must be disseminated widely so that policy makers listen to the voice of the people.

Dr. Abraham Joseph, international advisor, Global Programs and Partnership, University of Okhlahoma, stated that partnership platforms could be constituted with a decentralized architecture according to the country’s state and local needs respectively. The impact will be more pronounced when it is a bottom-up approach, putting local needs first. At the country level, coordination may be ensured through a variety of existing mechanisms or partnerships. Working with NGOs that have direct association with local communities are able to provide practical insights to the particular education needs of the area. The nature and dynamics of existing education sector coordination mechanisms vary across very diverse country settings. SDG4 commitments may require the strengthening and adaptation of existing mechanisms to ensure they are truly sector-wide, inclusive and country led, he said.

Dr. Ravi Raman, member, Kerala State Planning Board, underlined the idea of the ‘right to have rights’ by Hannah Arendt who argued that even when juridical rights are assured, these rights would not be complete unless the marginalized could exercise them as political rights. The subaltern politics of missionaries and social reformers were instrumental in challenging the system of inequality in education, advancing enlightenment and modernity. Kerala has taken a step further in democratising formal democracy into one of people’s.
Civil society in Kerala has been continuously democratizing formal democracy to meet the challenges, whether in education or health. This involves teachers, local intellectuals, and the students themselves taking up critical roles in shaping their own future and becoming a formidable knowledge power in the civil society.

Mr. A.J. Philip, CEO, Deepalaya, New Delhi, described a successful experience of CSO-government partnership between Deepalaya and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation in running three schools. The case highlighted how the partnership led to leveraging resources in terms of utilizing existing ones such as school buildings and teachers and strengthening these further by the CSO; bringing in the CSO’s comparative advantage to improve the quality of learning that led to retention of children in school; promoting parents’ participation in their children’s education and even going further to conduct literacy classes for them. Citing the experience with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) which took 5-6 years to allot land for Deepalaya’s school and another 18 years to issue a school building completion certificate, Mr Philip explained how red-tapism and governmental dysfunction are real barriers for healthy educational development.

The core of the SDG4 and its key targets were deliberated upon and discussed in four parallel sessions that were held on both days of the conference. Each of the session was on a specific theme related to SDG4 as shown below. Nearly 50 papers were presented by participants belonging to research and academic institutions, international and national NGOs, experts and practitioners. Apart from discussion on barriers and challenges to achieve the SDG4 targets, the sessions also provided an opportunity of learning lessons from ongoing best practices both in India and other countries. Discussions veered around the drivers of change

Theme 1: Governance of Public Policy for Equity, School Completion and Quality in Education - Chaired by Mr. Ramachandra Rao Begur, Senior Education Specialist, UNICEF India, New Delhi.

The session focused on challenges and barriers to education faced by out of school children, girls and marginalized communities in accessing and completing school. Equity, inclusion and quality dimensions of education and children’s learning underlined the parameters for addressing the right to quality education for all children.

Theme 2: Governance of Teacher Quality: Policies on Teacher Professional Development - Chaired by Dr. K. Ramachandran, NUEPA, New Delhi.

The session focused on the significance of teacher quality on children’s learning and deliberated on the need for reform in teacher professional development and teacher recruitment, teacher preparation, mechanisms for continuous teacher support.
Identification of teacher competencies to assess teacher performance and transparency in teacher management and accountability.

Theme 3: *Cross-sectoral linkages for equity and learner quality* - Chaired by Prof. Namita Ranganathan, Head and Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Delhi.

In order to reinforce access and equity in education and to ensure a holistic approach to children’s education, the session highlighted issues that impact upon children’s development and learning. Many of these issues require cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination between the education and other sectors, important conditions to ensure equity, inclusion and learner quality but which continue to be neglected by policy, decision makers and implementors. In this context, presentations highlighted the need for attention to early childhood development and quality pre-school education, child friendly schools that include not only child centred teaching/learning practices but equally, provide an environment with basic infra-structural facilities in particular, the provision of water and sanitation, basic health services. It also highlighted inclusion issues of children with disabilities and discussed the promotion of girls’ education through mechanisms that encourage not only their participation and school completion but also ensure protection from discriminatory social and cultural practices both in and out of school.

