

*Essential Services:  
Community Based  
Management for  
Right to Education*

# People as Changemakers

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# Abstract

In the light of recent passage of Right to Education Act as a fundamental right to all children between 6-14 years of age, there is a critical need to find ways in which this can be realized. It is also now widely acknowledged that without community as a primary stakeholder in the process, this right would not meet its intent. The Act provides for various entry points for such a purpose, most critical of them being School Management Committees. Oxfam India and many other civil society organizations have been working through various models for quite some time in which community of parents, teachers, local institutions and civil society have been working together to provide a vision in which this right can be realized. This paper attempts to capture some of those learnings which can show the pathway in which community's direct stake can be built in accessing free, quality and universal education for all.

## ***About this working paper:***

This paper was conceived primarily as a means to collate some of the ongoing work around community based management practices in education so that it could become a good learning tool for future practitioners. A discussion was initiated towards the same on Solution Exchange (the UN website for knowledge sharing). It was after this that Richa Kapoor, the intern working with Oxfam India did her field work to do further in depth research. Based on her first draft, a two-day national consultation was organized by Oxfam India and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan where various practitioners from about 15 states, activist-academics like Vinod Raina and Prof. Janaki Rajan, Prof. Apoorvanand, and policy experts like Dr Santosh Mehrotra, Advisor, Planning Commission, B. Muralidharan, Advisor, UN Resident Coordinator, participated in the same. It was given a final shape by Kaushik Dasgupta. The paper acknowledges all their contributions towards the same.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

On April 1, 2010, the Government of India notified the rules for the recently passed Right to Education Act, named, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. This Act had already received the President of India's assent on August 26, 2009. The Act intends to give shape to the right of free and compulsory education for all children between the age of 6 and 14. Article 21-A, inserted by the Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002, provides for such a right.

The salient features of the Right of Education Act include

### **The Act at a Glance**

The Act is a detailed and comprehensive piece of legislation which includes provisions related to schools, teachers, curriculum, evaluation, access and specific division of duties and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Key features of the Act include:

- Every child from 6 to 14 years of age has a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education.
- Private schools must reserve a quarter of their class strength for students from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups, sponsored by the government.
- All schools except private unaided schools are to be managed by School Management Committees with 75 per cent parents and guardians as members.
- All schools except government schools are required to be recognized by meeting specified norms and standards within 3 years to avoid closure.
- No child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until completion of elementary education
- A child who completes elementary education (up to class 8) shall be awarded a certificate
- There must be a fixed student-teacher ratio of 30:1.
- Mandates improvement in quality of education
- School teachers will need adequate professional degree within five years or else will lose their jobs
- The financial burden will be shared between state and central government.

But the effectiveness of these provisions will depend on getting the 'right' design that will ensure accountability and transparency in implementing the act. The Right To Education Act does have many provisions to ensure accountability through decentralization, including the creation of school management committees (SMCs) empowered to make plans and monitor school-level expenditures. But as is well known in India, the devil lies in implementation.

It is increasingly being realized that without active participation of citizens, policy and program initiatives will not deliver, certainly not in any inclusive way. Citizen's participation helps in mobilizing public awareness as well as building a strong sense of ownership of government policies and programs. It also creates greater transparency and accountability, holding public officials/politicians responsible on their promises. Such initiatives at the local level are also invaluable in bringing local issues, problems, aspirations and needs into sharper focus, so that indigenous fixes can be provided for them. Enabling such participation is also a means of empowering the marginalized groups.

Community-based monitoring (CBM) must be seen in this context. Simply put, CBM can be defined as a form of public stewardship, driven by indigenous needs, to increase the accountability and quality of public services and local development. The idea behind mobilizing and facilitating communities to take an active role in the planning, implementation and monitoring of development programs—such as the Right to Education Act—is to let primary stakeholders take ownership. A participatory role of this kind also builds the community's awareness of local development issues. Such kind of participatory approach also builds local partnerships and networks between key stakeholders such as concerned citizens, government officials, academics, industry personnel, NGOs, community groups and local institutions.

Within the CBM framework, members of a community affected by a social/public program generate not just data but also place demands, offer suggestions and critiques. Such feedback can help in further planning and implementation, thereby envisioning a model of facilitating grassroots activism.

CBM also promotes evidence-based policymaking and program implementation.

## THE SOCIAL IMPERATIVE

While the central notification for the implementation of the Act have just come into being, a few figures need to be kept in mind.

