

**National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)
– A Policy Intervention
for
Inclusive Development
and Mainstreaming of Marginalized
Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs)**

*With Special Reference to Muslim Community and
based upon
Sachar Committee's Recommendations (2006)*

Dinesh Singh Bist



National Institute of Open Schooling
A-24/25, Institutional Area, Sector-62, Noida (U.P.)

**National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)
– A Policy Intervention
for
Inclusive Development
and Mainstreaming of Marginalized
Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs)**

*With Special Reference to Muslim Community and based upon
Sachar Committee's Recommendations (2006)*

Dinesh Singh Bist



National Institute of Open Schooling
A-24/25, Institutional Area, Sector-62, Noida (U.P.)

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) - A Policy Intervention for Inclusive Development and Mainstreaming of Marginalized Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs)

*With Special Reference to Muslim Community and Based upon
Sachar Committee's Recommendations (2006)*

*Dinesh Singh Bist**

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), formerly known as National Open School (NOS), was set up as an autonomous organization under Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, in November 1989 for attaining a three fold mission of assisting the Government of India in achieving Universalisation of Education, in promoting greater equity and justice in society and for helping in the evolution of a learning society. (MOA of NOS Society, Section xxxiii, page 6)

In strategic terms, NIOS has a one-line charter of “Reaching the Unreached” in the field of School Education through open and distance education mode, more specifically to provide relevant, continuing and developmental education upto pre-degree level to all those who do not and/or cannot attend formal school system. Its prioritized client group, thereby includes important but marginalized Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs) like SCs/STs, Minority population (basically Muslims), OBCs (Other Backward Classes), women and girl child, rural populations, urban poor, disabled and disadvantaged groups in society, who have to be included in the educational mainstream by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode at the school level. The advantages of ODL over formal school system in terms of flexibility in selection of courses, pace of study, place of study, multiple attempts at pursuing examinations, vertical and horizontal mobility across formal and open systems through Transfer of Credit (TOC) and equivalence coupled with far much wider reach, and far less requirement of resources

* *Dinesh Singh Bist, IPS is presently Secretary, National Institute of Open Schooling, New Delhi. He is also holding additional charge of Director, Student Support Services Department.*

are well documented both in theory and practice, both within India and at international levels. Further NIOS's complimentary role as a "safety net" for dropouts from formal school system (School Education Boards) is also well known but the role of NIOS as an effective, fast emerging-ICT friendly, alternative to formal school system, particularly in the context of developing countries, is less known. More importantly the role of NIOS as an instrument of policy intervention by the State Government/Government of India (GOI) to bring about "inclusiveness" and "mainstreaming" of marginalized Socio-Religious Communities (basically Muslims) into the school level educational mainstream is even more understated and lesser known at most levels of policy making and planning in this field as well as by the civil society at large.

This paper is an attempt to explore the potential role of NIOS as an effective instrument of policy intervention by the state, for inclusion of the Muslim Community into the educational mainstream of India, more specifically in the light of the recommendations of Sachar Committee (2006). It is pertinent to mention that the Sachar Committee pushes for interventions by state through the formal schooling system, for implementing its recommendations. It does not refer to the use of Open Distance Learning mode for improving the educational status of Muslims in India at school level. However in view of the vast potential of ODL in general, and NIOS in particular, an attempt has been made in this paper to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee in the framework of Open Distance Learning system. Undoubtedly, the State will have to continue to make several other policy interventions through Formal School System and other institutions for implementing these recommendations. However this paper is confined only to those issues raised by Sachar Committee Report and recommendations given therein, which are directly concerned with the state of education of Muslims in India upto school level only.

2. Sachar Committee – Empirical Findings

The Government of India had constituted a High Level Committee (HLC) headed by Sh. Rajindar Sachar (hereafter called Sachar Committee) on 9th March 2005 to identify the areas of intervention by the Government of India to address relevant issues relating to the social, economic and educational status of Muslim Community. Subsequently Fatmi Committee was set up by MHRD to suggest ways and means of implementing the

suggestions given by the Sachar Committee. While Chapter 4 (sections 2,3,4,5,8 and 9) of the Report focus on issues related to education of Muslims in India at school level, Chapter 12 makes general and specific (education) policy recommendations.

Sachar Committee has recognized the role of education in facilitating social and economic development. Improvement in educational attainments will not only enhance productivity (through improvement in educational and skill base) and economic empowerment of SRCs but also augment their democratic participation of minorities/marginalized sections), upgrade their access to health and other quality of life indicators. More specifically, the Sachar Committee rightly feels that in view of the high growth phase of the economy (9%+ p.a), this is an opportune time to utilize new opportunities for skill development and education. It highlights the critical importance of access to education to take benefit from the emerging opportunities that are accompanied by the present phase of growth of Indian economy.

