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Decentralisation reforms and public schools: A human development perspective

by

Manabi Majumdar

Madras Institute of Development Studies
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600 020

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Abstract

The paper offers an overview of some of the current debates on decentralisation and what issues endure. Departing somewhat from the standard approaches to decentralisation and adopting an explicitly human development perspective, the paper tries to make and defend four basic claims.

First, decentralisation initiatives are to be seen as a programme within a multi-layered political system which functions at local, provincial and national levels, and not as a closed narrowly parochial stand-alone governance regime, as some advocates of decentralisation seem to claim. Second, the participation of the historically subordinate social classes/castes in the newly reformed structure of governance is a key parameter, over and above the legal reforms. That is to say, the broad social and political process, taking place outside of the constitutional framework, is quite central to the question of improvement of local democracy. Third, the purpose of democratic decentralisation is to improve the complementarity between the state and society and not to advocate a zero-sum opposition between the two. Finally, in the specific sector of education, decentralisation reforms are aimed not to remove public institutions from involvement in educational matters but to improve public performance. The 'vision' that currently enervates our school system is that 'education is not for *their* (read subaltern) children' This narrow conception of schooling needs to be re-defined. It is here that the contemporary effort to foster participatory democracy presents before us some genuine possibilities for school transformation, by galvanising a larger process of social and political transformation. The local democratic institutions and the participatory spaces they open up will likely impose on the policy agenda a generous conception of public schooling that makes a democratic claim of basic education being the right of every child.

1. Introduction

Recently, the notion of decentralisation has gained quite a standing among development theorists as well as practitioners.[1] The promises and perils which decentralisation entails have been the subject of several debates and discussions. The literature on this is quite vast now and fast proliferating. However, although many show awareness of the issues relating to decentralised governance, it is not yet a well-understood phenomenon; the term lumps together too many different ideas under an excessively broad label. There is clearly room here for conceptual refinement as well as further empirical investigation.

Interestingly, support for decentralisation has come from diverse quarters - from statists, protagonists of the market, and communitarians, and for varied reasons - of market failure, government failure or of the bankruptcy of both. More specifically, the current enthusiasm for decentralised development has moved in two distinct and rather opposite directions : on the one hand the decentralising arrangements are proposed by some as a route to roll back of government functions and to generally reducing the role of the `overdeveloped' yet `inefficient' state (`government failure') and transferring fiscal responsibilities to sub-national/State levels and at times back to the community or even households via user fees and so on (Klugman,1997).[2] On the other hand, those who acknowledge both the tendency of the market to undersupply collective goods at the local level (`market failure') as well as the shortcomings of a centralised governance structure suggest decentralisation as a way of improving public performance, of better public service delivery; they delineate the *information* and *incentive* advantages which local level organisations enjoy over central suppliers.

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[1] In India the prominent decentralisation reforms include the recent strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) under the aegis of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. These Acts require all the State governments to introduce certain legislative measures tuned to the revitalisation of local representative institutions. The measures in question include mandatory elections at regular intervals, reservation of seats for women and members of scheduled castes and tribes and some devolution of State government responsibilities to local authorities.

[2] "Decentralization has been advocated by the IMF, for example, as a route to `smaller government'..motivated largely by the desire to reduce central government expenditures; as a corollary, the transfer of functions has taken place without the transfer of commensurate revenue sources or increased central grants" (Klugman 1997, p.2).

In essence, both approaches, however, make an *economic case* for decentralisation, that is to say, an argument for improved cost-efficiency as an offshoot of decentralised development. Given the current climate of `cost-consciousness', preoccupations with efficiency effects of decentralisation are understandable. By any reckoning, fiscal adjustments and allocative efficiency are worthy causes for our concern. However, there is more at issue than these; there is more to decentralisation than mere internal organisation of government, deconcentration of administrative power from central to local agencies and community financing or user fees. These are the aspects which seem to receive most attention in academic and policy discussions to the relative neglect of what we argue later to be the basic spirit of decentralisation, namely, people's participation in the decision-making and implementational processes. Simply put, decentralisation is to be viewed, first and foremost, as one of the routes to expanding people's opportunities - an instrument of governance activated and energised by the actions and choices of people themselves. Thus it appears that the analysis of decentralisation is as much about people's participatory freedom as about administrative and fiscal efficiency.

Surely, decentralisation does not automatically enhance people's participation; the mode, intensity and quality of participation will vary depending on people's political organisation, mobilisation etc. The interest here lies in the impact of local participation in decision-making on the nature of decisions made and more generally in the linkage between people's freedom of decisions and actions on the one hand and human development on the other. The analysis of decentralisation may, therefore, set out with the premise that participatory human development is the goal for which decentralised governance is a potent tool. Where a departure might be due in the current decentralisation discourse is to insist on such a starting point. `Democratic decentralisation for human development' as a definitional radar will likely take us along right directions.

Surely, some of the issues we plan to discuss in the paper have been anticipated in other scholarly works before. Drawing upon the present literature, the paper simply offers an overview of some of the current debates about decentralisation and what issues endure. The reader will consider this essay a work in progress, which raises more questions than it is able to answer. But the paper at once engages with and

departs from received approaches to decentralisation initiatives. In precise terms, the arguments are developed in two parts. First, we try to show how a human development approach to decentralisation is distinct from, if not opposed to, other standard perspectives. Second, we step down from the level of generality to develop a more fine-grained analysis of the impact of governance reforms on a specific human development goal, namely, quality basic education for all.

Specifically, the following questions lie at the heart of the present enquiry : do the recently introduced decentralisation reforms in education (under the aegis of the PRIs) provide answers to the ills of public education and hold the key to school improvement? What exactly do decentralisation reforms in education mean - greater parental/community control over schooling decisions or greater school-site autonomy vis-a-vis higher levels of education bureaucracy or both? What effect will these changes have on school functioning in terms of teaching-learning activities, classroom practices and student performance? Above all, will governance reforms, when viewed as a complex social and political process, lead to an agreement among most citizens about the broad purpose of public schooling? In many parts of our country poor performance of government schools and their unresponsiveness to the educational needs of socially disadvantaged children reflect the general denial of a norm that education is the essential part of every child's upbringing. Can the constitutionally initiated decentralisation reforms address this `first-order' problem of our school system and correlatively generate a broad and democratic conception of educational purpose - a social aspiration that leads to extending public support for quality education for every citizen?

2 Towards definitional clarity

Before dealing with the questions mentioned above and to set the stage for our discussion, it is useful to make a few prefatory remarks about the context within which the decentralisation debate needs to be situated.

2.1 *Contextualising the Decentralisation Debate*

2.1.1 Inter-regional Variations

In a country as diverse as India, discussions on governance need to pay close attention to contextual specificities - to inter-regional variations in economic, demographic, political and cultural traits. Decentralisation cannot promise inevitable improvement; rather its success is contingent upon the constraining and enabling conditions that obtain in different degrees in different corners of the country. In analysing the promises and perils of decentralisation, we, therefore, have to adopt a disaggregated approach that captures the diversity and complexity of Indian social, political and economic reality. For example, a discussion on decentralisation can be misleading if it ignores regional variations in terms of resource endowment, social stratification, penetration of party politics, degree of land concentration, extent of civic involvement and collective organisation. Indeed, the regional nature of many aspects of India's development comes out clearly in demographic analysis. To cite two instances, a recent study estimates that: 1) by 2026 Uttar Pradesh will comprise one fifth of India's population and; 2) most Southern and Western States will be between 40 and 50 per cent urban (as compared to 20-25 per cent urbanisation in the rest of the country). This, no doubt, entails vastly differential demands on the capacity of PRIs and ULBs in different corners of the Indian Union. For example, high rates of urbanisation will create challenges to cope with service provision for high density, low-income population. One `generic' scheme of decentralisation will clearly not be suitable for such disparate ground conditions.

This also raises doubts about the rigid application of the centrally conceived three-tiered PRI model across the country, without paying any heed to past experience of individual States in this respect. It does indeed wash out some important State-specific differences in the design of the local governance system. For example, on paper the State decentralisation models look similar; but in practice there are State-specific differences in the relative primacy of the three tiers of PRIs. Some States have given primacy to the district panchayats (AP, Gujarat, Maharashtra), while States like MP, Rajasthan and TN have placed the block level panchayat at the center of the edifice. States like Kerala and West Bengal have historically had larger village

panchayats and continue to focus on this level (ISS, 2000). A uniform, centrally crafted three-storied edifice detracts somewhat from the very logic of decentralisation.

2.1.2 Local versus supra-local

There is a view which sees decentralisation as a zero-sum process whereby in developmental terms the Centre/State becomes irrelevant as the locality assumes paramount importance. It is essential to avoid such all-or-none positions that endorse regidly set out dichotomies between national and sub-national governance structures. Indeed, decentralisation does not entail the disappearance of the supra-local state apparatus or the abdication of its responsibilities towards the paramount task of human development. On the contrary, the enabling role of Central and State governments is crucial to the successful functioning of local institutions. For instance, the macro economic policy environment at the national and State levels constitutes the backdrop against which the processes of decentralisation are expected to unfold. Therefore, economic stabilisation policies should provide enabling conditions for decentralisation, by at least not worsening the conditions and vulnerabilities of the poor in the country.

Hence, in no way does decentralisation dilute the importance of synergy in operations of the Central, State and Local institutions of governance, nor deny a significant, if re-defined, role for supra-local authorities. Drawing on research on a set of decentralising programmes in Latin American countries, Tendler (1997) similarly underlines the role of `activist and capable' rather than a retreating central government (in her case, the State government is the central party) in addition to local governmental institutions and civic groups. Simply put, decentralisation reforms can be viewed as an attempt to identify the right divide between the responsibility of various tiers of government such that we can avoid duplication and overlap in developmental activities but at once reap the benefit of economies of scale.

2.1.3 State-level centralisation[3]

The decentralisation analysis has to be placed within the frame of power-

[3] This expression is borrowed from Weiler (1993).

sharing that exists between not only the Centre and the States but also the States and sub-State bodies. In other words, the process of 'decentering' need to move progressively downward from the central to State to local levels. But the States in the Indian Union are larger than most countries in the world in terms of geographical territory and population. There also exists a significant concentration of power at the State level.

Moreover, in an era of globalisation, the nature of Indian federalism has been undergoing a significant transformation, with the erstwhile centrally planned economy gradually yielding place to what Rudolph (2001) calls 'a federal market economy'. Correspondingly, sub-national governments have emerged as a set of competing jurisdictions (as opposed to a unified planning zone), with Chief Ministers of the States wooing domestic and international capital to come and invest in their respective States. With the attendant de-centering of economic authority and increase in economic sovereignty of provincial governments, the onus is now on the States to effect economic growth in their respective States via greater private investments.