Theme 4: *School as Foundation for Inclusive Skills Development and Social Change* - Chaired by Prof. N.V. Varghese, Acting Vice-Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

Discussion focused on bridging initial education with life –long learning and skills development to contribute to equity and quality of human resource development both in terms of increasing productivity and enhancing quality of lives especially amongst
adolescents from marginalized groups, girls and those with disabilities. Education systems have traditionally measured whether children go to school rather than whether learners benefit from their schooling experience. At the same time, more education does not automatically translate into better skills. Deliberations focused on the many challenges that mire the field of technical/vocational education such as mismatch in employment between demand and supply leading to self-financed work, lack of quality vocational education and lack of industrialization. Technological education must transform into employability. Planning of skills development and technical education must link with marketability. Coordination with industry, especially the formal sector, is important to strengthen and ensure employability.

The Plenary Session IV chaired by Dr R. Govinda, presented key issues, recommendations and way forward from the four parallel working sessions presented by the moderators of the plenary session on key points and take-aways from their respective sessions summarized succinctly by the chair.

**Valedictory Session**

Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament, India) was the chief guest of the valedictory session and Dr. Thomas Isaac, Finance Minister, Government of Kerala, guest of honour. Dr. Anjana Mangalagiri presented the Delhi Statement.

In his address, Dr Thomas Isaac said that the conference was being held at a significant time – “not only was it the 200th anniversary of the proclamation of the Royal Rescript of Travancore, it was also a time when many changes were taking place for the better in Kerala, particularly in the education sector.” Redistributive policies, attention to universal basic needs of education and decent health care and a strong demand from below have raised human development indices of the state to international levels. Concerted inter-sectoral efforts by the state government have contributed to improving the public education system and their popularization. Deliberations from the conference would however be extremely useful in guiding many more policy changes that are being envisaged in Kerala. The public education system needs to be strengthened and protected through major investments in better science laboratories, support for IT and infrastructure. While the development-oriented shift in education in Kerala was due to demand from the people, he underlined the importance of government’s commitment to expenditure and public participation, critical for Kerala society.

Prof. P. J. Kurien congratulated the ISS for organising the conference and celebrating the bi-centenary of Kerala’s royal rescript. He raised critical questions on the slow progress since the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals of
2000. For India the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution 1949 was a landmark. However, the allocation of at least six per cent GDP on education still remains a far cry not only in India but in most of South Asia. Poverty and low investment in education by the states will pose a challenge for the achievement of SDG4 targets. He cited examples from Kerala’s history that offer important lessons in the promotion of mass education by missionaries and the cascading effect across other communities that led to the growth of a number of organizations across communities and the forging of partnerships with the government. The contribution of Kerala’s Communist parties not only led to organizing the working class and agricultural labour but also created awareness on education as a fundamental right. In his closing remarks, Prof Kurien reminded the audience that Nelson Mandela had called education “the best tool for progress” and John Galbraith, former US ambassador to India had said, “Invest in education – all the rest will follow.”

Dr Ash Narain Roy, Director, ISS, in his vote of thanks, said that Kerala became a model not because of any golden glow of myths but thanks to the enlightened rulers and the State's cross-sectional coordination, partnership and alliances among the stakeholders. However, he lamented that education in India, today, suffers from deliberate untruths and quality inclusive education in India remains a chimera.
The conclusion of the conference was marked by a scintillating performance of Mohiniyattam, a classical dance form of Kerala by Kalaimamani Smt. Gopika Varma, member of the Travancore royal family. The dance depicted scenes from the Mahabharata epic featuring its two main women protagonists, Draupadi and Gandhari.