2.1 The finding of the Committee reveal that Muslim Community has experienced educational deprivation both in absolute and relative terms and more importantly, the community itself feels discriminated against and is getting marginalized increasingly.

2.2 In absolute terms, the educational deprivation of Muslim Community is reflected in :

- i). The levels of literacy, which is 65.1% for the country as a whole and 59.1% for Muslims as SRCs. As Socio-Religious Communities, only SCs/STs have lower levels of literacy at 52.8%. This becomes even starker, when “All Others” as Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs) [meaning excluding Muslims and SC/ST from the total] shows 70.8% as literacy rate as compared to literacy rates of Muslims and SCs/STs as SRCs.
- ii). In terms of time trends for literacy also, Muslims have lagged behind. In fact SC/STs as SRCs have increased their literacy rate fastest and overtaken Muslims as SRCs at All India Level on this scale by mid-90s. The literacy gap of Muslims vis-à-vis “All Others” as SRCs has in fact widened after mid-90s.
- iii) In terms of comparison across Socio-Religious Communities in terms

of MYS (Mean Years of Schooling), it can be seen that MYS for Muslim children (7-16) is lowest at 3 years and four months in comparison to 4 years, as national average, which in turn is also unsatisfactory. A comparison across SRCs both by gender and place of residence also reveals consistently lower levels of MYS for Muslim community.

2.3 For catching relative educational deprivation, various qualitative indicators have been used by Sachar Committee such as enrollment rates and attendance rates. NSSO and NCAER (2004-05) figures show that enrollment rates have increased for all Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs) and within that also SC/STs (95%) have overtaken Muslims (65%) but gaps are narrowing down.

2.3.1 As per the Sachar Committee Report (Chapter 4, Section 5, Page 59) differential educational attainment at all '4' levels of school education are defined as follows:

- (1) Primary (6-12) : with at least '5' years of education in + 12 years groups at least;
- (2) Middle level : (+15 years with at least '8' years of education)
- (3) Matriculation (Matriculation Completion Rate (MCR)) :- +17 years and at least 10 years of schooling;
- (4) Higher Secondary :- +19 years and at least 12 years of school education.

The differentials in school education attainment (as defined at '4' stages above) across Socio-Religious Communities show that Educational Attainment (E.A) of Muslims are close to or slightly higher than those of SC/STs but much lower than other Socio-Religious Communities like (Hindu) OBCs and significantly lower in "all others" at All India level. This also worsens in relative terms for Muslims as one moves from lower to higher levels of school education, and also across gender and place of residence.

2.3.2 In terms of Matriculation Completion Rates (MCR), 26% of the population in 17+ years are matriculates at All India level, which comes down to 17% for Muslims.

2.3.3 The findings of Sachar Committee are that dropout rates amongst Muslims are highest at the level of Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary compared to all Socio-Religious Communities and the probability of completing different levels of School Education has increased for all Socio-Religious Communities (in between 1983-2000) but Muslims and SC/STs have much lower probability than “All Others” for completing different levels of School Education.

3. Sachar Committee – Key Issues and Recommendations

Sachar Committee Report has highlighted that the “School Education” is the “biggest hurdle”, for the Muslims, in improving their educational attainment. Within school education, it has identified “Elementary Education” as the stumbling block, which hinders access of Muslims to higher education/technical education, thereby restricting their employment and income generating potential. “This is reflected in the poorest share of Muslims in streams having brightest employment prospects, having serious long term implications for economic empowerment of the community and also for the country as a whole” {Sachar Committee Report page – 85}. This is reiterated by the Committee in its Report, in Chapter-12/Section-3, page 243) on Recommendations by saying that “once the hurdle of School Education is crossed, the differences across most Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs) in the likelihood of completing graduate studies narrow down and are at times not very significant. Therefore a sharper focus on school education is desirable”.

According to the Sachar Committee Report “Primary Education seems to be the major hurdle for School Education” (Chapter-4 section-5 page 62). According to the Sachar Committee, (in chapter-4 section-9, page-79) “the advantage of providing education (especially primary education) in mother tongue is undisputed as it enables the child to understand and apply skills more easily. According to it “the non-availability of education in Urdu language is seen by some as one of the reasons for low educational status of Muslims in India. A substantial number of Urdu speaking people in most of the states made this point during Committee’s interaction with them”. The percentage of Urdu speakers is quite significant in some of the important states where Muslims live in significant numbers like Bihar and Jharkhand (9.9%) UP (9%) AP (8.4%) Karnataka (10%) etc.

