

The way forward for implementing NEP

A major challenge in the implementation of any policy is the absence of relevant institutional mechanisms. The higher education community is concerned about institutionalised inertia and indifference that can adversely impact the implementation of National Education Policy-2020.



Vital: Every effort in policy-making requires a significant impetus to capacity-building. PTI



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On July 29, 2020, as India was battling the first wave of the Covid pandemic, the National Education Policy (NEP) was launched to re-imagine education in India. NEP-2020 had undergone a comprehensive consultative process with all key stakeholders to create a visionary policy that speaks to the aspirations of young India. It has been a year since NEP-2020 was launched and it is an opportune time to take stock of what has happened and the way forward.

The recommendations on higher education received in the past year have been engaging. Public policy of any kind requires a lot of effort in all stages of the policy-

making cycle. Harold Lasswell, at the University of Chicago and Yale University, developed a multi-dimensional model of effective policy-making that is used even today. The five dimensions of his model are: agenda setting; policy formation; decision-making; policy implementation; and policy evaluation. Policy-makers around the world have learnt enormously from Lasswell's model.

The current times and the unique challenges and opportunities that India faces demand a reassessment of the model.

I propose three additional dimensions between the policy formation and the decision-making process: creating awareness among all stakeholders; building consensus among institutions; developing institutional mechanisms to support the policy.

The one year of NEP-2020 has focused on the three proposed dimensions. Stakeholders are seeing the efforts of the Government of India towards ensuring that the policy is implemented in right earnest. Since the launch of NEP, the government has been preparing plans for its implementation.

However, vibrant democracies such as India, where 'education' is on the Concurrent List of the Constitution, require deliberations, debates and discussions at all levels of the government and regulatory architecture, and among different types of higher education institutions (HEIs).

The three successful outcomes of the last year are:

1. Extensive efforts to create national, regional and state-level awareness relating to NEP with the active participation of stakeholders. It has created a collective consciousness of NEP among the members of the education community, which is now much more prepared to implement the policy.
2. Concerted efforts by the government and regulatory bodies in galvanising intellectual consciousness among the HEIs. Other than understanding the policy better, it has empowered the HEIs to take ownership of the policy. The HEIs, with support from the UGC, AICTE and AIU, have rendered yeoman service for building consensus around NEP.
3. One of the major challenges in the implementation of any policy is the absence of relevant institutional mechanisms that can work towards implementation. While some efforts have been made to put in place a few institutional mechanisms for supporting the implementation of NEP, a lot more needs to be done. The higher education community is concerned about pathological callousness, institutionalised inertia and irresponsible indifference that can adversely impact the implementation of NEP-2020.

I propose five steps that will ensure that NEP is implemented effectively in a time-bound manner:

1. Prime Minister's Advisory Council on implementation of NEP (PMAC): The PM has spoken on several occasions about NEP-2020 and its transformative potential for the future of India. To take advantage of the demographic dividend, this must be led from the highest levels of the state apparatus. The PMAC, chaired by the PM, will be the nodal agency to coordinate with all institutions to ensure the successful implementation of NEP.

2. Education Minister's Steering Committee on implementation of NEP (EMSC): Constituted in the Ministry of Education, the EMSC will be working continuously with all stakeholders to identify and resolve bottlenecks in the implementation. Chaired by the Union Education Minister, it will be responsible for taking complete ownership of the implementation process and will work closely with all other regulatory bodies.

3. National Higher Education Ministers' Council for implementation of NEP (NHEMC): The NHEMC is an important initiative that needs to be created with all education ministers of the states and chaired by the Union Minister of Education, with the Union Education Secretary as its Member-Secretary. The success of NEP depends significantly on the work that must take place in the states; there is a need for state governments to work closely.

4. Empowered Standing Committee on Legal and Regulatory Reforms for implementation of NEP (ESC): A gap between the vision of NEP and the existing legal and regulatory framework is a major challenge in its implementation, which requires intervention. Chaired by the Union Education Secretary, the ESC should be empowered to propose legal and regulatory reforms across the education sector to help implement the NEP.

5. Vice-Chancellors' Working Group for implementation of NEP (VCWG): The Vice-Chancellors/Directors represent the most important constituency for the implementation of NEP in higher education. The VCWG, under the chairmanship of the UGC Chairman, with members as select VCs/Directors of HEIs, can work towards implementing NEP.

Every effort in policy-making requires a significant impetus to capacity-building. These measures will ensure that we create a robust institutional architecture that will leave no stone unturned in the process of NEP implementation.

The inspiring vision of NEP can be effectively implemented only if we are ready to establish institutional mechanisms outlined above to build the necessary capacity.