- According to the latest report of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development 2.8 million children in the age group of 6-14 are not in school.
- The report notes that slightly less than 50% of these children were never enrolled in school and slightly more than 50% are dropouts.
- Girls constitute half of all out of school children in the age group of 6-14
- 25% of the out of school children are from Scheduled Castes—although they make up 20% of the overall population in the age group of 6-14.).
- 20% of out of school children in the age group of 6-14 belong to Scheduled Tribe children—although they make up 10% of the population in the age group.
- 23% such children are Muslim—although they make up 13% of the population between the age of 6 and 14 (Report of Technical Support Group, Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, March 2009).

So 68% of all out of school children belong to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Muslim communities. Dysfunctional schools plagued with poor infrastructure, irregular teacher attendance and unattractive teaching methods are the bane of schools catering to children of marginalized communities. Such schools are a big reason behind high drop out rates and the persistence of out-of-school children (Vaidyanathan and Nair, 2001).

The Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the precursor of the Right to Education Act, recognized such a shortfall. The mission laid much store on community institutions to improve matters. The Abhiyan tried to involve the community in the following ways:

- It stressed on training community leaders for tasks such as the preparation of village education registers, retention registers, pupil progress cards, and for maintenance grants for schools.
- It envisaged community ownership of the school system and for this purpose stressed on the involvement of village educational committees (VECs), school management committees (SMCs) of weaker and disadvantaged sections as well as of women—in addition to teachers, active community leaders, parents, representatives of NGO

- For monitoring the quality of education, SSA placed much emphasis on developing quality indicators. This had to be developed through partnerships between various stakeholders including research institutions, SMCs, VECs and Panchayati Raj Institutions
- SSA also mandated the formation of standing committees/sub committees under the Gram Panchayat (GP) as nodal bodies for all matters pertaining to elementary education. It proposed to link these bodies to school- level or village-level committees for overall supervision.
- SSA also envisioned a supervisory role for all tiers of the PRIs (village, block, district)

The National Curriculum Framework, 2005—another precursor of the Right to Education Act—also emphasized community participation as a means of enhancing quality and accountability in education. The document emphasized

- Decentralization in planning, implementation and monitoring of education programs.
- Strengthening of PRIs as a major step towards making the system “less bureaucratic, teachers more accountable, and the schools more autonomous and responsive to the needs of children.
- “Genuine planning from below” by enlisting the support of VECs, state SSA bodies, and other statutory bodies for micro-planning including such tasks as the village-level mapping of school participation (non-enrollments, attendance patterns, special needs, etc.) as well as identification of human resources
- Enabling learning through participation in the life of the community as an indispensable component of all disciplines
- Curricular choices with “legitimate stakeholders” (read local community members/parents) to help them see the educational value of curricular decisions as including a critical understanding of local realities of gender, caste, class and religion that are “oppressive and reaffirm social inequalities and hierarchies” (NCF 2005).
- Engage with local community to answer questions about the inclusion or exclusion of particular knowledge and experiences in the school curriculum, as well as using the local community as a valuable resource for teaching oral history and traditional knowledge.
- Wide-ranging cooperation and partnerships between the local community and other stakeholders including the state and civil society groups.

The decentralisation envisaged by the two precursors of the Right To Education Act owed much to the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment acts. Enacted in 1992, the two pieces of legislation created a key paradigm shift in governance models by invoking decentralisation, paving the way for the participation of local communities and institutions in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of government programs including those in education. The amendments established the three-tier Panchayati Raj system in the country, with elected bodies at the gram, taluk, and zilla levels to enable the community to actively participate in developmental programs and ensure more effective implementation. Amongst the 29 subjects identified by the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act for transfer to the panchayats was education -primary and secondary, adult and non-formal, vocational and technical.

The institutionalized statutory space provided by the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment acts makes mechanisms like Community Based Monitoring (CBM) key factors in facilitating movement from “top-down” methods to participatory processes for local engagement in effective governance.

The Right to Education Act keeps up with this commitment of decentralisation. It asks that SMCs be constituted for every state school (including aided schools) with adequate representation of parents (at least 3/4<sup>th</sup> with proportional representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes). The act devolves the following responsibilities on SMCs

- Monitoring the day-to-day working of school
- Preparing school development plans to ensure equitable distribution
- Utilizing grants for development of school

The act has been criticized for excluding children from the committees, or lack of clarity in terms of the status of the committees vis-à-vis PRIs. One of the demerits of the new law is that it provides limited powers to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

This body does not have the capacity to monitor performance of teachers in terms of quality. Hence it is not clear which agency/organization is going to monitor the functioning of the schools, teachers and other units. If monitoring of the systems and processes are not institutionalised its very difficult for any law to be effective.