The Committee recommends that “In view of large population of Muslim children with Urdu as their mother tongue, intervention to the support Urdu language should be made by the state. In fact Committee is of the view that “given the commitment to provide primary education in the child’s mother tongue, the state is required to run Urdu medium schools” (Chapter-12, page-247).

The Committee further felt that lower enrollment rates, more so for Muslim girl child, was on account of the fact that Urdu knowing teachers, Urdu medium schools in the neighbourhood, were not made available by the state for the Muslim community. The Committee has drawn this inference by the fact that states like UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh, which have substantial Muslim populations, have lesser percentage of children enrolled in Urdu medium schools as percentage of Muslims children in 6-14 years age group, as these state governments did not make required policy interventions for increasing Urdu knowing teachers and Urdu medium primary/elementary schools, leading to poor literacy levels, lower growth of literacy rates and enrollment rates for Muslims in these states. In contrast to these states the

Report states that, “Karnataka and Maharashtra are examples of better provisioning of Urdu medium schools at elementary level” (page-82/chapter-4) which has led to higher percentage of children enrolled in Urdu medium, as a percentage of Muslim children in 6-14 years of age group in these two states – which have large Muslim populations and are outside the traditional Hindi – Urdu belt. It has led to higher educational attainments, by Muslim population in these two states in comparison to states like UP/Bihar/Jharkhand/West Bengal & Assam. Committee has also noted that greater percentage of Muslim girls are enrolled in Urdu medium. Sachar Committee has drawn conclusion that educational deprivation amongst Muslims as reflected by various quantitative/qualitative indicators, is on account of the factors mentioned above. It requires significant shift in the state policy requiring it to enter into partnership mode with private and voluntary sectors and to use already existing para government organizations, in this field like NIOS. This becomes imperative in view of the vastness of area and population - Muslims comprise of 13.4% of the total population of India and within them as many as 25% of Muslim children in (6-14 years) have either never attended school or dropped out (Sachar Committee Report page – 7), complex socio-cultural & religious issues involved for

provisioning minimum levels of school education to the marginalized Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs), primarily Muslim, also complicate the issue.

The immediate interventions required to be made by the State are (a) in the field of elementary education, (b) through promotion of Urdu medium school (c) requiring Urdu knowing teachers, and (d) integrating Madarasas/Maktabs into the mainstream of education providers. To a great extent most of these recommendations can be implemented by fine-tuning the programmes and policies of NIOS and used by State as instrument of intervention.

4. State interventions for Implementation of Sachar Committee Recommendations through NIOS

4.1 Open and Distance Learning as Policy Intervention for “Educational Inclusion”

According to Sachar Committee Report (Chapter 4, Section 3, Page 60) “Expansion of Educational opportunities since Independence has not led to convergence of Muslims and “all others”.

It further states “that one of the key reasons for low participation of Muslims in higher education is their significantly low achievement level in Higher Secondary attainment rate. Muslims seem to have significant disadvantages vis-à-vis most SRCs”. (Sachar Committee Report Chapter 4, Section 10, Page 85)

More importantly, it has also drawn an inference that the community itself feels discriminated against and is getting increasingly marginalized.

Open and Distance Learning system seems to be one of the best intervention strategies for “inclusion” and main streaming of such marginalized SRCs (like Muslims) due to its Basic Philosophy, which is purely “Inclusive” in nature and when implemented in practice, it leads to ‘inclusion’ of all those who have been left out from the educational main stream. In such a system there is a place and space for all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, socio-economic status, boundaries of space and time. It does not require any explicit or obtrusive Affirmative Action, in terms of quantitative and qualitative restrictions like, pre-defined quotas and other interventions fraught with multi-dimensional implication in growing society. Therefore,

this mode of “Educational Inclusion” is most appropriate for strengthening a growing economy and society in equitable and just manner without precipitating social tension. This “main streaming” of sizeable population of India will also ensure that unemployed, underemployed, uneducated youth of these marginalized SRCs will not fall prey to divisive, disruptive anti-social and anti-national forces. It will rather ensure that all of them become valuable human resources, making fruitful contribution in the growth of economy and emergence of a just and equitable society in the coming years.

NIOS operates through existing educational infrastructure and human resources by partnering with formal schools, NGOs and other institutions, for imparting general and vocational education upto pre-degree level. There are broadly ‘2’ streams (1) Academic Education and (2) Vocational Education through which NIOS offers its courses/programmes of study to its prioritized client groups including marginalized Socio-Religious Communities (SRCs) like Muslims.

4.2. Academic Stream – This provides a comprehensive alternative education programmes which are equivalent to those of the formal schooling system. The programmes offered by NIOS for different levels cover the full gamut of formal schooling from class I to XII: This include (a) Open Basic Education (OBE) programme (b) Secondary and Senior Secondary.