This increase in economic freedom and greater responsibility of sub-national units has often gone, as many studies show, hand in hand with a general reluctance on part of the States to devolve functions, funds and functionaries to institutions at the sub-State level. It may be noted here that although passed by the Parliament, the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts are in the nature of 'enabling legislations' for provincial governments to create local bodies through legislation and to define the extent of their authority. While in principle the States are obliged to set up these institutions and delegate to them adequate powers and financial resources, in practice reforms have been carried out indifferently and the pace of implementation has been gingerly in many States. Generally speaking the State-level leadership, both political and bureaucratic, has thus far shown little willingness to share power with the local leadership. The 'conformity' legislations remain highly wanting in this respect. According to one recent study, PRIs are not yet the third tier of government but only an extension of the second tier (World Bank, 2000).[4]

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[4] One area of research that stands in need of urgent scrutiny is the inter-State variation in the scale and depth of governance reforms. The other larger issues that underlie these divergences include the relationship between 'local power' and State-level politics, the nature of party organisation at the State-level, its penetration into local politics, and above all the nature of the balance of class/caste power that

The question is if decentralisation is a problematic proposition for the central or State governments, why does it occupy a place of prominence in the current initiatives in the country (as a matter fact, in policies and reforms in so many countries)? It may be recalled that the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts were passed in the Parliament without much opposition from the provincial governments. The President gave assent to the Bill only after more than half the State Assemblies had ratified the Bill.

The answer to this ambivalent position of provincial units vis-a-vis decentralising efforts, Weiler (1993) perceptively observes, may be found in the fact that the state in exercising its power has a dual, mutually contradictory interest : maintaining control on the one hand and enhancing its legitimacy on the other. Decentralisation measure has its political utility; overcentralised systems, distanced from local bases, tend to lose legitimacy and decentralisation may act as a promising strategy for ensuring legitimacy. But coincidentally it poses a challenge to state's control over power, hence the dilemma.

2.1.4 Decentralisation as state-led or stateless development?

Discussions on governance reforms have gained ascendancy in the country particularly at a time when doubts are being expressed about the effectiveness of state institutions and more seriously the ideological and empirical bases of the state as a prime development institution are being challenged. Some prominent scholars have gone to the extent of saying that state-led development is dead.[5] Indeed, it can be said with some justification that the pre-eminence of the state in India, as the primary agency for securing rural development, has been rendered fragile (Rajasekhar, Bhatt and Webster, 1995). Parallely the presence of other actors such as civic groups, the NGO sector and the market has come to be recognised. A variety of new localised institutional experiments are now seeking to wrest the state's monopolistic responsibility of alleviating poverty.

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prevails in different States. On different political regimes across Indian States, see Harriss (1999).

[5] For a searching critique of the officially sponsored and patronized' paradigm of development, see Ludden (2000).

What is more, due to these new trends an alternative conceptualisation of governance has begun to inform the development discourse today, in which people's participation gains new authority, `bottom up' efforts preoccupy new research and thinking about development itself moves away from centres of power and downward into `localities of grassroots' (Ludden, 2000). Interestingly, while a nagging distrust of the state-led planning regime has become palpable in recent times, at the same time people's campaign for decentralised *planning* has gained new momentum. The question is whether the people's plan is a move towards dismantling the process of planning or strengthening it (Patnaik, 2001). More generally, should a justified move away from a wholly statist order push us to the other extreme of celebrating decentralisation as the form of governance, best executed in the absence of the state and completely outside the political sphere?

Is politics something that just unfortunately happens and is best got rid of or is depoliticisation equally problematic? Should the people at the grassroots and at the social margin - disillusioned with the politics and policies of the state - raise their voice from below as non-political actors or should they interrogate, what Ludden (2000) aptly describes, the `local features of state power'? It indeed appears that people seem to both challenge the state as well as seek spaces within it. People inhabit and engage with both political and civil society; they do not simply vacate one or the other when they receive limited political or social support to their cause.

It is unfortunate that the current thinking about decentralisation, at least one strand of it, poses the debate as one of government versus non-government organisations, with the explicit view that being non-governmental is in itself a qualification (i.e. having some inherent traits) for doing better development.[6] We feel that the discourse has to break with this dichotomous, all-or-none, view of the state versus people or the state versus civil society; instead we need to talk about their functional complementarity. The real challenge is to achieve greater popular involvement in governance through *all* available channels - governmental and non-governmental, without adopting polarised `either or' positions. This participatory

[6] This point has been helpfully discussed in Webster (1995).

process has to be facilitated by the government institutions as well as non-state groups and actors.

Two additional notes of caution are apposite here. First, bureaucracy is commonly regarded as `the problem', which often it is. Bureaucratic inflexibility and unresponsiveness are widely persistent. That bureaucratic behaviour shows indifference scarcely needs belabouring, but advocating unreservedly this idea obscures the fact that bureaucracy is not a single sort of category and that some reform-oriented bureaucrats are the 'solution'. As Williamson (2001) argues, an accurate assessment of bureaucracy requires that we come to terms with both its strengths and weaknesses. There are indeed prominent examples of the local community organisations working vigorously with (and putting pressure on) the local elected representatives and local public servants.[7] To cite one instance, scholars looking into the success of irrigation bureaucracies in running local irrigation programmes in China and South Korea offer an explanation that involves the combination of a strong and active [central] bureaucracy together with effective local organisations (Wade, 1988). It is the complementary contributions of groups and individuals inside and outside of the state that lie at the success of these projects.

Second, just as bureaucracy is not an unmitigated `evil', anything `local' is not necessarily benign. Local organisations do not automatically embolden the `voice' of the poor. Simply put, `local' control is not synonymous with `public/people's' control. In situations of entrenched inequality, the local setting may turn out to be quite oppressive, local institutions may get captured by the powerful and the wealthy. In such an environment of entrenched local authority, instances of local subordinate groups appealing to supra-local authorities for protection and relief are not uncommon; "..the intervention by the long arm of the state even in remote corners of rural India have been in such cases by invitation and not always by arbitrary imposition." (Bardhan 2001, p.265).

To summarise the above discussion, the discourse on decentralisation cannot revolve around a binary opposition between the state and civil society. Moreover, a

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[7] For an analysis of some recent case studies of successful public service bureaucracies in developing countries, see Tendler (1997) and the references cited therein.

rigid anti-statist stance will cloud our thinking on the subject, as it is mostly prescriptive rather than diagnostic. That is to say, it does not interrogate sufficiently adequately over why state institutions are unresponsive to poor people on several occasions and what might make them more responsive. By the same token , it does not explain why some public agencies or programmes do better than others and what public sector reforms would be required to replicate the best practices. Instead, quite often the ready prescription is to `abandon' rather than `improve' state sector institutions. If, on the contrary, the objective is to make the state more representative of people's needs, "..the task is not to divert demands away from the state [or to vacate the public sphere and disengage from state institutions] but to bring those demands to bear upon the state in a more effective way.." (Webster 1995, p.27). People's engagement in decentralised governance is contingent upon people's involvement with state sector institutions and their efforts at changing the local power structure.

It is surely the case that state-led developmental activities have in many cases produced perverse effects; one also certainly agrees that the real task, as many state-skeptics convincingly argue, is to place people at the centre of development. But uttered too rigidly (for example, to say that state institutions are deadweights only, not remediable), this view may come uncomfortably close to a rather conservative position. As mentioned before, the decentralisation discourse may get hijacked by very different ideological stakeholders for very different purposes. More elaborately, a thoroughgoing dismissal of the efficacy of any government programmes may turn into claims that appear to resonate with large sections of the society today in a way they did not in the past. For example, economic and social disadvantages of the poor were explained in the past by widely acknowledged forms of discrimination, whereas "..poverty/inequality now invite[s] either cultural or genetic explanations." (Arrow et al, 2000, p.x). Within this genre of reasoning, culpability for lack of achievement can be laid squarely at the door of the family or the individual, not at the systemic level. By extension one can argue that capability failures are something immune to public policy intervention.

A rigid anti-statist stance, that renders government institutions utterly dispensable, may therefore run the risk of converting even benign intents into a reactionary verdict about the possibility of orienting decentralisation reforms towards

human development priorities. To avoid falling into such a trap and to better understand the link between decentralisation and human development, we will have to focus on a state-people/state-civil society complementarity rather than trade-off; we will have to look for opportunities for exploiting potential synergies bwteen the two (Evans, 2000).

It is worth pausing here to consider why overly centralised development programmes are often carried out indifferently. To rephrase the same question from a 'ground-up' perspective, what are the theoretical arguments for decentralisation reforms? This takes us to the subject of the next section.

2.2 *Case for decentralisation : Prominent Theoretical Explanations*[8]

Discussions on decentralisation often, though not always, assume an exclusively empirical overtone, to the relative neglect of its theoretical underpinnigs.[9] Of course, there exists a great deal of understanding of the distinction between deconcentration, delegation and devolution (the last being regarded as the most thoroughgoing version of decentralisation). Also well-understood are the different dimensions of decentralisation, namely, administrative, fiscal and political.

Inspite of this growing conceptual clarity regarding governance reforms, the nature of discussions is at times more rhetorical or empirical rather than analytical. But governance issues need to be explored in both practical and theoretical terms. Hence a close look at how we can conceptualise its broader objectives and effects is appropriate here. Indeed, several sets of theoretical literature are quite pertinent to our enquiry.

In practice most governance regimes have both centralising and decentralising features; stated differently, most are only more or less decentralised.[10] Also, the

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[8] Our brief review does not deal with the theoretical work on decentralisation in any depth.

[9] Some important exceptions include Klugman (1994), Hannaway (1993), Bardhan and Mukherjee (1999), and Prud'homme (1995).

[10] Discussing Prud'homme's (1995) analysis of costs and benefits of decentralisation, de Wit (1997) reiterates a similar point: all levels of government are to be involved in various stages of policies; the

process of centralisation or decentralisation is often cyclical and each cycle leaves behind some institutional vestiges (Elmore, 1993). In a `partially' decentralised system, therefore, planners involved in decentralising reforms need to identify which components of the system are more appropriately managed at what level of government. Generally speaking, economic objectives are presumed to be a primary consideration for determining the scope of decentralisation.

Broadly speaking, countries decentralise their governance structure for a variety of reasons : `to transfer authority to the most capable level of government, to improve management efficiency, to satisfy better the equity goals of welfare programmes, to raise greater revenues, to better recognise and accommodate local diversity' and so on. It is obvious that a large part of the literature on decentralisation deals with its economic rationale.