But these can be overcome by making substantive rules. For instance, the rules related to procedure for developing school development plans could build in participation of children and make it mandatory for the plans to be presented and discussed before the gram sabha or the panchayat standing committees on education (Mehandale, 2010).

The formulation of the rules by states on the implementation of the Act can serve as an effective tool towards engaging local self-governments more comprehensively with the educational issues and challenges in their respective areas. In the light of the above the following questions are important:

- What should be the roles and responsibilities of each of the 'local authorities' as envisaged in the act?
- What kind of accountability and supervisory mechanisms must be there to ensure that the line departments in education at each level are made accountable to the democratic local authorities?
- What kind of preparation, capacity enhancement and framework will be needed for local authorities, to play their role effectively?-
- What should be the process and mechanism for centre and states to formulate rules for the implementation of the act, who should be the participants, how it should be done?

Moreover, the word "local authority" needs to be further elucidated to differentiate between various administrative bodies within the government and urban as well as rural governance structures. In the act, the definition of 'local authorities' clubs a range of completely different entities and structures which require to be dealt with separately to define clear roles and responsibilities.

SMCs and community levels groups formed at the village level should undertake the responsibility of planning and monitoring of each school. Gram sabhas should be the forum to approve the plans prepared by SMCs. Gram panchayat should have an oversight role' for the schools in its area. One of the roles of gram panchayat should also be to ensure the convergence between education department and agencies that provide services such as water and sanitation. It should also ensure coordination between the education department and the mid day meal scheme as well as between school development plan and panchayat overall plan for development. Municipal authorities in urban and semi urban areas should play the same roles.

Another important role of local bodies at each level should be to ensure that complaints can be addressed before they get escalated to the State Child Rights Commission to be formed in each state under the provision of Right to Education Act.

The process of legislating on right to education is far from over. Civil society organisations and teachers' unions must continue to engage with the rule-making process, especially at the state level and ensure that their state governments formulate provisions that effectively realise the goals of the act.

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Ground realities differ across states, even across regions between states. But there is a general tendency amongst education department officials to sideline and neglect local governance structures in the absence of clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms being in place.

Civil society groups working to ensure that the Right To Education Act is implemented effectively could draw on a range of experiences that ensure accountability.

### **Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam**

For instance Madhya Pradesh's Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, 2002 provides for regular monitoring of quality education in schools by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs).

Under this state act, teachers have both rights and responsibilities. But they have the support of Community and Parents through PTAs in each school.

Teachers cannot be deputed for non-teaching tasks except with explicit orders of Government from State level (under Section 10). This will provide more time to focus on improving quality of education. Teachers have right for their Professional development [Under Section 25(4)]

The teachers have to present the school's annual Academic Report (Jan Shiksha Pratevedan) to PTAs to ensure transparency. They have to organise PTA meetings every month to consult and review the academic achievement of children and other problems of school.

Other than the teachers, the PTAs can identify suitable persons like retired teachers to contribute to teaching in schools on an honorary basis and enlist them through PTA. The association also has the right to see answer sheets of students and take action to improve the performance of the academically weak ones.

### **The Assam experience**

In Assam, following a Guwahati Hight Court Verdict of 2003, Shiksha Nyaya Manch, a quasi-judicial forum, was initiated as a mechanism to address people's complaints pertaining to functioning of schools. This initiative has, however, not taken off because key officials in the project were transferred, but is an example of the kind of effective monitoring authority that could aid implementation of the Right to Education Act.

The SSA in Assam has begun a campaign to create databases of educational amenities in the state. The databases that have been created so far have been made public through newspapers and small booklets distributed to schools, villages and panchayats. Clear norms were defined for several interventions. For example: which habitation qualifies for a community school? Which school is eligible for a para teacher? These norms were given wide publicity by printing leaflets, discussion in meetings at village, panchayat and block levels. Village education registers became the basis for planning at the village level.

The well publicised norms and databases were used for several interventions including selection of schools for repair and construction, identification of schools that qualified for additional teachers, gradation of schools for providing additional

academic support, identification of disadvantaged areas that would be eligible for special compensatory packages, and so on. School and village education committees also made demands for bridge courses and 'remedial support' teachers based on these public databases.

### **Community takes matters in hand**

It must also be recognised that a community does not ipso facto become aware of issues concerning rights to education. This is where civil society organizations come in. For example, the ongoing efforts of Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA) in large-scale mobilisation of local communities have not only allowed the network to form decentralised networks but also provided for greater visibility, outreach and impact in 14 states around the country.

WNTA's 'Nine is Mine' campaign has run on the strength of a mobilised community, sending the signatures of over 200,000 children to pressure the government to keep its promises in its Common Minimum Program to invest 6% of the GDP in public education and 3% in health.

