New Education Division Documents No. 7

Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project
An overall appraisal

Desk study commissioned by Sida, Embassy of Sweden, New Dehli

By Vimala Ramachandran and Harsh Sethi

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Foreword

The Shiksha Karmi Project, a unique innovative primary education project in Rajasthan, India, was initiated in 1987 as a collaborative venture between the Government of India, Government of Rajasthan and Sida. To start with, during the first phase (July 1987 to June 1994) the expenditure was to 90 percent paid by Sida and to 10 percent by the Government of Rajasthan. However, during the second phase (July 1994 to March 1998) expenditure was shared equally between Sida and the Government of Rajasthan. As negotiations for the next phase of the project were on, Sida withdrew support for the project following the explosion of nuclear tests by the Government of India in May 1998. Later the British development aid agency, DFID, agreed to support phase three of the project.

Shiksha Karmi, meaning education worker, seeks to address the problems of teacher absenteeism, poor enrolment, high drop-out rates and inadequate access to education by training of local para-teachers in remote, economically backward, rural areas where formal primary schools are either non-existent or dysfunctional. Active involvement of the local communities has been a crucial part of the project. Shiksha Karmi is one of the most successful primary education projects in India. It has been able to validate its key hypothesis - that demand and a hunger for learning exists in all segments of society and that ordinary persons, appropriately selected, trained and supported, can function effectively as teachers and agents for social change.

The Shiksha Karmi Project was monitored right from the beginning at all levels by the Institute of Development Studies and Sandhan in Rajasthan as main partners. External evaluations and monitoring missions have been carried out periodically.

Sida is proud of having supported this unique project during eleven years. In order to document innovations and experiences made within the project and to analyse its strengths and weaknesses, this study was commissioned in 2000.

The Education Division of Sida would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to Mr. Abhimanyu Singh, former Education Secretary to the Government of Rajasthan, Dr. S. N. Methi, director of the Shiksha Karmi Project during many years, Dr. Sharada Jain, co-ordinator Sandhan Research Centre, and all other Indian partners involved in the project. We have learnt a lot from you! We would also like to thank Mr. Uno Winblad, the Swedish consultant, who, together with his team of Indian consultants, all women, closely followed the project, visited even the most remote villages, and initiated many of the innovations. Finally, we would like to remember our late colleague, Ms. Gunilla Rosengardt, who was enthusiastically involved in the project from the beginning.

Views expressed in the study do not necessarily reflect the views of Sida or the Governments of Rajasthan and India.

Stockholm in May 2001

Agneta Lind
Head of Education Division

Glossary

Angan Pathshalas	Courtyard School
Block	Administrative unit in a District comprising of approximately 80 to 100 villages.
Balika	Girls
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training.
DPEP	District Primary Education Project – a World Bank funded programme initiated by Government of India under the Social Safety Net Credit Adjustment Programme.
Gram Panchayat	Cluster of five to seven hamlets / villages that is taken as a unit for local self-government.
Gram Sabha	General body of the village that is convened by the Gram Panchayat.
Lok Jumbish	Literally meaning "People's Movement / Mobilisation" for primary education – a project initiated with Sida assistance in 1992 in Rajasthan.
Mahila	Women
Mahila Prashikshan Kendra	Training centre for women Shiksha Karmi
Mahila Sahyogi	Women escort and helper working with the Shiksha Karmi
Panchayati Raj	Local self-government system in India.
Prehar Pathshalas	Schools of convenient timings – where the Shiksha Karmi, community and learners jointly decide the timings. Most of them are run in the evenings.
Sandhan	A Jaipur based NGO specialising in educational research and training centre that has been working with the project since its inception.
Sankalp	A field-based NGO in Baran District of Rajasthan that evolved the 51 day induction training module in SKP.
Sahyogi	Hindi word meaning helper / supporter / escort
Scheduled Caste	Disadvantaged castes notified in as meriting affirmative action in the Indian Constitution – formerly known as Harijans or Untouchables.
Scheduled Tribe	Disadvantaged tribal communities notified in the Indian Constitution as meriting affirmative action.
Shiksha	Education
Shiksha Karmi	Educational Worker
Shiksha Sahyogi	Educational supervisor, supporter and helper rolled into one.
Vichar Manch	Council for dialogue and discussion

Executive Summary

Overview of the project:

1. Shiksha Karmi Project, a unique initiative that was launched in Rajasthan in 1987 with financial assistance from Sida, seeks to reach out to children in remote rural areas where the formal primary schools are either non-existent or dysfunctional. The genesis of the Shiksha Karmi Project can be traced to the night school experiment by SWRC, Tilonia – a pioneer in voluntary action in Rajasthan. Local youth with some basic education (Grade X in the case of young men and lower in the case of young women) are identified, trained and provided continuous educational support to teach children in Shiksha Karmi Day Schools, Prehar Pathshalas (Schools of convenient timings) and Angan Pathshalas (Courtyard Schools).

2. In a little over a decade that the project has been in operation, its activities have spread to 2697 villages in 146 blocks covering all the 32 districts in the state. The project now caters to 202,000 students (84,000 girls) through 2700 day schools, 4335 Prehar Pathshalas, 97 Angan Pathshalas. 20 of the day schools have been upgraded to upper primary schools. Students from SK schools are now gaining admission to regular schools and their standards compare favourably with government primary schools. Approximately 1% of children in SK schools are disabled.

3. SKP operates through 9 Resource Units. It has established 13 Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (Residential schools for training women) which have trained 349 Mahila Shiksha Karmi. The project has activated 2137 Village Education Committees (VEC), involved 188 Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis and 331 Mahila Sahyogis. In addition over 45 Subject Specialists and 798 Master Trainers are involved in helping with training of Shiksha Karmis.