Of course, these alleged benefits need not accompany decentralisation, `given the risk of loss of economies of scale, duplication and overlap'. Also there has to be a fairly thoroughgoing devolution of authority in order that the presumed advantages might follow. All things said, however, decentralisation reforms have demonstrated the potential to achieve the foregoing objectives with some amount of success. And the underlying economic rationale behind this falls mainly into the fields of 1) public choice, 2) institutional economics and 3) perspectives on civil society and social capital.

2.2.1 Economic rationale

The more proximate theoretical arguments for decentralisation are typically information-, preference- and incentive-based arguments. For example, one particular line of argument, developed by Tibeout (1956), builds upon the proposition that individual preferences may vary by locality and that information constraints inhibit the effective functioning of the central government. As a corollary, he has emphasised the relative advantage of local governments in providing differentiated public goods in response to heterogeneous preferences. People with divergent preferences `vote with

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issue is to establish a proper mix of tasks between central, regional and local government levels.

their feet' across local jurisdictions, leading to competition and variations in local expenditures and public goods provisioning. Expectedly, people choose to live in areas where the bundle of public goods provided coincides with their preferred choices. Simply put, greater efficiency flows from a better fit between individual preferences and localised public services, as the latter are provided by governments responsible to those most directly affected and with greater information about local choices, costs and needs. The implication is that decentralisation can improve the match between the mix of services produced by the public sector and the preferences of the local people (World Bank, 2000). Local officials have better knowledge of local conditions and closer to their constituents; they have the means and the incentives to be more responsive.

The argument for decentralisation on the grounds of information and incentive advantages is lucidly summarised by Tendler thus (1997, p.1), "...local government is better at [certain] kinds of services ...partly because it is spatially closer than central government to its client-citizens. This greater proximity makes government more vulnerable to citizen pressures, and makes it easier for citizens to become more informed and hence more demanding of good service.The smaller area and number of citizens served by local government allows for a greater tailoring of service to the particular tastes and socio-economic realities of each locality, in contrast to the 'excessive' standardization and rigidity of faraway central governments."[11]

However, the increased efficiency that presumably results from the decisions of better informed local officials has to be weighed against the increased monitoring costs that are likely to be produced by decentralisation. Decentralisation has been interpreted by some scholars, mainly institutional economists, as an example of the principal-agent problem. The supra-local authorities may be thought of as the principal and local officials as agents on whose effort depends the goal fulfillment of the organisation. The challenge is how to provide local agents (local government) with incentives to pursue the principal's (central authorities) objectives (Klugman, 1994).

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[11] Tendler herself critically reviews these claims. For other cautionary views about the current enthusiasm for decentralisation, see the references in her paper and Joshi and Moore (2000).

The literature on social capital also makes an economic case for decentralisation, though from a very different angle; it emphasises the positive influence of associational life on effectiveness of public institutions. One of the most influential contributions in this area is by Coleman (1990). This genre of reasoning makes a case for decentralised governance on the ground that it brings decision-making closer to local people - people belonging to cohesive social networks, glued together by norms of mutual trust, reciprocity and solidarity. Such small, localised social groups, operating in a vibrant civil society, engage in common endeavours; they augment the effectiveness of public institutions by mobilising community's *social capital* in general and improving delivery of public services in particular.

The above arguments, which find a prominent place in current research, typically evince a technocratic/management orientation to the whole issue of governance, to the relative neglect of the underlying political-economic forces. They highlight, for justified reasons, the pivotal role of institutional mechanisms for effectiveness of service delivery. Improving cost-efficiency in service delivery is definitely a worthy cause for our concern. But there is more at issue than this. Local governance is not just an exercise in `problem-solving', in the style of public administration; it is not merely a technical or administrative undertaking. Such a `restrictive' approach narrows down both the purpose of decentralisation reforms as well as the measure of its success. It de-emphasises the fact that decentralisation is a broad `political' process, and that the nature and degree of power transferred within a reform process are dependent upon political will and the power struggles that underlie all efforts to achieve decentralisation.[12]

Such a narrow view depolitises the governance question in another critical sense too. There is an unstated assumption that decentralisation is an appropriate organisational device to implement developmental goals. But the goals themselves are thought to be widely accepted and settled issues and hence insular from political controversy. It is as if there exists a sort of consensus on the need for `development for all'. But in our country partisan debates continue not only about how to implement

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[12] A similar critique is advanced by de Wit (1997); he too talks about the need to combine the more narrow administrative, technical view of decentralisation with a political one and to link decentralisation with democracy.

human development goals, but more disturbingly about the value of human development itself. For example, how widely shared is the goal of universal schooling? The PROBE (1999) report carefully documents some of the most commonly articulated middle class skepticism about the value of educating the children of backward communities. More generally speaking, the debate regarding the value of dignity and capability for all is still wide open and the underlying reasons for this are political economic, and not just technical or managerial in nature. In such a situation, the local governance regime is bound to emerge as a political arena in which groups and individuals inside and outside of the state apparatus fight over, what we call, `the first order problem', namely, the problem of politically negotiating and settling the issue of `human development for all'.

2.2.2 Decentralisation as an institutional base for political participation : does it empower the poor?

Decentralising initiatives are not mainly about technical intervention, they involve serious political decisions. First and foremost, it is a reform process which will likely strengthen local institutions of democracy, expand political mobilisation and participation at the grassroots level. Indeed, mobilisation and empowerment of the disadvantaged - those who are euphemistically called `all' in the slogan `development for all' - is essential to making development programmes responsive to the needs of the poor. Hence, decentralisation is as much about people's participatory freedom as about administrative and fiscal efficiency.[13] This understanding should not only enter the current policy consciousness but also inform our efforts at theorising about decentralisation.

The incentive compatibility and information advantages - concepts that seem to receive the most attention in theoretical and policy discourses on decentralisation (at

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[13] E.M. S. Namboodiripad's succinct remark drives the point home very effectively: decentralisation is a corrective to the older practice of having 'democracy at national and State levels but bureaucracy at all lower levels'. As Acharya (2002, p.788) also observes, "[The] centralised and impersonal system of administration..developed by the colonial power had been based on the *positivist* (emphasis added) principle which considered the masses as objects to be developed. On the other hand, decentralisation and panchyati raj does not carry any meaning without recognising the role of masses as subjects to decide their own affairs...."

least within the frameworks for studying decentralisation that have evolved so far) - get mediated primarily through the mechanism of `public control', itself a sum of mobilisation, participation, greater vigilance and correspondingly greater governmental accountability. The required `political push' for changing the orientation of the state and its bureaucracy toward greater emphasis on pro-poor policies is likely to come by when ordinary people feel empowered to participate in the local decision-making institutions. As Dreze and Sen (1999, pp.374,375) astutely observe, "What the government ends up doing can be deeply influenced by pressures that are put on it by the public....a crucial variable.. is the activism of public participation...actions of the public can be of profound significance to the successes and failures of economic and social change in general, and to development efforts in particular."

Simply put, public participation is essential to making developmental activities responsive to the needs of the poor. There is a need, therefore, to place public participation and correspondingly political accountability at the centre of debate on decentralisation. As stated before, in conceptualising about local governance, all we insist on is a shift in the starting point. Simply, the chain of argument proceeds as follows: local institutions are likely to make decision-making more participatory, hence more accountable and therefore more efficient. Decentralisation thus gets linked to local democratisation, insofar as local agencies facilitate greater citizen involvement in issues that shape their lives. The so-called economic rationale for decentralisation does not accord any specific attention to participation at the local level and this stands in contrast to the perspective in which participation is the key feature of decentralisation (Klugman, 1994).[14]

Of course, there is no necessary or automatic association between decentralisation and increased democracy or participation. In particular, in a traditionally hierarchical society like ours, characterised by entrenched inequalities, legislation and formal rules do not necessarily mean that citizens are able to take full advantage of the legitimate space for engagement in decision-making that has been created through constitutionally initiated reforms. A much lower involvement in local governance of people from disadvantaged backgrounds is an empirical reality in many

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[14] For compelling arguments in this vein see Dreze and Sen (2002),

regions of the country. So the motivating question is whether decentralisation creates the political space and processes which adequately respond to the interests of the poor. Understandably, in the current scholarly work considerable attention has been paid toward examining the 'process' of local governance; that is to say, the variables pertaining to the nature and extent of participation, the social composition of participants and so on (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 200; Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002; HDRC, no date; Krishna, no date; Kaushik, 1998).

As an aside, let us concede the following about participation in local bodies : town and village meetings take time and some may prefer to do other things and regard attendance at them as an infringement on their freedom. In other words, citizen participation does not just happen even when the political space and opportunities do emerge for it to do so. Developing effective citizenship and building democratic organisation take effort. Simply put, any feasible plan of local governance, involving elected leaders, user groups, community representatives and so on, must design its institutions such that they can be run efficiently by people without supernatural characteristics - people (like us) who spend a great deal of time thinking about themselves and not about the promotion of local democracy (Majumdar, 2000).

Furthermore, it is essential to study the effect of participation on the *quality* of decisions - in particular the distributive effects of decentralisation.[15] While the participatory process is in itself empowering, reflecting on democratic practices is hard to separate from an interest in the ultimate goal of improving people's opportunities and expanding their capabilities In the final analysis, therefore, both at the supra-local and local levels, democratising political reforms have to be assessed with respect to redistributive programmes they get to generate, i.e., the redistribution of opportunities toward poorer segments of the society. Thus, redistribution of land rights, educational reform, restructuring of health care benefits, progressive taxation, labour market reforms - all become focal issues in a discussion on decentralised development.

But achieving the distributive goals of decentralised development is inextricably linked with the fiscal capability of local bodies. Expectedly, therefore,

[15] We take up the issue of 'outcome' variables in a greater detail below.

attention has been paid in the recent literature to the nature and extent of fiscal decentralisation; studies, for example, have focussed on whether there is a reasonably assured source of funds (preferably untied) for local bodies to discharge their new responsibilities or the potential/power to raise funds independently. In one view, own source revenues of local bodies (as a proportion of their total revenue) is treated as a measure of fiscal autonomy. For example, their tax capacity and efforts are thought to reduce their dependence on supra-local governments. At another level, however, caution is being raised about the revenue-base (i.e., the revenue-raising potential) of LBs, inter-regional disparities in this respect and their implications for equity goals.