Other civil society groups have motivated communities to do something about the issues at local levels. For instance, the story of how Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) succeeded in creating a Bal Mitra Gram (BMG or Child Friendly Village) in Tewari, a village in Rajasthan historically mired in gender biases and strong patriarchal traditions, underlines how a mobilized community can be a force to reckon with.

BBA activists in Tewari, after a prolonged time in the field, were able to build rapport with youth, women, and village leaders through. They shared the concept of a Bal Mitra Gram with the local people. Once a consensus had been built, the villagers took the initiative to organise a huge public meeting in their village with the help of the BMG activists to address issues like gender bias and women's education, amongst others.

A mobile troupe of artists (in what are termed Mukti caravans) performed, using the mediums of theatre and song to create awareness of child exploitation and illiteracy. As a result of the meeting, the community heartily embraced the concept of a Child Friendly Village. With this new-found self-confidence, and having understood the critical importance of educating the children of their community, the Tewari community proactively tackled issues such as ways to revitalise the local school and curb teacher absenteeism. It even got the gram panchayat to pass a resolution to fix the problems.

### **Respect for the community**

A common underlying principle for organizations seeking to work with communities to enhance the educational experiences of their children is a deep respect for what the community itself can offer to these initiatives. For instance, Ankur, Society for Alternatives in Education, an NGO, believes the community has resources and capacities it can draw on to enrich the education of the children. Ankur's 'Learning Centers' (for children in the age group 5-10 yrs.) are, for example, are built as spaces intimately involved with the socialscape around and draw sustenance from it. Thus, grandmothers are welcome here to narrate stories distinctly imprinted with their times, even as children are encouraged to learn from them recipes for making gulkand.

In 'Children's Clubs' (for children in the age group 10-14 yrs.) there is a deliberate attempt to create opportunities for dialogue between children and adults in the community engaged in various skills whether carpentry, shoe-making, doll-making, or welding. The result of these interactions is often beautiful, student-composed texts that are compiled as flip books, booklets and even audio books. The attempt here is to use opportunities the community possesses for connecting life and learning.

Another initiative worth mentioning in this respect is the Lucknow-based BETI (Better Education Through Innovation) Foundation. It runs educational programs for girls in

numerous districts of UP, relying on the resources of the local community. Its vocational training programs involve a long-standing relationship with local chikankari craftswomen (part of another NGO called SEWA) who have enabled hundreds of young girls to be self-reliant by passing on their craft skills to them.

Community participation is also central in the non-profit Pratham's use of community women as volunteer teachers for their Balwadis in bastis and slums in many parts of the country. The Balwadi Program for pre-school children of 3 to 5 years in underprivileged areas makes extensive use of community women whom Pratham trains to run Balwadis (overseen by a supervisor, also drawn from the local community) for 3 hours each day for 8-10 months, focusing on the cognitive, emotional, social and motor development of preschool children. The instructor of a 'model Balwadi' is often asked to demonstrate skills to her peers who visit her Balwadi to learn from her. In addition, the instructors of about 30 Balwadis of a given geographical cluster meet weekly "to talk about their experiences, plan the next week and to get help from their trainers or peers" (Chavan, 2000, p. 35).

Long-term sustainability of the program also demands decentralization and hence, the Balwadi instructors are organized under Mahila Mandals. In the two Balwadis in Punjabi Basti in Delhi's Zakhira area, one observes self-confident, poised, enthusiastic instructors reciting songs and poems, which the children followed with excitement. Brief talks with these teachers revealed other skills and focused activities in their repertoire, which they had acquired as a result of their training at Pratham.

For other NGOs like the Society for All Round Development (SARD) and Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), the notion of community participation is based on the belief that the local community needs to be empowered and enabled to sustain the changes occasioned by any intervention, and hence, the community's active involvement is integral rather than incidental to the scheme of things.

SARD's work in the Deeg and Kaman blocks of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan stands as a good model of participatory development with education as a key intervention. An autonomous Community Based Organisation (CBO), comprised of 10-15 villagers (with representation of marginalized sections), is the main grassroots institution through which the NGO works to improve program participation and implementation. These CBOs have played an important role in influencing community attitudes, garnering support for the SARD-run Quality Education Centers (QECs) and soliciting contributions from the community.

The NGO's vision of community participation also entails capacity building of the PRI as a genuine grassroots institution by arming its members with clear guidelines about the activities they need to undertake and the responsibilities they need to discharge when it comes to educating the community's children. SARD's strategies in this respect involve the following:

- To make education a priority issue with the PRI.
- Identifying interested PRI members for work with the local community to bring about a change in attitudes, etc.
- Create platforms and opportunities for better interface between the PRI and government officials. Undertake joint planning, budgeting and decision-making.
- Involving PRIs in fund-raising as well as in generating resources from available government schemes for education.
- Organising exposure visits of PRI members to model educational institutions around the country to help them develop a better grip on the myriad issues involved in educating children from marginalized communities, from infrastructure to the qualitative aspects of classroom processes.

