**A different way**

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A SYSTEM-THINKING approach is marked by curiosity, compassion and courage. It includes the willingness to understand a situation more comprehensively, to recognise that systems are interconnected, to acknowledge that there are frequently multiple solutions to an issue, and, at times, to advocate for detested solutions.

Problems, from the perspective of system-thinking, become opportunities to show the organisation new ways to do business. Asking challenging questions becomes a critical duty rather than a vicious cycle. A linear mode of thinking, on the other hand, cannot see the entire picture.

Our country`s educational reforms have been piecemeal, with project-based interventions created at the higher tier rather than a bottom-up design. We have a loosely organised desk review of past plans, which have weak roots in evidence-based decision-making; this serves as the foundation for our decision-making.

The monitoring of most programmes does not include learning-level indicators, instead, they concentrate onfacts such as absenteeism, physical resources and the number of lesson plans created and utilised. They hardly anticipate or foretell what will occur in the long run, nor do they provide the government with a long-term strategy.

We may find such superficial approaches asymmetrical to our educational problems. Relying only on project-funded educational interventions is like taking antibiotics to avoid needed surgery. Long-term reliance on antibiotics results in body resistance to the medication our education system responds similarly to externally driven, top-down, or even alien project-based educational interventions that typically produce no synergies. For such interventions to last, they need to fit into the social ecology of our education system.

Creating parallel project-funded jobs by investing a lot of money in a short amount of time and changing the system has never worked. Is it more prudent to employ an outside genius for a few years to assist schools or the administrative tier to develop professionals from inside the system so they can generate more synergy and have a lasting impact? It would be more advantageous if these programmes reinforced the government`s own agenda and priorities.

In the same way, the global approach to funding education aims to `work with the government` to improve the whole system by filling in the gaps where the government needs help. But we may witness our donor-funded educational programmesemploying a `work for the government` strategy, which portrays the government as incompetent and makes it reliant on project design and personnel. Similarly, one of the gaps in our educational theory is the learner or student as a neglected entity, given the deployment of a huge pool of human resources, including consultants, who come up with idealistic, rather than practical, solutions.

Here is where our attention switches from learning to employment and enterprise. Time-bound interventions can`t replace the government, and neither does the `industrialisation`or educational goods and services appear to be appropriate.

Education cannot be viewed as a purely economic entity and knowledge as a commodity. They are a basic human right and a catalyst for social transformation, and they require a lifetime of commitment.

System-thinking is what can contribute to the improvement of the educational system. It necessitates unpopular and nonlinear decisions that determine decades-long interventions; projects, on the other hand, are driven by time constraints in the attainment of an objective. To discover an effective and unique solution to impact the system`s behaviour, itis crucial to comprehend the bigger context around the challenges.

The system·.thinking approach must win, and all investments, whether they come from inside or outside the system, should be made with the goal of making the system stronger. The government needs to take the lead by setting its own priorities and directions and, if necessary, getting help from outside sources. It should be self-reliance with outside support rather than superfluous, externally driven measures which only erode the educational infrastructure.

System-thinking is not just a concept; it is an intellectual culture, a worldview, and a perspective on the nature of reality.

System-thinking for educational improvement tries to help people understand a situation better, see how all its aspects are connected, and realise that there is often more than one way to solve a problem. It is important to make changes to the system because, as a wise man once said, adding mediocrity to a good system will make it even better, while adding brilliance to a bad system will make it even worse.  The writer is an educationist.