But the area that remains relatively understudied is whether, once provision of funding is assured, greater allocation to social sector spending has taken place as compared to, say, central and State level pattern of expenditures (Klugman, 1997). From a human development perspective this is one of the most relevant concerns. Stated differently, in their revenue and expenditure decisions, different levels of government seem to cater to different competitive priorities. What importance do these decisions accord to social development priorities?[16] To what extent can decentralised regime enhance pro-poor policies and improve redistributive outcomes? In order to progress beyond the conventional focus on legal. administrative and technical aspects of decentralisation and to move on to a new framework of analysis, in the next section we shift attention to reforms in a particular sector, namely, decentralisation programme in the education sector under the aegis of the PRIs.

3 Educational Decentralisation: Institutions, Finances, Functionings and Outcomes

In establishing whether and to what extent an education system is decentralised, there exists no simple or single criteria, but rather a combination of

[16] For a handful of studies that have specifically looked into these issues, see Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001), Klugman (1997), Nagaraj (1999), Indira (2000) and Isaac and Shaheena (2000). Admittedly, investment for productive purposes (e.g., expenditure on agricultural and industrial growth and productivity) too has an important bearing on expanding people's basic livelihood opportunities and hence is very much germane to human development concerns. Therefore, no binary opposition is proposed here between various sectors of public spending. In fact, in Kerala with relatively more impressive social statistics but less promising economic growth, the challenge before the LBs is to orient their expenditure programmes toward a greater expansion of the productive sector. I am grateful to a seminar participant for raising this point. For an interesting discussion of similar issues in two case Panchayats in Kerala, see John and Chathukulam (2001).

institutional, fiscal and political indicators.[17] Educational decentralisation may mean widely divergent things in countries with distinctly different organisational arrangements. In many countries, decentralisation measures are implemented through executive orders, as opposed to legal or constitutional mandates, which leave ample scope for easy abrogation of powers delegated to local bodies or their transfer back to the hands of the central agencies. In some other cases, decentralisation refers to constitutional transfer of authority from the central and State to local governments.

In India, the recently enacted 73rd Amendment Act provides for control and governance of elementary education (up to high school level, in fact) by elected panchayat bodies; it devolves education responsibilities – hitherto the domain of education bureaucracy – onto the democratically elected panchayat members. However, the legislation leaves much to the wishes of the State governments and since the willingness of the State-level leadership to share power with the local leadership is highly uneven across the country, wide inter-State variations prevail in reform initiatives in the education sector. Another important consideration is with respect to the size of sub-central units. In a situation where provincial governments are themselves very large, the State government itself assumes the role of 'central' party in the relation between local and supra-local units and the municipal/rural counterparts the 'local' party. In other words, the notions of the 'central' and the 'local' are very country-specific.[18]

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[17] Weiler (1993) sheds light on the political dynamics of the debate over decentralisation in education governance by placing it within the theoretical context of the state's exercise of power. As mentioned above, the key conceptual categories in Weiler's analysis are control, conflict and legitimacy. His principal thesis is that the state, in exercising its power, has a dual interest : maintaining control on the one hand and enhancing its legitimacy on the other. Conditions of conflict, endemic in pluralistic societies, highlight the fundamental contradictions between these two interests. Without going into the details of the subject, one wonders whether the controversy around the recent centrally-sponsored drive for curriculum revision under the aegis of the NCERT reflects a similar contradiction.

[18] In the United States, for example, States are responsible for education, but most States further devolve most decision-making to special education districts. There are about 25 schools under each school district (Winkler, 1993). The local special districts are often coterminous with local government boundaries. Here decentralising programmes in education, therefore, usually entail transferring powers and functions away from district level actors (e.g., the school district board) to the individual schools themselves, to school level actors. By international standard, the US school system is already quite decentralised, with school districts functioning with considerable freedom from State and federal governments. In many States, curriculum decisions are made at the district level. Interestingly, district level curriculum decision making is thought to be highly centralised, even though it is highly participatory, because school principals and teachers are the prime decision makers (Hannaway, 1993). Thus, decentralisation has different connotations in different country settings, especially in countries

Also, as mentioned before, decentralising programmes in the education sector are never an all- or- nothing phenomenon. Some functions, such as decisions on the nature of classroom teaching by their nature need to be left to the persons performing those functions. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that some uniformity of school structure, teacher training, syllabuses in schools, and mode of evaluation is necessary in order to ensure some equivalence of academic degrees and mobility among institutions as well as across different parts of a country. In some countries it is the national government that reserves the authority to require equivalence, in others it is the prerogative of provincial governments. The latter is true of the practice prevalent in the States of India too. However, decentralising the function of curriculum development and text book preparation in the country involves several complex issues. As Rampal (2002, p. 161) thoughtfully observes, (we quote her extensively),

"How far 'down' can we take the process of decentralization? Does it mean further polarization, in terms of having separate curricula for the urban and the rural, the tribal and the non-tribal? How can we ensure 'equivalence', and what does equivalence really imply? What will happen to examinations, and would school boards need to be reconstituted? All these may be valid questions to discuss. ....A convenient unit would ultimately be the district, and ideally materials and textbooks must be developed by each DIET, in conformity with a skeletal 'core curriculum', and in close collaboration with a resource group of school teachers and other academics.

At present DIETs are academically inadequate, but a hands-on programme to upgrade their capacities and train their personnel can be taken up gradually. Such capacity building and facilitation of decentralization should be the major task of state- or national-level institutions. This should imply radically restructuring the NCERT, the SCERTs, the Textbook Corporations, the State Institutes of Education, etc., not only academically, but functionally, managerially, financially as well. The new role of national bodies such as the NCERT would be to provide forums for experience sharing and facilitate exposure to the experiences of various voluntary groups and state projects, through a close analysis of the materials developed.

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like India where at times even State-level operations assume continental proportions.

It has often been pointed that, in keeping with the spirit of academic decentralization, the NCERT must desist from producing textbooks of its own. At present the NCERT brings out textbooks for the network of *Kendriya Vidyalayas* (italics supplied), which exist all over the country. By doing so it only legitimizes the notion that for the dominant class of students studying in these national schools, `culture free' textbooks are desirable, whereas it is for the ordinary child that `relevant' books are prescribed. If text materials in conformity with local language, culture, and environment are indeed pedagogically important, then the NCERT must pursue this philosophy in its work too."

As an example of participatory curriculum setting, Rampal (op cit, p. 165) looks at the *Nali Kali* programme, "..being run in over 4000 government schools, as part of the DPEP in Karnataka. Primary teachers are the protagonists, and have been instrumental in working out the entire scheme of transacting the curriculum, with the help of block officials and some resource persons.

One significant issue emerging from the Nali Kali programme (first initiated in the H.D. Kote block of Mysore district),..., is that upscaling this effort cannot imply simple replication in other geographical areas."

Coming back to the diversities of decentralisation, in one prominent version, governance reform in education is taken to be a move to accord more autonomy to school-based decision making (King and Ozler, 2000); another model entails greater autonomy for local civil servants vis-à-vis central bureaucrats, and yet another focuses on the need to increase the role of the local community in schooling matters.[19] Thus, to capture the diverse dimensions of decentralisation, it would be helpful to fix our analytical gaze on the following issues and questions : i) decentralisation as organisational reform; ii) decentralisation as bringing schools closer to people; and iii) in what terms are the alleged benefits of education reforms to be reckoned?

i) Transition from cetralised to decentralised governance would mean changes in the organisational size and complexity of schools. Apart from teachers directly

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[19] The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that has been operational in selected districts of India has created a district based administrative structure which is somewhat different from the

responsible for teaching, there are a host of people – principals, supervisors, directors, clerks and so on – who are concerned with keeping the whole system going. Would decentralisation mean additional layers of governance (with its own bureaucratic apparatus) or making the organisational structure simpler with more directly accountable institutions in place?

ii) Again, we need to examine how reforms facilitate active local/parental participation in the governance of public education. By local community do we mean the parents, patrons and participants in a given school, a geographically defined neighbourhood or a broader civic body? Does the community enjoy real control over core elements of school administration such as budgeting, staffing, and curriculum and so on? There is a growing view that in the name of involving lay people in what seem to be administrative and professional matters, decentralised governance of public education may lead to a school administration that is corrupt and chaotic, uneven in quality and student performance. For reasons of standardization, economies of scale, coordination etc., the argument continues, we need to blend different forms of governance – centralised and decentralised. The challenge is to figure out what kind of school decisions are best managed at what levels of government.

iii) One way to assess the success or otherwise of decentralisation is to talk about accountability. Accountability may mean internal bureaucratic accountability. More pertinently however, accountability has to be assessed with reference to what lies at the heart of the school system, namely, teaching-learning activities. For example, do teachers regularly come to school, do they actively teach when present, what are the results of their instruction as measured by student performance on standardized tests? This brings us back to the first-order problem mentioned before – the broad question of the purpose of public education. We need to ask what value the society attaches to the education of all children, whether it considers education to be the right of every child and correspondingly whether it nurtures a vision of decent future for all its citizens. Under a decentralised regime, do we work to improve the public school system, or abandon it in favour of privatisation (Carnoy, 1993)? Is the main impact of decentralisation felt by the rich, with little if any educational opportunities `trickling down' to the lower income groups? The answer has important implications for school

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mainstream organisational structure; it accords relative flexibility to the local institutions.

reform policies. If decentralisation typically leaves the poor behind, what does it do to the vision of public schooling?

In what follows, we take up some of these issues in turn.

3.1 The organisational arrangement in the education sector under the PR regime :

Since educational decentralisation can take a variety of forms, it is necessary to describe in some detail the arrangements that are evolving in our country under the new setting and the range of institutional actors involved therein. It bears noting however that in a federal system like ours reforms take place within a multi-level planning framework and that each cycle of reform (decentralising or recentralising) leaves behind its own institutional vestiges. Consequently, parallel structures proliferate. Also, with the expansion of the school system in the last one decade, the education bureaucracy has also grown in size; sub-central administrative units have sprung up at several levels – starting from the State government to the village school.

The implementation of decentralisation measure itself has brought in its wake new organisational arrangements at all levels of educational management. For example, school management committees, parent-teacher associations, school cluster committees, village education committees and various other bodies are being created at the district, block and village levels – mostly as State-promoted efforts from above to institutionalise `grass roots' processes of management. All these generate new organisational exigencies in terms of interfusing multiple layers of governance and bringing together diverse institutional actors, namely, PRIs, line departments, school level actors, user groups, communities and so on.