4.2.1 Open Basic Education (OBE) programme: The OBE of NIOS corresponds to elementary education class (1 to 8) of formal school system. It provides a learning continuum based on graded curriculum, for of children of 6-14 years and adult neo-literates, school dropouts/ left outs and learners of other Non-Formal Education programmes.

The unique features of this programme, particularly suited for improving the access and quality of elementary education for inclusion of marginalized Socio-Religious Communities like Muslims in view of Sachar Committee recommendations, are as follows:

- a) It is implemented in a highly decentralized manner with the partnering agencies functioning often below district level or at least at district level. NIOS partners with NGOs, other voluntary agencies and also some of the agencies of the government like Zila Saksharta Samitis for its implementation. Under this partnership, the NIOS provides resource support such as adaptation of NIOS model curriculum, as per the local

requirements, study material, joint-certification, orientation of resource persons etc. In turn NIOS uses the infrastructure and human resources of the partner agency for imparting this programme. This partnership can be easily extended to Madarassas and Maktabas for reaching out to SRCs.

- b) The feature of flexibility in the choice of curriculum as per the local needs, customs and culture. The agencies are free to choose from the curriculum offered of the state education board, SCERT, NCERT and NIOS. Further they can also develop their own materials based upon the curriculum opted by them. .
- c) The flexibility of OBE also allows agencies to develop material in their local language/mother tongue and teach through the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Urdu can be used in all those regions/districts where there is a demand for it as medium of instruction. In view of this, local agencies including madarssas can develop their own teaching learning materials in their own language. They can identify subject experts and NIOS can train them for developing materials. The OBE programme can meet the demand for Urdu medium schools at elementary levels, in the areas inhabited by Muslim Community all over the country
- d) One of the strong points of the OBE programme is that it has a vocational component. These vocational courses have been given the same parity as an academic course. The idea behind introducing these vocational programmes is to ensure that this education helps in poverty alleviation and persons coming out of this programme are trained in a particular skill. In the case of OBE being conducted by madarssas, it would be possible to include many of the traditional trades into the learning content and provide a “branching off” stream for those Muslim Learners who would like to acquire professional vocational skills.
- e) The OBE Programme is designed in a manner to ensure that neo-literates and learners of NFE utilize it as an continuing education programme for life long learning. This would also act as a bulwark against their relapse into illiteracy. To that extent the OBE programme works in close conjunction with the overall objectives of the National Literacy Mission of NLM and this would help in strengthening literacy amongst SRCs.

- f) At present the focus of the Government is to ensure that the objectives of Sarva Shikha Abhiyan are met within the given time frame. However the huge target before the SSA included certain difficult groups that may not be fully covered under the formal schooling system. IN such cases, the efforts of the state can be augmented through the OBE programme of NIOS under the umbrella of the SSA till such time as all SSA these targets are met. NIOS already has partnerships with programmes such as Mahila Samakhya, which is an OBE agency. The collaboration with madarssa and maktabas would be in line with the overall thinking of SSA that universalization of elementary education should be through community ownership of the school system.
- g) For (6-14 years) of children it offers 'A', 'B' & 'C' levels of Open Basis Education courses equivalent to class III/V & VIII respectively of formal school system, thereby providing a comprehensive Equivalency Programme of UNESCO for children of this age group. Till such time and in those areas where the State is not in a position to provide access to the formal school to all the children in (6-14) age group as required by newly enacted Article 21 (A), by 86th Constitutional Amendment Act. OBE programme of NIOS can be continued to be used as temporary policy intervention to provide access to elementary education to all such children.
- h) The Sachar Committee has also observed that Madarsas/Maktabas should be linked with Higher Secondary School Boards in order to ensure the mobility of Muslim students and it has also recommended recognizing of the degrees from Madarsas for eligibility in competitive exams (chapter-12, page-24 8) These can be incorporated to a great extent by the ambitious scheme undertaken by NIOS, for establishing linkages with Madarsas/Maktabas all over the country.
- i) NIOS has set up a 'Minority Cell', which is operating with the aim of launching special advocacy programmes for highlighting the utility programmes like OBE & Open Vocational education through Urdu medium. It is hoped that such sensitization would convince these Minority Educational Institutions about the benefits of these programmes and encourage them to enter into partnership with NIOS, whereby they can become Academic Agencies (AAs) or Accredited Institutions (AIs), Accredited Vocational Institutions (AVIs) depending upon their area specific requirements.

