

Release Function of the Probe Revisited Report

PROBE Revisited (a report on elementary education in rural north India) was released by OUP on 24th August 2011 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. Dr Shantha Sinha, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, was the Chief Guest who was asked to officially release the report. Co-authors of the *PROBE Revisited* report – Ms Anuradha De, Ms Meera Samson, and Dr Reetika Khera -- made a combined presentation on the findings of the report. Dr A.K. Shiva Kumar, co-author of the *PROBE Revisited* report, concluded the function with his comments.

Ms Anuradha De began the presentation by discussing the changes in education policy since the PROBE survey in 1996 and the reasons for doing the *PROBE Revisited* survey ten years later. She mentioned that the focus of *PROBE Revisited* went beyond primary education (the focus of the 1996 PROBE survey) to elementary education. Ms Meera Samson discussed the major changes in the delivery of primary education in the decade 1996-2006, and their impact on school access and quality. The good news is that there has been major progress in the PROBE states in areas such as schooling facilities, provision of mid-day meals, enrolment rates and consequent narrowing of social and gender gaps. At the same time, fundamental problems remain. Children who are enrolled are not necessarily in school. Moreover, even attendance does not guarantee learning. Many children who attend school are in classes where there is little teaching activity. Teaching activity, where it does exist, often translates to mindless rote learning. Dr Reetika Khera concluded the presentation by highlighting how the increased use of contract teachers, the setting up of education committees with the expectation that they monitor school quality, and the growth of private schools, have brought with them their own set of problems.

Guest Speaker, Dr Jean Dreze highlighted the significance of the report as a wake-up call for the government and all concerned citizens. While there has been much progress in the field of primary education since the PROBE survey in 1996, the schooling situation in India remains dismal in international perspective. In fact, even as India is forging ahead in terms of economic growth, other countries that are much poorer and growing more slowly, such as Bangladesh and Nepal, seem to be making faster progress in terms of social development including school education. He commended the report for identifying the core issues as well as the scope for change, and for being both well-researched and reader friendly.

Dr Shantha Sinha officially released the report at this time. In her comments, she said that though she had had very little time to go through the report, she could see the same kind of rigour had gone into the *PROBE Revisited* report as had gone into the *PROBE* report. She mentioned that the *PROBE* report was a path-breaking report and that it was the rigour in its research that has made it so useful for policy advocacy, as well as research – there was no one in the field of education who could do without reading it. Dr Sinha congratulated the team and said she hoped that *PROBE Revisited* would be used as widely as *PROBE*.

Guest Speaker, Dr Vinod Raina commented that he, as a practitioner, has often been critical of research reports. However, he found both *PROBE* and *PROBE Revisited* to resonate with ground realities in education. He emphasised the importance of having a document such as this one – well researched and well presented – to be able to use while advocating for better norms and policies. He strongly urged the team to start preparing for a PROBE 3, which will capture the changes in the schooling situation in the light of the RTE Act.

Dr A.K. Shiva Kumar, co-author of the *PROBE Revisited* report, concluded the function with his comments. He began by drawing attention to the enormous challenges that lie ahead in the area of upper primary schooling. Enrolment is nowhere close to achieving UEE. Large proportions of 11-13 year olds (39%) are still in primary school. Physical infrastructure is still far from sufficient. There are more and better qualified teachers, but the number are not adequate. Quality remains a serious concern, with only low levels of teaching activity observed in the 2006 survey. Dr Shiva Kumar then spoke of the complete neglect of pre-school education. Finally, he drew attention to the massive corruption that pervades the education system -- the corruption linked to construction, transfers and postings of teachers, as well as the corruption involved in leakages in programmes and schemes which seek to provide quality schooling to children. He stressed the need for grievance redressal mechanisms in the education sector.

The *PROBE Revisited* report is available at major bookshops and can be ordered directly from OUP. The price is Rs 345, which includes the first PROBE report in CD format. Major findings of the *PROBE Revisited* report were shared at meetings in Delhi, Hyderabad and Kolkata in 2009, in Jaipur in 2010, and in Hoshangabad, Almora and Ranchi in 2011. Efforts are on to finalise the *PROBE Revisited* report in Hindi.

[Photos of the Release](#)