Also, as things stand now in several if not all States, there is no clear demarcation of functions between the three tiers of panchayats, generating a confusing situation and threatening accountability. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) set up a Committee on Decentralised Management in 1993 to formulate guidelines on decentralisation reforms in education in the context of the 73rd Amendment Act.[20] It offered detailed plans of entrusting educational functions to local

[20] As far as the letter of the law goes, overall supervision of all education programmes in the district up

institutions (Chart 1). The Committee proposed creation of Standing Committees on education at different levels of the PR structure – gram panchayat, panchayat samiti and zilla panchayat levels, assigning comprehensive powers, functions and responsibility to these bodies (ISS, 1996).[21] However, generally these committees either have not been provided for in the State Acts or are mostly not there in practice (excepting the VEC); also most States have not delineated functions and powers of these committees. Simply put, the scope and the nature of their activities remains completely undefined. What needs to be done in the education sector at each level of the three-tiered PR system has not been specified under the State law. Several States have simply repeated the education-related subjects and functions at different levels.

In respect of financial and personnel matters, the State governments have to take a series of specific steps including framing of rules, bye-laws, guidelines etc. Because, in most cases hardly any provisions have been made so far in the State Acts for transfer of the real powers related to personnel and financial matters to LBs. "Such powers are either denied or left undefined, leading to a potentially contentious dual control at best or to complete dependence on the State government at worst (Gupta, p.76).

The current decentralisation reforms in the education sector, their gingerly pace notwithstanding, signify the presence of and interaction between a host of institutional actors at the district, block and village levels, ranging from elected representatives to education bureaucracy to teachers to parents as well as district, block and cluster level functionaries created under the DPEP (Chart 2). On paper, the District Education Officer (DEO) is supposed to deal with all issues pertaining to school education within the district. In practice, however, DEOs are often found busy with preparing proposals regarding the opening of new schools, upgrading existing schools, provision of additional staff, rationalization of existing staff etc. But major decisions in these respects are taken at the State level and the responsibility of the district-level

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to secondary level is brought under the purview of PRIs.

21 The Committee realized that the standard practice used to monitor school functioning, namely, the school inspection system of the State education department, had remained highly ineffective as a supervisory mechanism in most States; hence its recommendation for constituting Village Education Committees (VECs) at the gram panchayat level, to take up the task of monitoring day-to-day functions of schools.

authorities is mainly confined to preparing proposals and/or implementing decisions taken at the higher levels (Govinda, 1997; Nuna, 1997). DEOs seldom find time to visit schools and give academic leadership to school teachers. There are several inspecting officers such as AEOs under each DEO; they too do not have adequate time to pay one visit to all the schools allotted to one particular inspecting officer in every year.

Similar observations hold, even more appropriately, for functionaries working below the district level such as the Block Education Officer (BEOs). They play largely an advisory role. As a more recent drive toward administrative decentralisation, it has been decided to establish one institute in each district known as the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in order to meet professional training needs at the district level. But the functioning of DIETs has been hampered severely mostly because they are poorly staffed (mostly through deputation and temporary staff) in many districts (Rampal, 2002).

Apart from hierarchy within the education bureaucracy itself, what compounds the task of organisational decentralisation even more is the lack of clear demarcation between the jurisdiction and powers of the education administration and PRI institutions vis-à-vis schooling matters. As indicated earlier, as per the Constitutional Amendment Act, powers of decision making in the school sector are vested with the elected representatives of panchayat bodies. In the conformity legislations enacted at the State level, however, their powers have been left undefined in majority of States, creating the possibility of parallel lines of control ensuing from PRIs and education bureaucracy respectively. Very often, the dual control creates an element of tension.

For example, the DPEP, as a centrally sponsored scheme of the Government of India in some selected districts of the country, has put in place a new framework for management of primary education at the district level. This programme functions with considerable autonomy and has the objective of involving the community in an active manner. The relative flexibility of the programme, some scholars hold, has produced satisfactory results. However, since the DPEP (it is also a time-bound project) operates under an independent set of rules that are quite distinct from those of the regular administrative set-up in non-DPEP districts, this programme not only creates parallel

structures, but more critically, accentuates the much-mentioned problem of integrating democratic control (of elected leaders) with bureaucratic supervision (by the administrative staff) at the district level.

Clearly, decentralisation through the PR system is distinct from delegation of administrative powers from higher to lower levels of bureaucracy. But the two strands of reform must blend together under the overall leadership of elected bodies in order for genuine transformation of schools and schooling to take place. Just as no rigid dichotomies are perceived in the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy at the Central and State-levels, at the local level of governance too there is a clear possibility for collaboration and partnership between PR members and reform-minded fractions within the bureaucracy.

3.2 Inter-governmental assignment of educational responsibilities

To what extent are the education-related functions decentralized under the current reforms regime and how are they assigned to a host of institutional actors across various levels of government? While addressing these issues, we must recall that the degree of centralisation/decentralisation of decision-making may differ widely by specific function or component, even within a given inter-governmental system of education. For example, curriculum decisions may be relatively more centralised, at the same time school construction may be almost entirely decentralised. As indicated before, the idea is to find out what kinds of functions are best handed at what level of government, keeping in mind considerations such as efficiency, (dis)economies of scale, equity goals of education etc.

As an illustrative example, Table 1 summarises the details of functional allocation that currently prevails in the school education sector in Tamil Nadu. It is apparent that not only is curriculum preparation done by State-level boards, decisions regarding virtually all school related activities – pedagogic, administrative as well as financial – are centralised at the State level. Strictly speaking, teacher recruitment is a State level activity, but teachers are recruited to a district cadre and are transferable within the district. In this respect too, therefore, sub-State level actors exercise only limited power. School construction and maintenance is one among a handful of

functions that is vested with the sub-district level authorities. In States like Tamil Nadu, the elected LBs as well as the local administration (especially at the sub-district level) are still treated mainly as the implementing agencies for plans and decisions taken at higher levels. However, there exist considerable inter-State variations in this respect.

3.3 PRIs and Teacher Management

We now move onto what lies at the heart of the school education system, namely, teaching. Can institutions of local governance provide an incentive compatible system that encourages teachers' professionalism, performance and accountability? For parents, the ideal is to have teachers who actively engage themselves in teaching activities and provide high-quality education to their children. For that purpose, it is important to decide at which level of governance the management and supervision of teachers should rest. This involves, for example, the setting of teaching standards, the establishment of teachers' training, recruitment, pay, promotion etc. Attempts are under way to decentralise many of these managerial responsibilities of the education sector and some have indeed produced encouraging results.

However, some areas of concern still endure and need to be resolved. For example, local bodies in more disadvantaged areas may find it hard to attract qualified teachers (this will certainly have implications for inter-regional disparity). Again, setting salaries at the local level may have detrimental effects on teacher quality; similarly, employment of cheap teachers on a part-time basis (a likely fall out of localised needs and capacities) may cause 'creeping casualisation' in the teaching service.

Also at issue is the unstated assumption of dual allegiance of teachers to PRIs as well as to the education department. If teachers are deputed/transferred from the department to LBs, whom will they report to – PRIs or the education department? Particularly contentious is the issue of delegating to PRIs the authority for promotion and transfer of teachers and disciplinary actions against them. In general, teachers do not like to be brought under the control of LBs; they are not in favour of shifting power in this regard from distant central authorities to local agencies (Govinda, 1997).

The situation gets even more complicated because of increased politicisation of teachers' unions.[22]

Apart from these managerial issues, there remains the endemic problem of teacher absenteeism and shirking in rural India. As the PROBE survey of schools in some selected States of North India reveals, at the time of the investigators' visit, one third of the headmasters were absent, one third of the schools had a single teacher present, and about half of the schools had no teaching activity going on (Dreze and Kingdon, 1999). Talking about this persistent problem Dreze and Sen (1999, p.389) perceptively observe, "...it is difficult to see how [this problem] can be successfully tackled without involving the proximate agency of village communities. Shirking cannot be easily detected by distant outsiders, and the system of centralized school inspection has proved quite ineffective in much of rural India. It is much easier for the concerned parents and other local residents to monitor the behaviour of school teachers." It is in this context that the PRIs can play an important role in providing an institutional mechanism to ensure the accountability of village teachers to the local community.[23]

But how exactly is the specific knowledge of the local community and PRIs vis-à-vis school functioning and teacher activities to be translated into remedial action? This is a 'challenging problem of local governance'. Put more elaborately, in order to improve teacher attendance and accountability via local monitoring, it would be counter-productive to adopt a thoroughly anti-teacher stance. After all, there exists no foolproof method of monitoring teachers, because teacher effort belongs to a class of 'complex contracts' that are unavoidably incomplete; it is ultimately a product of teachers' initiatives, motivation and professionalism. As Kirkman (2001, p.3) rightly ponts out, "we do need to recognize...that we shall not enhance the quality of education in our schools..., if we always think the worst of our teachers." Therefore,

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[22] There appears to be a conflict of interest between politicians (let alone between administrators and elected leaders) at two levels of government, that is to say, between State-level politicians and PRI leaders. Because, for the State-level politicians teachers' unions provide a source of manpower which can be used for promoting politicians' own interests (For an interesting discussion of this point, see Kingdon and Muzammail, 2001).

[23] This of course implies a related challenge of how to integrate the respective roles, in education management, of PRIs, local communities and school level actors in a manner which facilitates the expansion of educational opportunities. We discuss this point later.

local vigilance and monitoring could work to weaken the endemic dereliction of duties on the part of teachers by involving them in schooling matters and making greater professional demand on them, and certainly not by alienating them from their work.

There is indeed a skeptical view about the current enthusiasm for reforms in the education sector which warns us against the possibility of de-institutionalising and de-professionalising the system, in the name of localising educational decisions (Sharma, 2000; Kumar, Priyam and Saxena, 2001). There is a tendency, it is argued, to undervalue the critical role of a good teacher and her professional skills in a decentralised school system, in the process of reposing our confidence in community control. An effective reformist project, therefore, will have to ensure the collective engagement of all the critical groups - teachers, PRI leaders, parents and the larger community – in a common endeavour to transform the school system. As Hannaway (1993) astutely observes in her discussion of American public schools, the bad work of teachers in public schools is often not criticised or corrected; teachers' efforts often are not well directed not because they are over-regulated but because `they are ignored'. Hence, shifting from a regulated centralised model of schools to a more decentralised set up would produce desired results only when our attention is turned to this major lacuna of the existing school system, namely, the alienation of teachers from their work and the absence of professional challenges before them. Just as local pressure and vigilance is critical for making it socially compelling for teachers to pay attention to their central functions, namely, coming to school regularly and engaging in active teaching when present, structural reforms that give teachers a sense of the importance of their role in school transformation, and facilitate their professional exchanges around common teaching-learning objectives are quite certain to result in more effective schools than what the existing hierarchical structures do.

