

What do we want from education?

Are you satisfied with the educational facilities that are available to your children? Does the school in your neighbourhood fulfill your community's needs? Do you think your son's or daughter's school or educational institution provide a good education? What should we expect from educational services?

Does the following represent your children's experience with education?

My children:

- Are happy with their learning experiences. Have enough time to sleep, eat and stay healthy. Are safe and protected from violence, and harassment in their school or learning environment.
- Are treated equally no matter what – whether they are male or female, whether they are rich or poor; no matter what their language, religion and/or ethnicity is.
- Are taught by teachers and lecturers who are experienced and knowledgeable and are able to address their needs.

Will ultimately become active participants in our society, who can think critically and creatively and contribute to creating a better society.

Does education do this for you and your children? If not, this may be an indication of the crisis we are facing in the education sector of this country.

PROBLEMS PARENTS REPORT ABOUT OUR SCHOOLS AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR: HOW MANY OF THEM APPLY TO YOU?

Accessing education

- My child's school is not one I can be proud of. There are better schools that will not admit my child.
- Only people with money and connections can get children to good schools. I do not have connections or that much money.
- I cannot find a good school because of my ethnicity and language.
- My child wants to enter university, but his school's A/L stream is not good and I simply cannot afford tuition.
- My child passed A/Ls, but was not selected to the university. We cannot afford other options for higher education.

Costs of education

- I had to give a large contribution to admit my child to her school.
- I'm sending my child to an international school I cannot afford because the public schools available to her are not good.
- I cannot afford to put in money, time and effort to serve the school as I am expected to. I worry about how this will affect my child.
- I cannot afford the extra time and money to send my child for tuition and other extra classes.
- We struggle to meet the cost of higher education. I have taken many loans to deal with these costs.
- My child must work to find money for university and cannot focus on his studies.

Concerns about learning experiences

- I worry that my child does not get the attention she needs.
- The curriculum treats my daughter as second class, simply because of who she is – because of class her sex, her caste, her ethnicity, and where she lives.
- My child has special needs that are not met by the school.
- Teaching support for my child is inadequate as he is in the bilingual stream.

Concerns about my child's future

- I worry about my child's future as he did not go to a good school.
- I am worried that my child's education will not prepare her for the future and a comfortable and dignified life.

Concerns about health

- My children must travel long distances for a good education. They cannot sleep or eat properly as a result. I worry about their safety as they travel back and forth.
- My child's school does not have proper bathrooms or buildings. The school has no money to improve.
- My child has no time to play. She has to go for extra classes just to survive at school.
- My child is ignored, ridiculed and bullied at school.

Concerns about safety and justice

- My child's teachers seem afraid of those who are above them, which make it hard for them to do their jobs.
- I worry about voicing my concerns to school/university officials because I may put my child in trouble for doing this.
- I worry about the safety of my child, because they are not protected from ragging and other forms of peer pressure.
- I worry that my child will face sexual harassment at the school or university.
- My child's involvements at university have resulted in harassment by the police and the military.

These problems are not limited to a few people, to you, to your child's school, or to your community. We share them in common. An education that does not fill us with hope and joy for the future is a serious problem. For many of us, the education system and our experiences with it fill us with worry, fear and frustration. This is not acceptable.

These are our problem. We need solutions for them.

The problems we are seeing with education today are problems that require solutions. They cannot be solved by each of us as individuals. We as a society must together find solutions.

There are several reasons why these problems have become our *private* problems.

- Funds allocated by the State for education are inadequate.
- The emphasis on providing a good education for ALL is no longer seen as very important
- The system we have does not support educators and education. There is too much space for powerful people to manipulate the system.

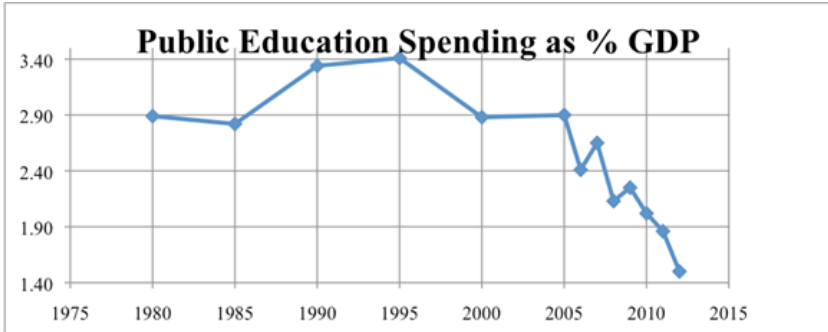
Reforms to education policy are designed to support business people make profits, by selling education, rather than to support you to educate your child.