A unique and key feature of a BMG is the formation of a children's assembly known as the Bal Panchayat which allows children an opportunity to create a legitimate

democratic space for themselves to voice their demands and grievances. A Bal Panchayat is an elected children's assembly which is given recognition by the adult (Gram) Panchayat. Bal Prashikshan programmes (Child Orientation Programme) are organised to help children to learn about the process of holding elections, debate and act on issues that impact children and their lives, whether it is the construction of toilets in the local school or demands for shutting down the local liquor store.

The experience gained from such initiatives can be very useful in framing rules that enable the community to monitor the implementation of the Right To Education Act. SARD and BBA's work points to the fact that getting the community to identify with the aims and objectives of programs/initiatives often works as a solid way of ensuring the latter's impact. Involving community at every stage of the program (i.e. planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) not only empowers the community over its living conditions (a desirable goal in general) but also ensures that the program continues to serve the needs of the local community rather than those of the implementing NGO or its donor agency.

### **An empowered community acts**

#### **The Samajshala Model**

Mahadevnagar village in Osmanabad district is home to *pardhi* community (denotified tribes) who were branded 'criminal' under British law. The village has been deprived of basic facilities like roads and sanitation. The children were mostly missing from school and parents migrated to labour sites or were found behind bars, leaving their children unattended. Though community members had access to modern facilities like television, education of children remained a neglected facet.

In the last two years, the community has taken revolutionary steps to ensure 100% enrolment of children in primary school by deciding a punishment of Rs. 25,000/- for parents who do not send their children to school. Similarly, they have acquired land for the school building from the government administration after long drawn struggle. Today, the parents and village leaders, including youth and women from the community have come together to ensure better education for their children.

An improved face of primary education has emerged at 20 government schools in remote tribal and dalit populated villages in Marathwada and Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra in the last two years. This has been a result of collective efforts made under the Samajshala programme, which was initiated to promote quality and equity in primary education through enhanced community participation and ownership.

In the last two years, community members have started to monitor and supervise the school administration and various functions with an enhanced sense of ownership and with the help of School Management Board formed under the programme. The involvement of community has led to 100% enrolment of children and visible improvements in the performance of children. The local NGOs implementing the Samajshala model have focused on improving relationship between school and community and facilitating use of innovative teaching aids and methods and regular co-curricular activities. This has led to education becoming an enjoyable experience for the children.

As a result of community participation and advocacy efforts at the Block level, these village primary government schools have witnessed enhanced physical amenities like compound walls, playground, kitchen sheds, repair of classrooms and construction of additional classrooms in schools. There is growing acceptance and appreciation of the Samajshala model among Block Education Officers (BEOs). In the next phase, state and national level advocacy will be carried out to showcase the best practices of the Samajshala model for improving the quality and equity in primary schools across the country.

In Maharashtra's Marathwada regions Samajshala, this community-based model, is active in providing quality, equitable primary education created by a network of organizations working on Child Rights in the state—Bal Hakk Abhiyan (BHA), Oxfam India, Indian Institute of Education (IIE), along with two independent educational consultants Dr. Anand K. Dyal Chand and Mrs. Alda S. Dyal Chand.

Samajshala poses the following questions:

- What is the role of the gram panchayat in the field of education and why is it not central to any planning and development process?
- How can parents be given a voice in planning, developing, assessing and monitoring the educational program?
- Why is control of the primary education system not in the hands of those who benefit from it and are the closest to it?
- Why does the community not own its school and its educational agenda?

It then makes the following recommendations for enhancing community participation:

#### Decentralization

- Holds civil society participation and ownership as keys to the successful implementation of any educational program in any community.
- Aims to involve the community effectively by decentralizing the administrative, academic and fiscal management of educational programs.

#### Training and Capacity Building

- Extensive mobilization and capacity building of the community, its various organizations and leaders.
- Address educational equity by mobilizing the community towards social justice issues such as the enrollment and retention of girls' and children from marginalized social groups, increase enrollments of such children by a minimum of 20% each year in the first five years with the intention of achieving 100% enrollment of school-age children from these groups at the end of the fifth year.