- j) The acute shortage of neighbourhood schools, imparting Urdu medium education has been cited as the reason for poor enrolment levels of Muslim girl students. The Sachar Committee has noted that there is a need for community study centers in view of shortage of space in urban areas, for majority of Muslim families. The inclusion of madassar and makhtabs as study centre would help to meet this need.
- k) The shortage of Urdu knowing teachers as noted by Sachar Committee Report as one of the constraints is not relevant in ODL mode, as course content is delivered in Self Learning Material/Self Instructional Material format. Urdu as medium of instruction and as subject is available both at Secondary and Sr. Secondary level also in NIOS. Large number of NIOS learners, can therefore be made proficient in Urdu language and can be further trained in Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE module and teaching modules) to work as Urdu teachers at elementary level again both in AIs of NIOS and also in the formal elementary schools in their local areas.

4.2.2 Secondary and Senior Secondary Education Programmes

In the Academic Stream of NIOS Secondary/Sr. Secondary level, the partnering agencies are primarily formal schools operating under recognition of various State Education or Central Boards of Education termed as AIs or study centers of NIOS. Under this study programmes, the learners are imparted education for class X (Secondary) and class XII (Senior Secondary) level through ODL mode. Learners are registered (at present) through the network of these AIs or study centres (2250) spread all over the country and also in few countries of the Middle East. Registration is valid for '5' years, during which '9' chances are given to the learner to pass all five/six subjects, collectively or individually depending upon their convenience. The learners are also allowed Transfer Of Credit (TOC) for two subjects, if they come from some other formal school Board. Multimedia approach is used for providing study material in the form of printed material, audio-video CDs, T.V & Radio broadcast (Gyan Darshan and Gyan Vani). Books/study material are in Self Instructional style and are provided free of costs through AIs/study centres of learners. '30' Personal Contact classes per subject are given to remove difficulties of the learner and Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) are used to assess and guide self learning of learners, based upon the study material provided by NIOS. Certification is done on

the basis of two examinations conducted every year in the month of April-May and Oct-Nov.

NIOS has emerged as the largest Open School of the world with 1.4 million learners on its cumulative rolls (in the block of preceeding five years, for which the admission is valid) and has certified almost 1 million learners in last 15 years.

In the 11th Five Year Plan it is envisaged that Open Schooling would have to meet the educational need of 15% of the total school going children. This has led to much new thinking and planning in NIOS level. Consequently it is visualized that NIOS must transform itself in structural and functional terms so as to evolve into a true Open Distance Learning system. The new strategies being considered by NIOS include Online Admissions that are valid throughout the year to ensure better access to educational facilities for learners as per their convenience. It is also proposed to further expand the flexible system of examination through On Demand Examination System (ODES) throughout the year. It is envisaged that this would result in the multiplication of the scale of operations of NIOS from just 3 lakh students getting enrolled per year to almost 10 lakh students every year. (Bist, D.S, 2007)

The special efforts of the Minority Cell are extended to the Secondary programme also. These intensive and extensive advocacy programmes target marginalized SRCs with specific focus on Muslims. This is being done by contacting and sensitizing prominent community/religious leaders like Ulemas all over the country to familiarize them with the entire educational package of NIOS so that this information can be made use of by local educational institutions especially for Madarsas/Maktabas. The idea is to integrate in educational mainstream by granting accreditation to certain high quality madarssas as NIOS study centers (AIs). Madarssas fulfilling certain norms can be given concessions so that they are able to successfully impart secondary level education in Urdu medium.

Since these institutions are well spread out in Muslim dominated areas, this will reduce the problem of access and fulfill the need of neighbourhood schools for Muslim communities providing education in Urdu medium. This will help in improving enrollment rates, particularly of Muslim girl child, in the same way as by Accredited Agencies of NIOS working in the field of elementary education.

As noted by the Committee several times, the biggest hurdle for improving educational attainments of Muslim Community all over the country has been lack of sufficient number of Urdu medium schools at both elementary and secondary level. As is the case with OBE programme of NIOS, (as Equivalency Programme for elementary education of formal system), both Secondary and Senior Secondary courses of NIOS also offer their courses in Urdu medium, which is specially suited to needs of the Muslim Community today. At Secondary level NIOS offers 26 subjects in seven languages (including Urdu) and at Senior Secondary level it offers 24 subjects, in '3' mediums including Urdu.

NIOS has also developed course material for Arabic as subject at Secondary level and has already initiated the exercise for translation of all its '73' Vocational Education courses in Urdu in light of their requirements by Muslims all over the country. Therefore NIOS is in a unique position to provide policy intervention in the form of Urdu as medium of instruction covering entire spectrum of formal school education starting from class I to class XII, by offering its own model of Equivalency Programmes from OBE (elementary) to Secondary and Senior Secondary levels.