In the next sections we look at these issues more closely.

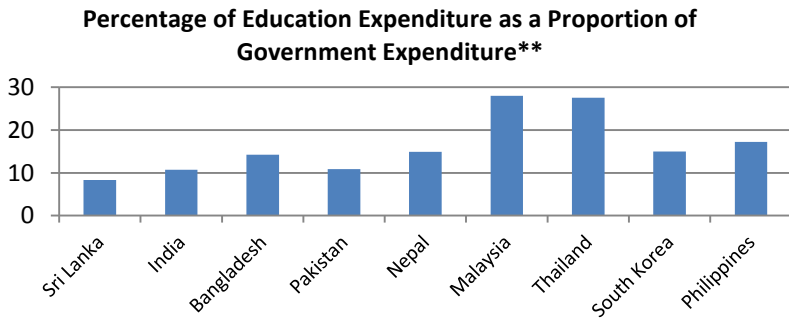


GOVERNMENT ALLOCATIONS ARE INADEQUATE

Spending on education has decreased drastically*.



...and it's low compared to that of other countries...



...which means you must bear these costs!

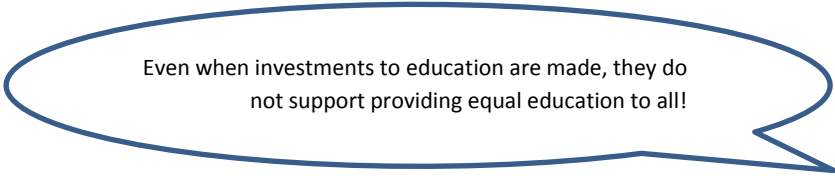
Did you know that household spending on fees to *government schools* almost doubled from 2010 to 2013???* **

*Ministry of Education online data extracted in 2012, **Athurupane, 2009; *** Income & Expenditure Survey, Dep't of Census & Statistics

How are you made to pay to bear those costs?

- Through direct donations to schools.
 - Through donations of your time and effort (even when you have to sacrifice your livelihood to do so).
 - By compelling your child to go for extra classes.
 - By asking your child to bring various things to school for learning - things that you may not be able to afford.
 - By closing schools close to your home or by allowing schools close to your home to deteriorate, so you have to pay to transport your child to a school far away.
 - By gradually increasing the costs of higher education, such as through hostel fees, registration fees, and facilities fees.
 - By encouraging you to spend on expensive professional qualifications such as CIMA, IPM, SIM, and by promoting the idea that public education does not deliver what you want.
 - By supporting the development of international schools and private universities, which do not require state support.
-

NEWS: 'A new Education Act will be introduced this year with international schools islandwide, coming under the Education Ministry...' (Sunday Times, Feb, 2013)



Even when investments to education are made, they do not support providing equal education to all!

Our education is supposed to be free!

The highest educational expense on average to the household is tuition fees! In 2002, households paid the same amount for tuition as for exercise books; in 2010 they were paying about double, AND in 2013 they are paying 4 times as much!*

**Income and Expenditure Survey, Department of Census and Statistics*

How much do you pay a month for your free education?

My spending on education per month:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Direct donations & school supplies | Rs. _____ |
| Extra classes and tuition | Rs. _____ |
| Travel expenses to school | Rs. _____ |
| Losses in income due to school commitments | Rs. _____ |
| Total expenses | Rs. _____ |

How does the government say they are solving these problems? ...By saying they are spending more than enough on education:

'Sri Lanka is presently spending approximately 5% of its GDP on education, Higher Education Minister S. B. Dissanayake said...' Daily News, July 19, 2012

But this includes what we as parents spend on education! In 2013 state expenditure on education was only 1.5% of GDP!



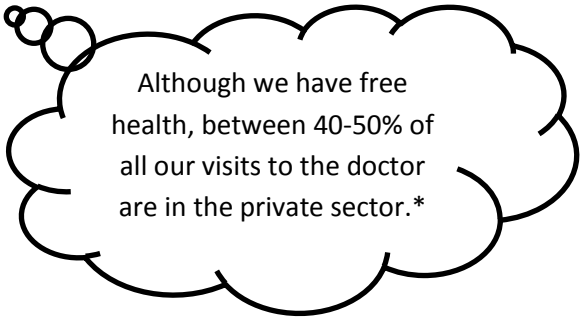
This is not only happening in education other services are becoming fearfully inaccessible to many. Society is under threat!