#### School Management Board

Given the highly political nature of most village educational committees, the Samajshala model SMCs have a "healthy representation" of women and members of the SC, ST and OBC communities. The model recommends "exposure" trips for members to allow them to experience how reputable schools and school programs are organized and managed. The model also recommends the SMCs forming their own subcommittees (School Building and Ground Improvement Committee, The Teacher Evaluation Committee, The Admissions and Retention Committee, Finance and Budgeting Committee, Committee on Curricular and Co-curricular Programs,

etc.) each responsible for specific functions. The model aims to invest the SMCs and their various sub committees with the following responsibilities:

- Operation of the school budget plus making budgetary allocations
- Policy decisions including those regarding curricular/co-curricular programs
- Setting the annual calendar and ensuring that children get classroom instruction for no less than 200 days in each year
- Monitoring physical and human resource needs
- Monitoring the free midday meal program and the free grain distribution plan
- Monitoring teacher attendance with the power to take disciplinary action against errant teachers
- Assuring that the physical facilities of the school are available for community programs such as adult literacy and non-formal education classes after normal school hours
- Assuring that there are programs in place for enrolling and retaining children from marginalized socio-economic groups and the girl child
- Assuring the regular attendance of each child of school-going age including the authority to appoint a volunteer 'truancy' officer who works with parents to ensure regular attendance.

### Sustainability

One of the hallmarks of the Samajshala model is its community mobilization and training. Once a community becomes involved and begins to own its school and recognizes that providing a good education is not the sole responsibility of the government, the sustainability of those institutions and their continued excellence are assured even after outside input ends. This is what is anticipated with the primary schools in this model. Groups like the SMCs, the Mahila Mandals and local management boards will continue to retain their power and responsibility and remain the vital groups that insist on demanding excellence.

The model can be replicated as a whole or in part, i.e. such elements of the program that serve the needs of a particular community, with the following key features in place:

### Community Involvement

- Institution of the Education Committees/Management Boards to ensure administrative, academic and fiscal accountability and efficiency with representation from village organizations like the VECs, PTAs, Mahila Mandals, youth organizations, etc.
- The defined roles of the, VEC, PTA, Mahila Mandal, youth organizations (if any), and partnering NGOs.
- Joint school – community ventures to address quality and equity issues in school education.

### Accountability and Transparency through Community Stewardship:

- Accountability of teachers particularly in terms of attendance
- Fiscal accountability
- Availability of all school records and reports to the community
- Formation of a community based School Management Board

### The Bodh Model

Bodh Shiksha Samiti, an NGO formed in 1987, has also given prime place to community participation in its programs aimed at contributing to the “evolution of a system of equitable and quality education and development for all children.” Currently working in both urban and rural educationally-underserved areas in Rajasthan, the NGO provides pedagogic and managerial support to about 200 government schools in the State. However, it is in the running of what are called Bodhshalas (Community Resource Schools, both within the city limits of Jaipur as well as in locations in Thanagazi and Umren blocks of Alwar district), that the NGO shows its genuine commitment to democratic decentralization at the grassroots. Bodh’s involvement of PRIs in education has organically evolved out of its experiences of directly engaging with communities first.

The NGO’s beliefs about community participation include:

- It is not possible to ensure quality education for children without first developing a deep understanding of the surrounding contexts in which this education will take place.
- Bodh makes concerted efforts to engage reflectively with families and community organizations to make them appreciate and demand a quality education for their children. It maps the educational status of the children in the community. Household surveys, weekly and monthly meetings, street performances, film shows, etc., are all used to create a conducive environment for providing formal education to children in the community. Thus, significantly, the Bodhshalas get established only when the community demands such schools for its children to receive a quality education.
- Bodh believes that ‘community participation’ (in the limited, ‘add-on’ sense that the term implies) is not enough. Programs have to be ‘owned’ (in the fullest sense of the term) by communities.
- The organization believes that education should not create any social distance between the child and her family. The aim is to involve families as willing and equal partners in the educational endeavour. Bodh teachers frequently meet with parents, share impressions of the child’s progress and make efforts to understand the family’s perceptions about the child’s education. Such interactions are useful for strengthening the community’s interest in the school. Community contact also clears misconceptions about ‘unconventional’ pedagogies employed in Bodhshalas.

### Capacity Building

The organization conducts capacity-building exercises to make various, key stakeholders fully aware of their roles and responsibilities so that they can then play an effective, participatory role in the process. The capacity-building entails both educational management issues as well as academic dimensions of schooling like curriculum, pedagogy etc. For instance, Bodh’s Janpahal program is based on the concept of co-governance of government schools. For this purpose Village Education Development Committees or VEDCs are set up (with representation from the community, PRIs, and the teachers’ collective).