Sachar Committee has recommended that adequate reflection of Social Diversity in content of "textbooks should be made and constant process evaluating of the content of (school) textbooks needs to be initiated to purge them of explicit and implicit content that may impart inappropriate social value, especially of religious intolerance". (SCR, Chapter12, page244).

It is noteworthy that NIOS has already carried out content review of its course curriculum, on the lines suggested by National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 for Secondary level and the work is going on for Senior Secondary level.

4.3 Vocational Education Programmes

The Sachar Committee Report makes a strong case for Technical Education and Training for Non- matriculates. It observes that "Artisanship is a dominant activity among Muslims, technical training should be provided to even those who may not have completed schooling" (SCR, chapter 4, page 65). Further the Report notes that, "majority of Muslim girls and boys fail in their matriculation examinations or dropout before that". The Report recommends that this group of children who have completed middle

school (upto class 8) but have not managed to study further need to be incorporated in different type of technical training". (SCR, chapter 12, page 244).

This thinking brings the focus upon the 2nd stream of NIOS programmes namely the Vocational Education programme, provided through ODL mode.

4.3.1 Under this programme, specialized public/private institutions/ NGOs having facilities for training in various vocational trades are accredited by NIOS as its study centers viz Accredited Vocational Institutions (AVIs).

4.3.2 NIOS has developed '73' different vocational courses, depending upon area specific and community's need specific demand for skills. It has already started translation of these courses in Urdu medium. The open vocational stream of NIOS has courses at diploma, certificate level some of which can be taken up by even those learners who have completed level B/C of its OBE courses (corresponding to class 5/8th of formal school system) in line with the recommendations of Sachar Committee Report as mentioned above. In fact, its OBE programme makes provision for both, use of mother tongue as medium of instruction and also allows choice of one vocational skill, as per the area specific or local community's requirement and are essentially employment preparatory in character.

4.3.3 At Secondary and Sr. Secondary level NIOS allows stand alone vocational subject to be taken along with other academic subject – a unique flexibility not available elsewhere, and ideally suited for those Muslim youth who do not intend to continue their general education beyond class VIII/X or XIIth and intend to enter work force as tradesmen or want to setup their own enterprise and or go for acquisition of higher level of competencies in their choosen vocation.

4.3.4 Up till pre-degree level, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the only institution, which offers various Vocational Courses and also has the power for their certification having validity all over the country. Sachar Committee has suggested that Muslim Youths who fail or do not intend to continue their general education beyond or up till Class 10th also should be given Vocational Training, so that they can earn their livelihood as wage earners in the workforce or as self employed entrepreneurs. Therefore, one of the major recommendations of Sachar Committees Report can be implemented by NIOS only.

4.3.5 The Open Vocational Education Programme of NIOS follows a collaborative model for implementation. The choice of appropriate need based vocations has been made on the basis of market surveys done at micro level of blocks/districts, keeping in view the specialized requirements of various SRCs like Muslims in particular. NIOS has entered into partnership with various trade and industry bodies like Federation of Indian Confederation of Commerce Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Indian Medical Association (IMA), Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) to get the feed back regarding type of skills demanded by the market, level of skills and the approach for standardization and testing these skills.

4.3.6 The Open Vocational Education Curriculum of NIOS follows a competency based modular approach. It can be customized to the needs of individual learners/group of learners by joining various modules of varying strengths for imparting various levels of skills over different span of time. The Open Vocational Education Programme of NIOS provides for multi-skill, multi-entry, multi-exit, flexible credit based courses to the learners to make it all life long education programme. Entrepreneurship is an essential part of all Vocational Education Courses of NIOS.

4.3.7 Vocational Education infrastructure in Rural Areas is almost absent. Keeping in view the fact that most of the marginalized SRCs (Muslims) live in Rural Areas of the country, renewed attempt is being made by NIOS to provide an intervention for Vocational Education in Rural Areas through Rural Community Workshops. It is proposed to have “11 Rural Community Workshops” all over the country one for each Regional Centre area of NIOS. Regional Community Workshop (RCW) is proposed as a prototype infrastructure of training cum production cum service center. It will have ‘3’ main components (i) Workshop, (ii) Staff & (iii) Equipments and Consumer Mills. The academic input shall be prepared by NIOS. It is proposed that Rural Community Workshop in each Regional Centre area of NIOS will cater to atleast 10 vocations or different trades, in demand in that particular area. The facilities so created will be used training of the master trainers and testing of the learners in these Trades in that particular area. It is estimated that each Rural Community Workshop will cost 10 crores as Rs. 1 crore would be needed for setting up of equipment and infrastructure related to each of the 10 selected trades for that particular region. Since this intervention is to be made in Rural Areas of each Regional

Centre of NIOS, a total sum of Rs. 110 Crores would be required by NIOS for making these investments. The cost of acquisition of land and construction activity would be in addition to it. It is proposed that Ministry of HRD should grant these funds under Plan Head to NIOS for making this vital intervention in Rural Areas for promoting need based Vocational Education, which would benefit various marginalized Socio-Religious Communities living pre-dominantly in Rural Areas of this country.