As members of a community, we expect certain services from the government. We expect them to provide not only education, but also good health care, good transportation, good services and care for those who are retired, those who are working and for our children. Just as we have to spend more and more time and effort on education, we have to do the same for health. Health care is expensive. We cannot get what we need from the government hospitals. We have to pay for medicines because hospitals do not have what they should.

As public transport becomes more and more expensive, and as the extent of basic services available to people

deteriorates, we are expected to spend more and more for our basic requirements.

Therefore, just as we are spending more and more on education, we are also spending more and more on health, transport, and other essential services. There is no money left, in fact we are in debt, when all of this is taken care of. What is the point of earning more if we end up having to spend all our money and more on services that used to be affordable or free? Now all of these have become our problems.



**World Bank, 2013*

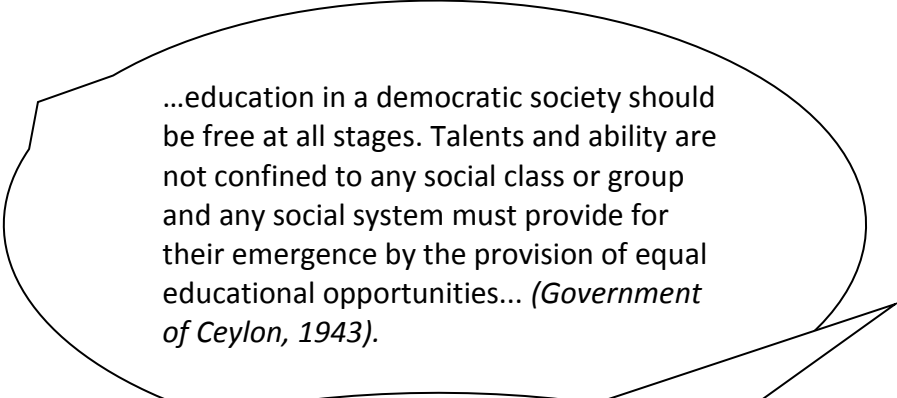
These problems were once seen as the responsibility of the State. Now even though we pay more and more taxes on almost everything we buy, we are still having to pay more and more for the services these taxes are supposed to provide us. Where is all this money going? *How much of your income goes to paying for education, health, and other services?* Use the table below to calculate how much your household spends on services.

| | |
|--|------------------|
| My average monthly household expenses: | |
| Food and clothing | Rs. _____ |
| Housing/rent & utilities (water, electricity, etc.) | Rs. _____ |
| <i>Education (school, university, tuition, etc.)</i> | Rs. _____ |
| <i>Health (private, public, ayurvedha, etc.)</i> | Rs. _____ |
| <i>Non-school transport (bus, train, three wheeler, etc.)</i> | Rs. _____ |
| Loans and other debt repayments | Rs. _____ |
| Other expenses | Rs. _____ |
| TOTAL AVERAGE MONTHLY EXPENSE | Rs. _____ |
| TOTAL AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME | Rs. _____ |
| <i>HOW MUCH WOULD YOUR EXPENSES BE WITHOUT YOUR HEALTH AND EDUCATION EXPENSES? THESE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE FREE!</i> | |

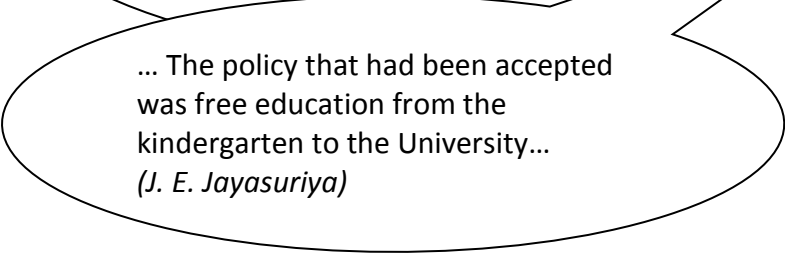
Providing everybody good education is no longer very important.

Just as there is less money for education, there is also less money for the people who need the most support to pursue education.

Our education system is supposed to be free for ALL. This is what our society used to say about education:



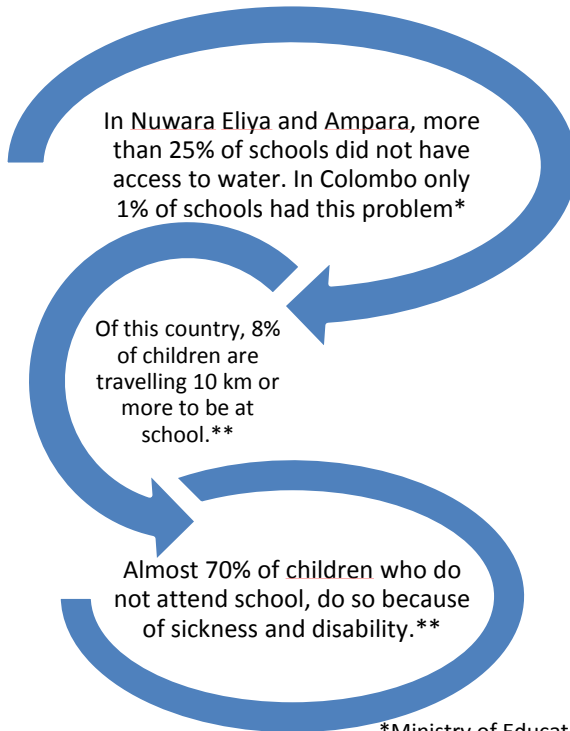
...education in a democratic society should be free at all stages. Talents and ability are not confined to any social class or group and any social system must provide for their emergence by the provision of equal educational opportunities... (*Government of Ceylon, 1943*).



... The policy that had been accepted was free education from the kindergarten to the University... (*J. E. Jayasuriya*)

No matter who you are, where you are from or what you do for a living, your child should have the opportunity to attain the highest level of education. Is this happening?

Educational reforms today make it harder and harder for those who are struggling the most to educate their children. This is not what our community is about. We need to create a society that supports all to fulfill their wishes and ambitions.



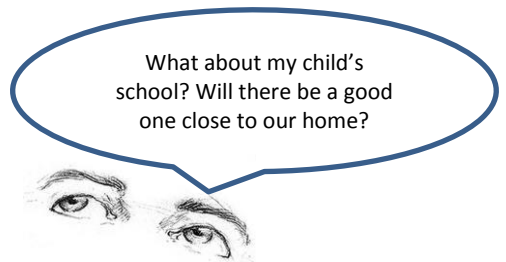
*Ministry of Education, 2011; **Dept. of Census & Statistics 2009/2010

How is the government saying they are solving this problem?

By constructing better schools:

'Under the project to renovate 1000 secondary schools island-wide... technical labs will be constructed....'

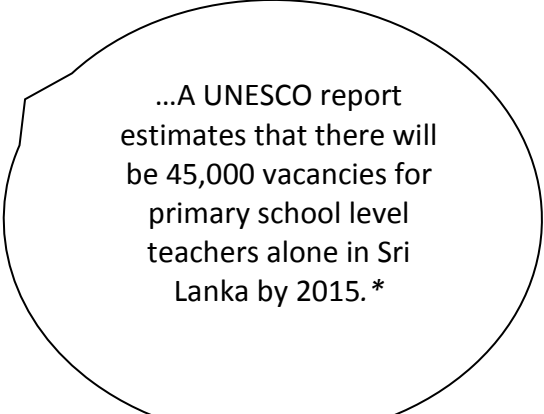
Business Today, October 25, 2013.



The system does not support educators and education

Teacher salaries and vacancies

Teachers' salaries are inadequate. Many schools are unable to find teachers who are willing to teach for this salary. Does your child have enough teachers? Are they teaching what they should be and are able to teach?



...A UNESCO report estimates that there will be 45,000 vacancies for primary school level teachers alone in Sri Lanka by 2015.*

Teachers have other problems as well. Schools and their staff are expected to do the bidding of powerful individuals, sometimes things that have nothing to do with education. People are appointed to jobs

**Moon (2007). UNESCO White Paper*

because of personal connections rather than qualifications. We need a system that focuses on your child and your child's education, not one that uses schools to fulfill other objectives.

A strong education system would allow students and teachers to express themselves. Such a system would enable teachers to work in the interest of their students. Parents would feel free to voice their concerns and fears, and feel that their problems will be addressed. This is not happening. At schools and universities, parents are scared to complain or address problems that their children have. Children are made to fear their peers, teachers and lecturers, and university students' voices are silenced through brutality and intimidations.

Are there any experiences with the education system that you would like to share? What are your biggest concerns? What is your greatest wish for my child's education?

What can we as a community do to fulfill your wishes for your child's education?

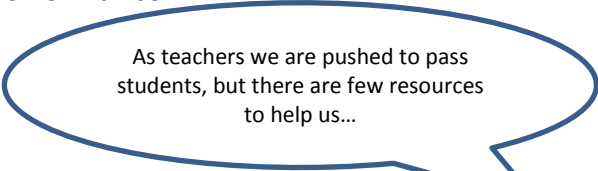
HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT SAY IT WILL ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS?