- Devolution of adequate power and authority to the local community network of stakeholders.
- Sensitizing the bureaucratic machinery towards problems and social processes at the local level.
- Bringing about a change in the generally-held notion that the community, owing to its handicap of illiteracy, cannot use its authority judiciously.
- One of Bodh’s key interventions for developing the local capacities of care givers and others in the community has been through the concept of ‘mother teachers’ – women from the local communities, having a good understanding of the given socio-cultural context, who after receiving intensive training can address the

developmental needs of children in the 3-4 yrs. age group. Not only does it empower the women, it also facilitates the process of community reflection resulting in an increased awareness and understanding of the need for Early Childhood Education and Development.

The organization's experiences show effective PRI involvement is critical for school effectiveness and development. Hence Bodh members spend a lot of time enhancing the capacity of the PRIs, the first democratic governing unit, by involving them in the discourse on education.

- An active PRI engages in such activities like frequent school visits; taking part in community meetings (so as to establish a close relationship with the members of the community as well as understand the problems faced by them); being in regular touch with both the general administrative apparatus of the state as well as education department officials regarding issues faced by its schools; and leverage resources for school infrastructure from various government schemes.

- The organisation has worked hard on establishing a close relationship with PRI members in both Thanagazi and Umren Blocks. As a result, PRI representatives began to regularly attend the inauguration of various Bodhshalas as well as other functions held on their premises. The team members ensured their participation in the decision-making related to the functioning of schools. In monthly meetings with the community, Members apprised the Panchayat about the progress, condition and status of the Bodhshalas.

#### Creating and Strengthening Forum

Bodh has managed to create several openings for dialogue and engagement with the community. More often than not, the PRIs have initiated the forums that contribute to the building of solidarity, help overcome internal rifts among people, and allow collective action to make the ideal of meaningful education for rural children a reality.

- **Community Level Meetings:** In these monthly meetings (attended by PRI members) the status of school, teachers' attendance, teaching-learning processes and infrastructure all figure prominently.
- **Gram Panchayat Meetings:** Held twice a month, these village-level meetings help in carrying forward the work initiated in the form of joint ventures by Bodh and the Panchayats.
- **Panchayati Samiti Meetings:** These monthly, block-level meetings provide spaces for discussions regarding educational initiatives led by Bodh and the Panchayats. They also provide impetus for expanding programs as well as the addition of new features to existing programs. These meetings often result in an increased monitoring of schools' functioning through regular visits made by PRI members, district officials, etc.
- **Gram Sabha Meetings:** Occurring once in six months, Bodh's efforts have resulted in education being an important topic of discussion in these meetings, with the result that a number of solutions have been put forward.
- **Village-Level Education Meetings or Gram Shiksha Sabhas:** Formed with Bodh's active intervention, this forum's monthly meetings help sustain the momentum to solve educational problems at the village level.
- Some of the issues discussed include enrolment (and non-enrollment), availability of adequate classrooms, community contributions to build more facilities, status of various facilities,

availability and attendance of teachers, attendance of students, learning levels/achievement levels, etc.

- Panchayat Education Group: In this forum, Panchayats come together for regular monitoring of schools and assess educational progress at the cluster level
- Block-Level Panchayat Group: Meetings take place yearly at the block level and include all the Panchayats that Bodh works with.
- Kishori Samooh/Mahila Samooh: Community level forums accessible to young girls and women where issues such as education and literacy figure prominently.
- Community Program Coordination Committee: A significant step in creating a specialist forum to supervise, monitor, support and strengthen the education program both at the Bodhshalas as well as in the government schools of the block, thus allowing the community to take ownership of them. This forum formalizes the involvement of local communities and their PRI representatives in providing children with a quality education.

### Lessons from Bodh

The Bodh model proves alternate educational management mechanisms that replace traditional top-down approaches are possible. An aware and organized community, actively supported by the PRI and the teachers, has the power to transform the educational experiences that children get even in government schools.

In rural communities with deep divides of caste, class, religion and gender, Bodh's way of addressing deeply-entrenched practices of social exclusion and discrimination is to create an ideal of the 'common good' – like educating the community's children - which everyone in the community aspires to achieve. As the community aspires to achieve this common good, it necessarily reorganizes and mobilizes itself collectively around the issue.

### **The Lokmitra Model**

Lokmitra, an UP-based NGO, works to improve services (amongst them education) provided by the government with a strong focus on strengthening local self-governance. Its operational area includes the districts of Raebareli, Pratapgarh, Jaunpur and Sitapur in central-eastern Uttar Pradesh. Primary education, Early Child Care and Development (ECCD), women's leadership and empowerment, improving the living conditions of brick kiln workers, providing basic literacy and arithmetic skills to slum children before mainstreaming them, are some of its areas of work.