In a masterly analysis of two successfully decentralised school districts in the U.S., Hannaway (op.cit) draws our attention to one of the key elements that has accompanied decentralisation in these two experiments, namely, the considerable extent to which the new arrangements have generated interactions among teachers and other school-level actors around technical and professional issues. This aspect, she convincingly argues, is central to the effectiveness of these projects. In her revealing words (p.154), "In both districts, teachers are stimulated, prodded and supported [at

times by national and State-level education reform groups, [illegible] each other about their work and to act together [illegible] technical interactions..'control' the behavio[illegible]ure and peer monitoring of quality. In [illegible] teachers more aware of the professional views of other teachers. The public nature of much of teachers' professional lives in these two districts undoubtedly affects the behavior and the seriousness of purpose with which teachers attend to their work. For this reason it might be argued that high levels of technical interaction among teachers reduce the agency problems that are commonly assumed to accompany decentralization [that is to say, any divergence of interests between the school district and individual teachers]."[24]

Simply put, decentralisation reforms in education, to be effective, should at once facilitate 'social control' of school level actors by parents, local residents and local communities as well as promote 'mutual control' of teachers through greater professional exchanges and interactions among them.

3.4 PRIs, Education Professionals and the Public : A Possible Synergy of action?

Education decentralisation through PRIs is something more than just school-site autonomy and management;[25] in addition to school level actors (teachers and principals) it involves a host of other bodies created at the district and block levels such as VECs, school cluster committees, PTAs, academic and expert groups and line departments. Achieving synergy in aims and actions of such a motley group of institutions and actors – starting from elected bodies to user groups, school specific actors, village-level agencies to supra-local educational functionaries and so on – is a major challenge of local governance. The areas of their respective jurisdiction are often not clear, creating an overlap of functions and infusing an element of tension into their interactions and power equations, especially in situations where different political parties are in power at different layers of governance.

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[24] The original proposal for establishing the District Institute of Educational Training (DIET) in each district of India was also inspired by similar expectations. Comments along these lines were made by A. Rampal in a national seminar on primary schooling held recently in New Delhi.

[25] The major frameworks for studying educational decentralisation that have evolved in the U.S. focus on school site management (King and Ozler, 2000).

One central issue which underlies these complexities relates to the respective roles in education governance of professionals on the one hand and parents and local patrons on the other. Pro-community reformers want a more direct link between schools and the 'people'. This itself is a good thing. However, an increasing enthusiasm for 'local' support and control in schooling matters often comes at the expense of a parallel doubt about any useful role for education professionals. As Tendler (1997, p.14) observes, ".. in the decentralisation discourse professionals are usually portrayed as obstructing reforms and greater local power is portrayed as a way of getting *around* professionals." In this view, public schools are to be treated as grass-roots affairs, and therefore new governance structures must be designed that hold schools accountable to their clients, rather than to their bureaucratic and technocratic superiors. Put simply, the over-bureaucratised institution (along with its professionals) is the problem and the community is the solution.

When schools are decentralised parents and patrons can call the shots. Elmore (1993, p.90) summarises this argument in the North American context thus, "If the community and the parents of school age children had more voice in the schooling enterprise, then there would be more parental satisfaction with the schools and more commitment to the educational process. The result would be improved education attainment. The democratization of the governance process and the representation of parental and community interests would lead to improved schooling."

Focussing on the rural setting in India, Sen (2001) comments about a much lower involvement of parents from 'lowly' background in parent teacher meetings, and their severe under-representation in the VECs. "Those who most need that their 'voices' be heard lack that power fairly comprehensively" (.p4).."one way of adding to the incentive system in schooling", Sen continues, "would be to give more legal power to the parents-teachers committee, even perhaps making the renewal of school appropriations conditional on their approval. Since the parents-teachers committees are more specific to particular schools, in contrast with Village Education Committees (which have a specialized domain), the case for a fresh beginning by substantially broadening the parents-teachers committees in the operation of specific schools may be more plausible. For effectiveness, there would also be a need to establish firm guidelines on the representation of parents from different class backgrounds, and also

some insistence on approvals being made in actual meetings rather than fictitious ones" (p.5).

Therefore, several qualifications are in order before we can gather a rounded view of the nature of partnership between the people and the professionals. First, it is naïve to presume a strictly benign role for the community in school governance, without paying heed to the nature of community groups, the degree of cohesion among them, and more generally the oppressive class system of the Indian society. Second, no one can dispute the fact that professionals in the public sector have made governance difficult on various occasions, been reluctant to grant legitimacy to community inputs over and above their technocratic qualifications and have often imparted, rather arrogantly, a sense of powerlessness to users of public services. Yet one would have to also realise that technical knowledge and skill and institutional mechanisms around it are required to tasks such as formulation of curriculum, appointment of teachers, conducting examinations, training teachers etc.

Hence, it is entirely consistent with the view that education reforms should accommodate and be sensitive to local public interests to acknowledge that we need to draw upon the expertise and discretion of professional educators, especially those with a reformist bent. Parents and professionals need not be arch adversaries; it is indeed counter-productive to push for a false dichotomy between them. Stated differently, there is no `one' best way to govern schools. It seems either of the following two statements - `people know the best' or `experts know the best' – is myopic and extreme. Uttered too rigidly, both the views can be easily caricatured and turned into an absurd claim that either is redundant and dispensable.[26] The real imperative is to combine parental and community concerns with educational expertise for effective school reforms. The challenge of local governance is to translate local participation and pressure into governance inputs, without necessarily de-professionalising school organisation and activities. The idea is not to displace professionalism but to activate public interest and involvement. There indeed remain instances of interaction (and overlap of concerns) of parents and local residents with reform-minded experts (such as the KSSP in Kerala) as well as with public education professionals with a reformist

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[26] Somewhat relatedly, even for voluntary organisations a code of conduct is necessary. In this connection, see Bunker Roy, "NGOs too need a Code", The Indian Express, 29 December (8-9), 1993.

bent, leading to promising vistas in educational governance (Tharkan, 2000).

3.5 Distributive Outcomes of decentralisation reforms in education

What effects structural changes (school restructuring) have on school functioning in terms of teaching-learning activities, classrooms practices and student performance? As Weiler (1993, p.72) pointedly asks, "..under decentralized conditions do teachers teach what they are supposed to teach, students learn what they are supposed to learn and are the schools clean and the accounts properly kept?"

Our ultimate interest lies in the impact of decentralisation on the expansion of educational opportunities to *all* children. To put it simply, our distributional concerns prompt us to raise two basic questions. The first relates to the good old politico-economic question of who benefits. Is the main impact of decentralisation felt by the rich, with little opportunities 'trickling down' to the lower income groups? Alternatively, can decentralisation bring about substantial benefits to the poor? Second, in what terms are these alleged benefits to be reckoned?

Obviously, there is no easy way to measure educational outcomes following from decentralisation. This acknowledged, in somewhat more concrete terms we may consider the relevant outcomes as those which a) increase access and utilisation on the part of poorer sections of the society (the equity effect); b) improve student achievement (school effectiveness criteria); c) reduce the unit cost of production and provision of educational services (the efficiency effect); and d) put the educational needs of disadvantaged children at the centre stage of the political agenda (the broad political effect). Narrowing the focus even further, one may look into the impact of decentralisation of fiscal responsibilities and examine whether the revenue and expenditure decisions of local governments are more oriented towards education (and other human development goals) as compared to what would have resulted under a centralised system.

To be certain, evaluation is not a strictly technical and neutral activity; rather it is driven by our socio-political considerations. Expectedly, opinions diverge widely about the relative importance of the diverse fall-outs of decentralisation reforms. To

quote Weiler (1993, pp.73.74) again, "Those whose children grow up in more privileged and stimulus-rich circumstances will judge an education system more by how well it cultivates outstanding talent and ability (excellence), while the parents of less privileged children will attach greater importance to the system's ability to foster more equitable learning opportunities for a larger number of people...[especially] larger groups of less privileged children."

Disagreements also persist on whether performance on standardised tests is the only legitimate measure of educational outcomes. Based upon an illuminating review of `the school effectiveness research', Bashir (1995, pp.10-11) cautions us, "..achievement tests were developed by educationists to monitor academic performance or diagnose educational problems. In the hands of economists and macro-policy makers in education, they have come to be interpreted as `output' measures and are being used .....to influence resource allocation decisions. If questions of validity and bias were important when the uses were purely educational, they are even more so when momentous decisions are being taken which may affect the life-chances of millions of young people."

To the extent the choice and interpretations of outcomes are determined by our social and political priorities (for example, a selective focus on either of the two competing goals of equity and achievement), an evaluation of governance reforms is bound to be limited. These inherent difficulties notwithstanding, we put forth a framework of evaluation, adapted from Klugman (1997), which is consistent with our ultimate interest in distributive outcomes, that is to say, outcomes that are positive in terms of human development concerns.

Ideally, we need to compare the above-mentioned diverse outcomes under two regimes, i.e., before or after decentralisation or alternatively between similar programmes run by central and local authorities. However, data limitations will hardly permit such strict comparability (op.cit). Also, it is notoriously difficult to disentangle the effect of decentralisation per se from other exogeneous factors which would also influence educational outcomes. There is also the factor of time lag with which `outcomes' are shaped by reforms.

Thus, while clear and unambiguous indicators of the impact of decentralisation will be hard to achieve, it is important to identify some relevant factors and 'possible causal links' that need to be traced in order to measure the effect of decentralisation on educational progress (Chart 3). The impact of reforms in the education sector may be seen to flow from three major sets of variables, namely, a) budgetary allocations to LBs and fiscal arrangements; b) organisation and utilisation of budgetary resources; and c) participatory inputs and incentives.[27] The first variable mainly affects the volume of resources available under decentralised conditions; the second provides the route through which funds will be actually utilised and technical effectiveness might be gained.[28] The third variable aims to capture the dimension of participation of parents, teachers, PRI members and local residents in schooling matters and its effects on both fiscal decisions as well as other aspects of school functioning.[29] The respective roles that various participatory institutions such as VECs, PTAs and teacher unions play in village school affairs strongly influence outcomes. Also, sometimes it is the unobservable or 'intangible inputs' like teacher motivation, parent-teacher co-operation etc. more than tangible resources which make a big difference to achievement performance of students (Dreze and Kingdon, 1999).