4.3.8 At the Headquarter level, it is proposed to have a Model Community Workshop on the lines of Rural Community Workshop at the Regional level as mentioned above. Model Community Workshop will also cater to 10 Vocational trades under one roof. It will provide facilities for instrumentation, on the job training for the trainees, provide facilities for virtual classrooms and ICT interventions for simulation of actual training processes, for improvement of Vocational Skills. It will be also responsible for development of curriculum, its analysis, dissemination and research for all vocational trades covered by all Rural Community Workshops all over the country. It is proposed that each trade will require an investment of Rs. 3 crores, thereby a total sum of Rs. 30 crores would be needed for setting up of Model Community Workshop at NIOS Headquarter.

4.3.9 Financial and technical assistance to AVIs of Minority Communities can be given by Minority Cell of NIOS and used as policy intervention for promotion of Open Vocational Education amongst marginalized SRCs on the norms & guidelines, which can be decided later on, if MHRD is willing to finance it under Plan Head of NIOS.

4.4 Other Interventions through NIOS

The Sachar Committee Report (SCR) in Chapter-12 has made few general policy recommendations, which can also be implemented by NIOS, within its existing framework. The Report recommends creation of National Data Bank (NDB) where all relevant data for SRCs are maintained and also an Autonomous Monitoring Authority (AMA) to evaluate the extent of development benefits which accrue to different SRCs through various programmes (Chapter-12 page-238/SCR-239).

4.4.1 In this regard NIOS proposes to use its Student Support Services (SSS) Department as its Data Bank by converting it into a call center having all relevant information On Line. It is proposed that the admission forms

of NIOS be suitably adapted to capture all the relevant information about SRCs as has been done by Census of India (2001). It is proposed to build it up exhaustively so that scholarship facilities for SC/ST, students, available from Government of India and other sources can also be effectively used.

4.4.2 Student Support Services Department can also conduct research studies to evaluate the impact of all programmes of NIOS on SRCs and suggest policy action for course correction as per MOA of NIOS. The above-mentioned Data Bank will also be used for research and evaluation work by the Research & Evaluation unit of NIOS. Tracer studies on the socio-economic background of NIOS learners and their subsequent progress in higher educational/vocational streams and future absorption in the market can also be done to assess the effectiveness of programmes of NIOS.

5. Minority Cell – A Special Intervention by NIOS

In the recent past, NIOS has adopted many measures to ensure that the institution focuses upon the objectives for which it was set up. This includes policy initiatives taken to give direction for achieving its original charter as enshrined in its Memorandum of Association (MOA). Some of these, which are also in line with the recommendations of Sachar Committee, are as follow:

5.1 A 'Minority Cell' has been set up in NIOS, under the directions of MHRD, under the overall supervision of Secretary, NIOS with two fold objectives, (a) to collect the work of NIOS related to Minority Educational Institutions under one unit. This includes, basically work related to their accreditation in all '3' fields i.e. as Accredited agency under OBE programme, AIs for Secondary/Senior Secondary Stream, AVIs for Vocational stream, issues related to their functioning as partners of NIOS in order to ensure prompt disposal of their work and maintenance of records related to them. (b) To launch special advocacy programme focusing on extending the reach and impact of NIOS on various SRC's with particular emphasis on Muslims. This is to be done by a multi-pronged strategy:-

- (i) Developing Special Advocacy Films/documentaries showing utility of NIOS educational programmes in relation to various SRCs, Muslims in particular.