Where primary education is concerned, Lokmitra's experiences have been that the policy framework for decentralized governance and community ownership was either nonexistent or ineffective in practice, with no mechanism/enabling process for effective discharge of those entitlements. For instance, the VECs were too politicised with the pradhan and the head teacher (chairperson and secretary respectively of the VEC) more often than not colluding with each other for their own vested interests. The nominal representation of three parents as members of a VEC was not only insufficient but sometimes parent-members remained ignorant of the fact they had been nominated to the VEC.

Further, there was little or no parent involvement in decision making as the members had insufficient understanding of their rights and responsibilities. In this context, Lokmitra's demonstrated innovations in participatory governance to improve the performance of government schools through a new institutional set-up consisting of

multi-level parent associations are attempts at getting the most important stakeholders – parents – to play an active role in their children's education.

At the same time it has attempted to bring in adolescent girls who had to leave their education at an early stage into the mainstream education system through a bridge course by creating Kishori Kendras from where they move onto successfully join the school system.

### School Management Committees

Lokmitra has set in place a system of ensuring local accountability through evolving and forming SMCs with about 10-20 members. The NGO organises large parent meetings as community-mobilization exercises and to identify active, interested and vocal parents who can contribute effectively as SMC members. In addition to parents, the SMCs have Panchayat representatives and a few other active community members who are motivated to work on the issue of education.

- The organisation has encouraged the participation of women and marginalized sections in the SMCs.

- The SMCs meet twice a month and raise and discuss issues of school infrastructure, proper utilization of available resources, mid-day meals, teacher regularity, timely student enrollment, students' learning levels, etc.

- Lokmitra's role has been in helping the SMCs to evolve into effective grassroots bodies by building the leadership potential of its members and sensitizing them to their democratic roles and responsibilities. Capacity-building exercises initiated by Lokmitra include organising intense debates about issues in quality education to help mobilize the community towards the education of their children.

Its team works with teachers, children and parents to develop locally relevant teaching, learning material, develops school development plan and works towards its better implementation.

### Cluster Parent Associations

The system of ensuring transparency, accountability and proper utilisation of available resources is further strengthened by the creation of parent associations at the cluster and block levels (Cluster Parent Association or CPA and Block Parent Association or BPA), with members raising educational issues during public hearings and in joint meetings with officials, issuing press releases to local newspapers, using the Right to Information Act (RTI) to seek information and even taking legal recourse in case of extreme violations. Lokmitra has worked at the capacity building of the members of these organisations through meetings/discussions, training sessions, workshops and other awareness programs.

Lokmitra has activated the Gram Panchayats to make education an important issue on their governance agenda in the areas. This has led to improvements in the quality of mid-day meals, installation of hand pumps, construction of toilets, improvements in teacher attendance, construction of more classrooms, etc.

## Teachers' Forum

Community involvement in children's work also demands a greater synergy with all the stakeholders in terms of looking at the ways in which they can support each other. In this respect, the model also works towards bringing teachers on a common platform for their own inter-linking, learning and sharing. Besides, their specific problems are discussed and ways found to resolve them. Their stake is thus deepened in the entire process where they become co-travelers and not just half-hearted duty bearers. Towards this end, Lokmitra also works closely with teachers to enhance their learning and involvement in the development process itself.

## Basic Shiksha Manch

It is to upscale the model at the state level and follow it up with an active advocacy work that the model also works with an upward linking model of parents-teachers association called Basic Shiksha Manch which works to organize them at the village, block, district and state level. Linking with several other like-minded organizations it has brought scores of parents and teachers on a common platform for cross-learning and sharing exercises, helped to build their voices demanding greater accountability of the state and improvement in delivery services.

It is in this sense that Lokmitra model looks at the issue both horizontally and vertically for the fulfillment of universal access to quality education.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Right to Education Act is an example of civil society pressure forcing government to enact enabling legislation. However, the government is yet to deliver on its promise of providing 6 per cent of the budget for education.

So the task of civil society groups is far from over. But the experiences of various organisations in successfully getting communities to steer the initiatives to educate their children recounted above, shows it is possible to break both the ignorance and the cynicism that existed earlier. A vigilant community can demand its entitlements, access available government incentives, monitor programs, and initiate processes of change to ensure better delivery of government services.

The wealth of experiences of NGOs in the field makes it evident that facilitating the PRIs into effective institutions which can fulfill their mandated roles has to be concurrent with community mobilisation since involvement of elected representatives can add teeth to the process. Citizen monitoring can exact both transparency and accountability on the part of the providers leading to better governance.

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