All the three sets of variables are thought to affect outcomes through various process indicators such as school enrolment, attendance and retention rates of students, teacher attendance, involvement etc. It is not surprising that researchers have focused a great deal on these intermediate variables. But we need to progress beyond them and pay attention to outcome variables as well. Incorporating criteria of both equity and efficiency, we may consider both overall education attainment as well as its distribution, disaggregated by the level of income, rural/urban residence, gender, family size, social groups etc. Finally, the efficiency of provision and production of

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[27] There are of course wider exogenous macro-economic variables which are also likely to affect educational outcomes independently of decentralisation reforms, as also some household-related factors such as the rate of unemployment, parental education and income etc. These factors somehow need to be controlled for, in measuring the impact of decentralisation.

[28] Note however that there may well be central control on local decisions; as Klugman (1997) points out, wages, for example, may be centrally fixed.

[29] Indeed, what actually happens inside the school, what teaching-learning activity goes on inside the classroom, how much interaction takes place between parents and teachers – in short, the activities that lie at the heart of the school system – depend not only on budgetary allocations and their use but equally crucially on the so-called participatory inputs and incentives.

knowledge may be measured through an analysis of the unit cost of production in a decentralised setting as compared to the same in a more centralised set up.

Finally, subsuming all of the above outcome measures there remains a larger political question (and correspondingly the possibility of a wider political development): whether and how institutions of local democracy help shaping the broad purpose of public education; whether PRI politics induces local participation and creates pressure in favour of expansion of educational opportunities and thereby works to combat the chronic neglect of basic education in rural India; and finally whether the local political agenda is infused with an element of radicalism which in turn generates a democratic claim of basic education as a right of every child. In operational terms, we may investigate whether under a decentralised regime such concerns exercise a strong influence on the making of local public policy.

In this paper, we have not dealt with one important aspect of decentralisation in education, namely, fiscal decentralisation (i.e., reassignment of revenue-raising and expenditure responsibilities form the central and regional to local governments). We only make a very brief mention of the following points. In our country, regional governments are primarily responsible for financing elementary and secondary education, although strictly speaking there exists a mixed system, including central government financing/revenue-sharing programmes/categorical grants etc. To shift part of the burden of support for elementary and secondary education to local governments and even to local communities is viewed by many as reasonable. However, as Klugman (1997, p.6) responsibly qualifies this view, "While some view local authority to raise revenue as a necessary element of devolution..., it is not a sufficient condition for effective decentralization...central financial transfers play a critical role in determining the impact of decentralization...[on school participation]." Also, arguments for fiscal self-sufficiency have to be weighed against parallel concerns for regional disparities in fiscal capacity, tax base etc. and their effect on quality and quantity of education.

3.6 PRIs, the local elite and public schools :

A note of caution is apposite here. Locally elected bodies may be run in the interests of the dominant classes in land and wealth; they may indeed fail to throw up

any new political leadership and instead work to strengthen the grip of the extant rural elite. They may fail to unleash a process of radical politics in favour of quality schooling for all (Narain, 1972). Given the entrenched and highly unequal nature of power in large parts of the country, the *capture* of PRIs by the local elite is sadly plausible. As several empirical studies have noted, effective representation in local bodies is mostly by landed people and the economically ascendant class having better education, and not by groups such as agricultural labourers or illiterate people. This stands as reminder that there is no guarantee of linear progression to democracy as we proceed progressively downwards from the center to the State to sub-State levels.

Similar points have been made by several scholars. While it is often assumed that decentralisation will enhance representative democracy, Binswanger notes that "[g]iving greater voice to lower-level political institutions...[also] run[s] the risk of entrenching further local, often highly unequal, power structures and worsening income inequalities." (as quoted in Tendler,1997). In a similar vein, James Madison in *Federalist Papers* underlined the significance of the federal system which allows, through checks and balances in the allocation of power, citizens who feel that they have been poorly treated at one level of government to have redress at other levels. (op.cit.).

Indeed, PRI politics can be thought to be a microcosm of supra-local politics; "..there are as many opportunities for local government as for central government to engage in rent-seeking and other undesirable behavior." (Tendler 1997, p.7) "The [current] enthusiasm for decentralization", she continues, "...assumes that giving more power and responsibility to local government goes along with all other good things, including greater representation for the poor and servicing of their needs." (p.11) But in reality all good things do not move together. However, the possibility that elite domination can impede participatory democracy need not make us overly anxious about the limits of decentralisation, because all the three tiers of government are prone to similar problems (Majumdar, 2000).. And it cannot be established *a priori* that the vulnerability of local governments to `capture' by local elites is bound to be higher as compared with their supra-local counterparts.[30] It is therefore premature to pronounce

[30] While assessing the relative capture of local and central governments, Bardhan and Mukherjee (1999), however, claim that comparatively speaking LBs suffer from greater vulnerability to capture by

that one level of government is 'fitter for democracy' than the other. The central and State governments, Tendler (1997. p.7) rightly points out, themselves are rife "..with the clientelism...that [they] fear in local government." Thus, a justified concern for elite domination of local institutions need not detract us from stressing that there is an analogue at the higher levels also. On a more positive note, we recall what Rabindranath Tagore said in the context of India's demand for independence from the colonial rule, "It is the opportunity for self-determination which gives training for self-determination." (as quoted in Dutt and Robinson, 2000).Thus, as the PR initiatives create the potential for accommodating wider local interests, ordinary citizens will eventually be able 'to articulate their own interests and develop their own leadership'.

4. **Concluding Remarks**

The exercise undertaken here has only scratched the surface of the implications of educational decentralisation. While there is nothing dramatically new about the observations made here, the paper attempts to develop a perspective to improved local government in general and improvement in public schools in particular that differs somewhat from the current thinking about decentralisation. It suggests an explicit human development approach to thinking about decentralisation reforms, by placing at the heart of the enquiry, the nature and extent of democratic involvement of the poor in the reform process.

Without attempting to summarise the arguments made above, we are now in a position to draw the important points together. First, decentralisation initiatives are to be seen as a programme within a multi-layered political system which functions at local, provincial and national levels, and not as a closed narrowly parochial stand-alone governance regime, as some advocates of decentralisation seem to claim. Second, the participation of the historically subordinate social classes/castes in the

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local elites, due to greater cohesion and overlap of interests among local elite groups, lesser degree of electoral competition in local politics etc. However, a process of social churning has started taking place in different parts of rural India and consequently cracks have started developing among the local elite too; their interests do not neatly converge any more, nor does their dominance, in terms of land ownership and other economic wherewithal, remain intact. The exercise of power by the dominant class/caste is being challenged in different corners of the country by subaltern classes and stands somewhat weakened. The scholarly works brought together in two edited volumes by Frankel and Rao (1989, 1990) focus on this phenomenon of 'the decline of dominance'. I am grateful to A. Vaidyanathan for very helpful discussions on this point.

newly reformed structure of governance is a key parameter, over and above the legal reforms. That is to say, the broad social and political process, taking place outside of the constitutional framework, is quite central to the question of improvement of local democracy. The Constitutional Amendment is to be seen as only a necessary condition to bring into existence vibrant local governments. While discussing the promises that the recent legislative reforms hold, Dreze and Sen (1999, p.392) insightfully comment, "...if they [legal reforms] go hand in hand with an expansion of public initiatives and social movements..., a stronger political organisation of disadvantaged groups and a more vigorous challenge to social inequalities, they would represent a real opportunity to transform local politics in rural India."

Third, which is linked to the second, the purpose of democratic decentralisation is to improve the complementarity between the state and society and not to advocate a zero-sum opposition between the two; neither is it to 'to remove the state from involvement in development' (Webster 1995, p.32). While discussing the livelihood concerns of marginalised people in selected Third World cities, Evans (2000) makes a similar point about the need to highlight, in discussions of local governments, the possibility of complementary contributions from different organisations and groups inside and outside of the state. In his revealing words (p.21), "'state-society synergy' is not just an abstract concept. It is shorthand for the myriad concrete relationships of mutual support that connect communities, NGOs and social movements with individuals and organizations inside the state who put a priority on livelihood and sustainability." However he also admits, "...innumerable opportunities for building ties, making connections and exploiting potential synergies are being overlooked...Technocrats underestimate the extent to which they need communities; community leaders dismiss those working in the state as bureaucrats and NGOs dismiss ordinary citizens and technocrats as pedestrian and shortsighted." (p.23) Evaluating the urban poverty alleviation programmes in an Indian city, de Wit (1997, p. 35) underlines in a similar vein the importance of co-operation and interaction among multiple actors, "Ultimately policy implementation takes place at the local grassroots level, in local arena where local agencies, bureaucrats, local elites, politicians, land owners, speculators, contractors, NGOs and social workers operate." It is the challenge of local governance to harness such joint initiatives and activities for human development purposes.

Finally, in the specific sector of education the task seems to be to align decentralisation reforms with the broad purpose of public schooling, which embodies a strong commitment to social justice and a generous vision of a decent future for all citizens.[31] In other words, the purpose of educational decentralisation is not to remove public institutions from involvement in educational matters but to improve public performance. And democratic decentralisation is one important means by which this can be hopefully achieved.

The `vision' that currently enervates our school system is that `education is not for *their* (read subaltern) children'. This narrow conception of schooling rears a callous attitude towards the current ills of the public school system (upon which children from the disadvantaged background mostly depend) which develops into a readiness to even allow the entire system to collapse. To energise the public school system we need a generous vision of `the common school', we need to redefine the purpose of public schooling. And it is here that the contemporary effort to promote participatory democracy under the aegis of PRIs presents before us some reformatory possibilities.

Reforming public schools through the channel of decentralisation will require at least two things : a) re-examination of the harsh criticism of public schools currently in vogue, and b) involvement of the public in schooling matters. Often a strong case is made for dismantling public schools. It is as if the present system is `structurally incapable' of correcting its deficiencies, leaving us with the unique option of private schools. However, there does not exist a private solution for every public deficiency. Hence, even without any prejudices against private initiatives, our aim should be to improve and not to abandon the public school system. Also, to extend the `public' character of public schools, decentralisation reforms may act as a means of putting education in the hands of the people – the people as parents and community members who have a direct interest in specific schools as well as the people meaning the broader community of citizens with general interest in the entire school system.

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[31] For an illuminating discussion of a generous conception of educational purpose (i.e., public schools – public in support and control – should be open to all children), see Barber (1997), Tyack (1993),

Simply put, we envision a possibility of the 'transformation of the school system' under decentralised conditions. Of course in this paper we have covered only a few of the many subjects that need to be addressed for a meaningful discussion on school transformation. For example, we have to deal with the nuts and bolts of the school system under a decentralised regime and examine the effects, under the changed organisational arrangements, of school inputs, pedagogic practices and teacher attributes on student achievement and contrast these with the agenda pursued by central educational agencies and the corresponding outcomes. Our analysis is certainly limited in these respects.