- (ii) Audio-Video Publicity materials to highlight individual programmes and their field level implementation.
- (iii) Holding of Seminars & Conferences, for prominent Social/Religious Community Leaders of Minorities, Social Activists, NGOs working in the field of Minority Education, prominent Maulvis, Ulemas & Heads of big Madarsas of Deoband & Barielly Schools, in order to familiarise and sensitise them about the benefits of programmes and policies of NIOS for their respective Communities, so that they can in turn “hard sell” NIOS and its activities to Minority Religious cum Educational Institutions, and motivate them for using NIOS bouquet of Educational/Vocational inputs, in addition to their traditional learning system without disturbing them.
- (iv) Some prominent religious/social leaders and community leaders have already been appointed as Project Coordinators for NIOS, in their respective local areas of influence, on contract payment basis by NIOS to perform above mentioned tasks. A duty chart and “work to be done” proforma has been developed for assessing their performance. Orientation lectures/classes have been given to them, so that they can work in their local areas for attaining above-mentioned objectives.
- (v) Financial and other incentives for meritorious children from different SRCs is being contemplated by NIOS (to be given if funds are provided by Government of India)

It is proposed that Ministry of Human Resource Development should enhance the funds given to NIOS under the Plan Head for meeting the expenditure to be incurred on these activities aimed specifically at bringing marginalized SRCs into the Educational Main stream at school level through Open Distance Learning mode. NIOS generates its own funds through various kinds of fees and charges which are taken from the learners of NIOS, it will be not possible for NIOS to finance any of these specific activities aimed at implementing Sachar Committee Recommendations from its own generated funds.

6. Quantification of Targets for Implementation of Sachar Committee Recommendations through Open Distance Learning mode

NIOS has identified, created and selected various measures, concepts and

process for translating the implementation of recommendations of Sachar Committee into quantifiable targets as follows:

- 6.1 Constant development of new Curriculum, Review/Updating of existing Curriculum, with in the broader framework of National Curriculum Framework (2005), to ensure that issues related to societal concerns are handled properly as per the Constitution of India – is a constant and on going activity.
- 6.2 Proportion of enrolment figures for NIOS learners across all SRCs should be increased up till at least their proportionate share in the total population by devising suitable policy incentives, launching special advocacy programmes etc., i.e. at least 14% of NIOS learners should be from Muslim Community, 23% or more from SC/ST etc. These figures need to be taken down at disaggregated levels i.e. NIOS should strive to maintain the percentage share of gross enrollment of all NIOS learners from different SRCs in all ‘3’ broad streams of NIOS individually also i.e. in OBE, Academic streams for class X/XIIth and vocational streams also.
- 6.3 Retention rates for all NIOS learners belonging to different SRCs can be enhanced by ensuring that they complete the programme of NIOS for which they are enrolled by providing special incentives.
- 6.4 The percentage of Accredited institutions like (AAs for OBE) AIs for Secondary/Sr. Secondary and AVIs for Vocational Education belonging to marginalized SRCs should also be in accordance to their proportionate share in the total population.
- 6.5 Percentage of NIOS learners, opting for Urdu medium, should be increased, so that most important recommendation of Sachar Committee can be implemented for improving educational attainment of Muslims all over the country.
- 6.6 Transformation of Student Support Services Department of NIOS as full fledged, 24x7 call-center, working both as National Data Bank (NDB) and Autonomous Monitoring Agency within NIOS, for assessing the impact of NIOS programmes and policies on the educational attainments of SRCs and suggesting policy initiatives needed to enhance this process.

Conclusion

In the 9th and 10th Five Year Plan, Elementary Education and Literacy were the focus of Government of India in the field of Education. Projects like Sarv Shiksh Abhiyan (SSA) were launched in mission mode, which have been successful to a great extent. Now the focus has to shift from Elementary Education and Literacy to Secondary Education. 11th Five Year Plan has already targeted that 15% of the school going children in the age group of 6-17 years should be absorbed by the Open Learning System in the country in order to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Secondary Education (USE) in the coming years. NIOS is already in the process of making profound changes in structural and functional terms in order to evolve into a higher level of Open Distance Learning system, so that it can expand its scale of operations and meet the targets set by the Planning Commission in this regard. NIOS has to move from the margins to the center stage of school education in the country, so that it can attain its original charter and thereby also assists Government of India in its mission of Universalisation of Secondary Education (USE) in coming years. It has been estimated that almost 50 lakhs students will have to be enrolled in the Open & Distance Learning system by NIOS and all State Open Schools (SOSs) in order to achieve these targets. (Bist D.S. 2007)

There is no doubt that the recommendations of Sachar Committee have come at very appropriate time as they provide insight into some of the future growth paths for increasing enrolment by Open & Distance Learning system in the country today, which is poised for “take off” in the coming years. It has, therefore, given a desired direction for growth and expansion of NIOS in the coming years. “In doing so it enables state to use NIOS as a policy intervention for promoting greater equity and justice in society, and creating a learning society”.

References

- Memorandum of Association NOSS, NIOS
- Bist, Dinesh Singh, *Increasing Educational Access through NIOS, Integrating Open Learning System with Flexible Examination System through use of ICT – Concept Paper, NIOS* (unpublished), Feb 2007; Census of India 2001
- Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India, Prime Minister’s High Level Committee, Government of India, November 2006