By improving student performance:

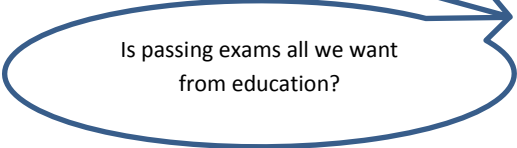
'Achieving a 75% pass rate at the GCE O/L examination by 2016

is within reach...'

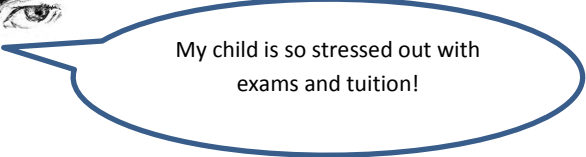
Daily Mirror, April 5, 2014.



As teachers we are pushed to pass students, but there are few resources to help us...



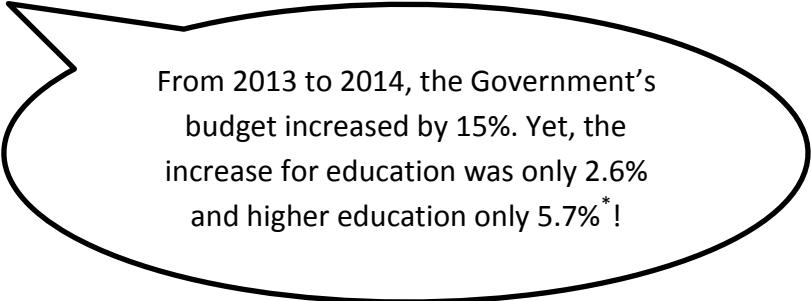
Is passing exams all we want from education?



My child is so stressed out with exams and tuition!

Is education a priority?

The government is not too poor to provide the services that we received for free in the past. The government says we have achieved high economic growth, but that they cannot afford to improve state educational services. But isn't this simply a matter of priorities?



From 2013 to 2014, the Government's budget increased by 15%. Yet, the increase for education was only 2.6% and higher education only 5.7%* !

Just as we prioritise household spending on essentials, the Government prioritises what is important.

Share of allocations to ministries (2014)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Defence and Urban Development</i> | <i>19.9%</i> |
| <i>Ports and highways</i> | <i>09.4%</i> |
| <i>Education</i> | <i>02.5%</i> |
| <i>Higher education</i> | <i>01.9%</i> |

**Appropriations Bill for 2014*

How important is education to the government? How much of that budget is committed to providing *equal* access to education?

Reforms to education policy are designed to support business people make profits rather than support you to educate your child

Government policy does support certain people and certain institutions, even though it does not support you. Recent policies have helped private companies and government institutions to SELL education. For instance, the government is giving a lot of incentives for private companies to set up new universities. In fact, they are giving incentives for government institutions, universities, ministries, and agencies, to sell education, so they can put their money into what powerful people think is important.

Your role then becomes that of a consumer; you are now expected to buy education. This method has been successful. Look at the newspapers, there are people selling degrees and selling private tuition classes. When we worry about our children's future, these advertisements sell us hope. They are making money from our fear and worry as we are made to make difficult choices:

Is it more important that my child eats tonight or has an extra tuition class so that in the future she will not have to worry about food for her child?

?

Is it more important that I keep some savings or should I sell everything I own so that my child can be qualified?

Is it more important that I have some leisure time or work extra with no break so that I can do my duty to my child?

Freedom in education

We have to make these choices because government policy has decided that a 'free' market is where education should be. They have decided that we should make difficult decisions because we should have 'free choice' in deciding where we should put our money. It all sounds so good, until you actually think about it. Are these really choices that are 'free'? Or are they choices that enslave us to a life we do not even want? Should something as precious as education be bought and sold like a toy or a mobile phone? Do we want to put the responsibility of education in the hands of people who are motivated by profit? We do not think so. Yet, we participate in this system because we do not have a choice....OR SO WE THINK!

Solving our education problems.

What is our role?

- This is a government we have elected and it must take responsibility for our society. The problems of education are not our personal problems. The government should prioritize education and solve the problems.
- We have to look at these problems as a problem of priorities and government policy. We have to make education, like other services that we want from the government, a priority to the government.

A CALL FOR ACTION!

Who can make this happen?

WE CAN!!!

The crisis of education is not one you are facing alone, but one your neighbor, your community, and your school is facing. It is one we are all facing.

The legacy that our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents left us, that gave so many people new opportunities must be protected and improved. This legacy is being taken away from us.

We need to fight for the kind of education system we want for our children and our grandchildren so that our worries will not be the worries of future generations.

Join our efforts to fight for this legacy.

Steering Committee on Education
The Movement for 6%