However, we have touched upon one important issue. We have tried to argue that the analysis of school transformation will hold limited utility unless we consider it as a part of a more general project of social and political transformation, likely to be galvanised through the process of decentralisation. Hopefully, local democratic institutions and the participatory spaces they open up will influence partisan competition and electoral battles in particular and the public discourse in general in such a way that a progressive education agenda is imposed on state policy both at the local as well as supra-local levels.

Carnoy (1993) and Kumar (1998).

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Chart 1: Proposed Decentralization Reforms in Education : CABE Committee

Level	Functions	Powers	Funds	Administrative Support
Zilla Parishad Standing Committee on Education	Overall Supervision of all Education Programmes in the District up to Secondary level	establishment and Maintenance of Schools up to Secondary level including recruitment and transfer of staff, Payment of Salaries; Disbursement of grants; Preparation and sanction of education Budget; Mobilisation of Resources	Mainly through Government Grants	Service of Staff of Education Department at the District level
Panchayat Samiti Standing Committee on Education	Supervision of AE, NFE, ECCE, Primary and Upper primary Schools	Recruitment of Staff for AE, NFE and ECCE; Preparation of Budget and Sanctioning of Plan Expenditure from PS Education Budget	Grant from ZP, State and Central Grants; Funds through Taxation	Service of the Staff of Education Dept. at the Block Level
Village Education Committee	Promotion of Enrolment Drive; Supervision of Schools; Mobilization of Resources	Visit to education Institutions and check attendance and Other registers; undertake construction	ZP, PS and State funds; local mobilization	Support from Head Teacher and Other School Teachers

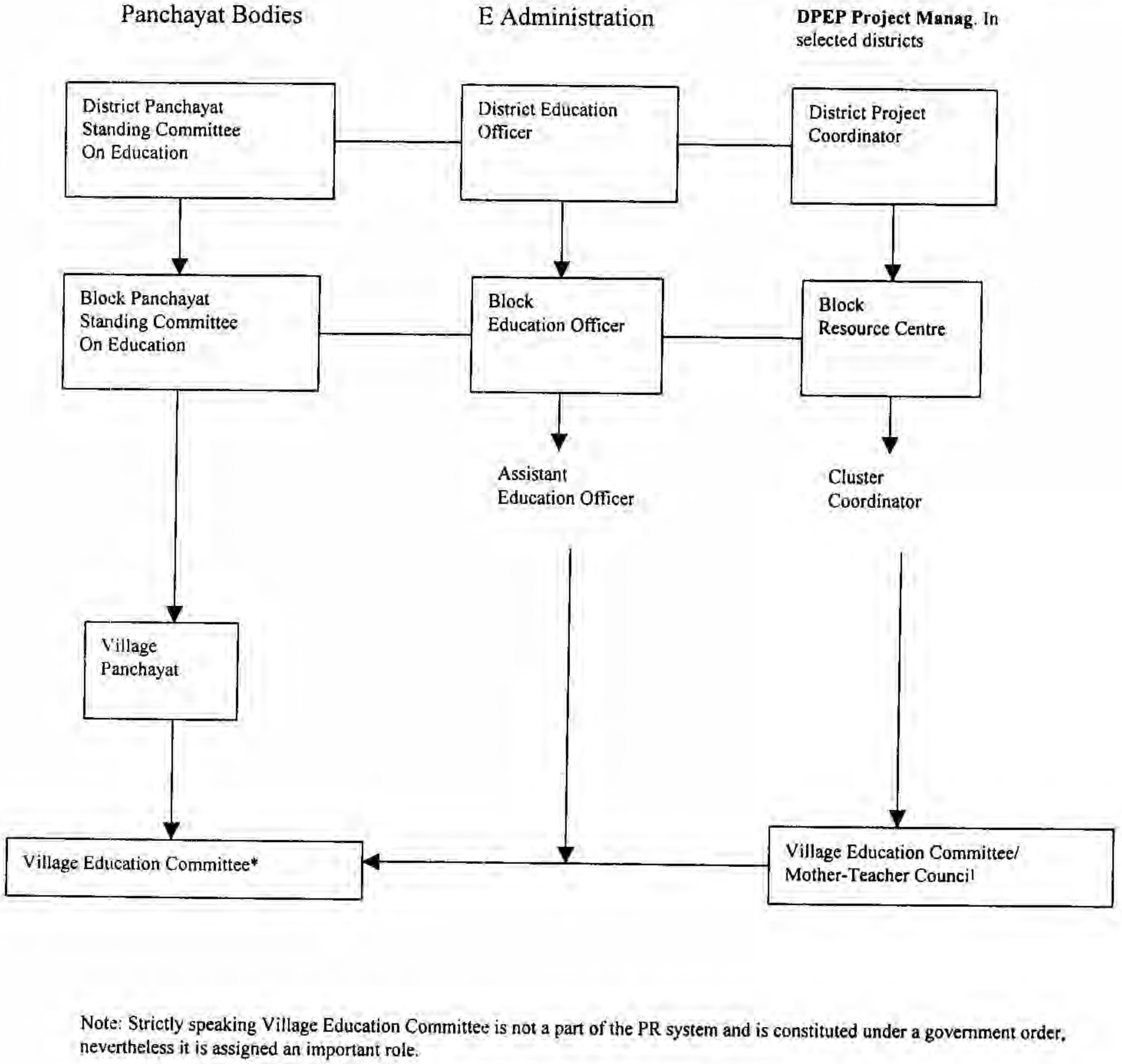
Source : Institute of Social Sciences, Commission Reports, 1996

Table 1: Assignment of Responsibilities among various levels of Government{PRIVATE }

Responsibilities	State Level	District Level	Sub-district level
Creation of New Teaching Posts	X		
Establishing New Schools	X		
Certifying Teachers	X		
Training Teachers	X	X	X
Setting Curriculum	X		
Selecting Text Books	X		
Setting Equivalencies	X		
Designing and Administering Incentive Schemes	Designing	Administering	
School Timing : Schedules, Days, Hours of Operation	X		
Determining Class Size	X		
Hiring and Firing Teachers	X	X	
Hiring and Firing Administrative Personnel	X		
Transfer of Teachers	X	X	
Transfer of Administrative Personnel	X		
Teacher Remuneration : Fixation and Disbursement	Fixation		Disbursement at the school level
Setting, Administering and Financing School Budget	Financing	Administering	
School Construction and Maintenance	X	X	X

Source : Adapted from Govinda, King and Ozler and Klugman.

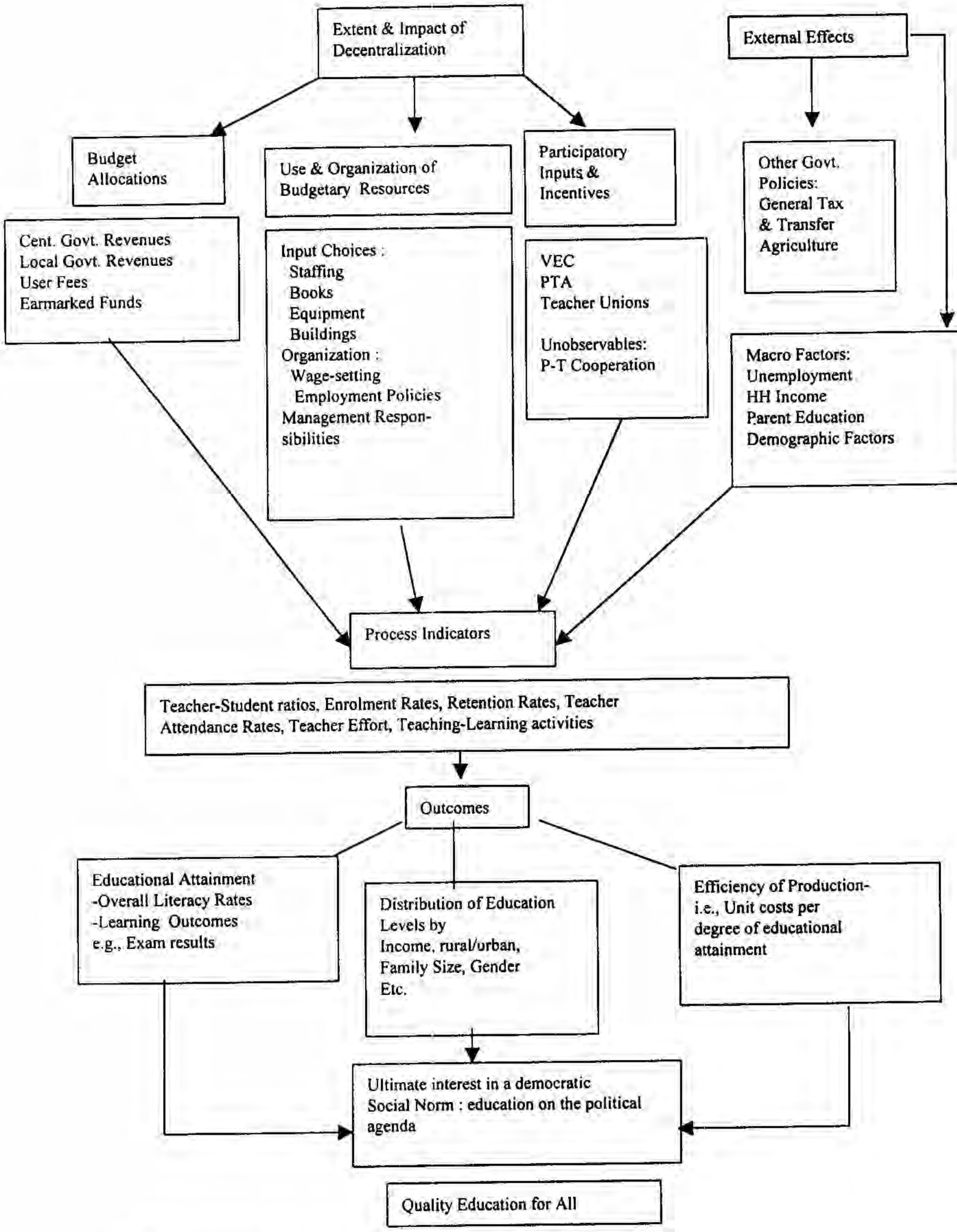
Chart 2:School Education: The Range of Institutional Actors at District and Sub-District levels



Note: Strictly speaking Village Education Committee is not a part of the PR system and is constituted under a government order, nevertheless it is assigned an important role.

Source : Adapted from Govinda (1994)

Chart 3: Distributive Impact of Educational Decentralisation



Source: Adapted from Jenni Klugman (1997)