4. The concept of the Shiksha Karmi Project rests on the assumption that barefoot teachers belonging to the local community, once intensively trained and enjoying local community support can overcome the lack of formal educational qualification. The training programmes are residential and participatory. They are also need based depending upon performance of Shiksha Karmis in previous training, work done in schools and test results. Established procedures govern selection and recruitment across the Shiksha Karmi Project, all of which are laid out in manuals. Once the Gram Sabha votes on the creation of a Shiksha Karmi school, spot tests are held to identify eligible Shiksha Karmis. As of March 1998, the project employed 6085 Shiksha Karmis (5390 M and 695 F) indicating the difficulty in meeting the Phase II target of at least 25% Mahila Shiksha Karmi.

5. The project has evolved a structure of training, support and monitoring by involving Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis (SKS) drawn from both the formal school system and NGOs. To address the gender imbalance in the appointment of Shiksha Karmis, the project has set up Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (residential training schools) for Mahila Shiksha Karmis. Marking a departure from the formal school system, the project initiated school mapping to involve the community in identifying children who are not in school. Partner NGOs provides ongoing training support and also participate in community mobilisation.

6. The Shiksha Karmi Project is being implemented by the Shiksha Karmi Board (SKB), an *autonomous* agency under the overall control of the state education

minister. The Shiksha Karmi Project has both significant overlaps with both Lok Jumbish and DPEP. It now forms part of the larger state strategy for UPE and works in collaboration with state functionaries, research institutions and NGOs. After the passage of the 83rd constitutional amendment and the setting up of an elected Panchayat structure, the project has sought to develop links with elected representatives at different levels. Overall, the Shiksha Karmi Project displays a healthy mix of autonomy and linkage. Unlike a parallel stream unrelated to or competing with the state managed educational delivery system, the Shiksha Karmi Project is designed in the spirit of partnership.

7. The project seeks to combine the openness and flexibility of NGOs with the legitimacy accruing to the official government system. A key element of the Shiksha Karmi process is its emphasis on consensual functioning, with all decisions related to schools, selection of Shiksha Karmis location of prehar pathshalas/angan pathshalas, mapping etc. taken in VEC meetings and eschewing a target approach i.e. the pacing of the project is related to the contextual need. Equally, implementation seeks to adhere to a spirit of partnership, such that decision-making and control over critical issues such as selection of personnel, pace of expansion, forums and strategies for problem solving and generating approvals does not become bureaucratised and pass into the hands of government project authorities or experts. Slow reformism to ensure sustainability rather than radicalism marks the project's style.

Main Strengths:

8. What makes Shiksha Karmi unique? Officials argue that the SKP was positioned as a low key project that was not competing with the mainstream but was aimed at addressing problems that could not be tackled in the formal school system. It was not projected as an alternative to the formal stream, but one that compliments the formal school system. Most importantly, a significant number of officials, educationists, teachers (including the teachers' union of Rajasthan) and NGOs identified with the project. This wide base of involvement permitted the project to overcome a 'normal' shortcoming marking special schemes – that of being seen as 'captive' to specific individuals or a group. And lastly, the working style, expenditure pattern and facilities compared with the mainstream – it was never seen as a well-endowed project that was flushed with funds. In a resource deficit state like Rajasthan, this image of austerity and simplicity went a long way in creating a positive public image.

9. It has been able to validate its key hypothesis – that a demand and a hunger for learning exists in all segments of society and that ordinary persons, appropriately selected, trained and supported, can function effectively as teachers and social change agents. It has also demonstrated the efficacy of government – NGO partnership, bringing the relative strengths of each to the programme. Equally, it has managed to forestall the normal bickering over credits and turf characteristic of programmes involving multiple agencies. Most significantly, it has earned approvals at different levels, not just from students and programme functionaries, but the village community, elected representatives and government officials. To have managed this in a difficult environment – given its focus on out of school children, and those hitherto excluded (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Other

Backward Castes/minorities/girls) – and at a unit cost not significantly higher than the outlay per student in government schools - does demonstrate that given commitment even an educationally backward state like Rajasthan can aspire to meeting UPE targets.

10. The Shiksha Karmi Project has been fairly successful in reaching out to children from disadvantaged communities (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The project has, to a lesser degree, able to address the gender gap. The lower success achieved in the case of women is reflected both in the low proportion of girl students and Mahila Shiksha Karmis. As compared to Rajasthan Lok Jumbish (up to June 1999), the leadership of Shiksha Karmi did not give girl's education the attention it deserved. This was pointed out in successive bilateral reviews/evaluations. While most officers associated with SK agree that they cannot achieve universal elementary education unless they make concerted efforts to address gender imbalances, the Shiksha Karmi project did not create an environment where girls' education was given top priority.

11. Central to the successful operationalising of the SK project and process is the training system. Training programmes are contextual and need based. The 41/50 day induction training are residential and participatory in nature. Rejection of the conventional didactic training method (that is still used in the formal school system) marked a major departure. Training is based on discussions, self-learning, co-learning through exercises and a range of activities including songs, role-play, practice teaching etc. The induction training is followed by two thirty days training programmes in the first two years, a 20 day training after 2 years and a 10 day training programme every year. In addition the Shiksha Karmis also participate in a 2-day monthly review, planning and difficulty removal meeting. The training system is one of the strengths of the project and it is also an important area of concern.

12. Shiksha Karmi Project was probably the first significant attempt to involve research bodies, not as external evaluators but as co-participants, in an ongoing and concurrent process for course correction and problem solving. The Institute of Development Studies and Sandhan were the two main partners. Over the years a number of reputed organisations, experts and NGOs have participated in monitoring and evaluation. What is interesting is that the monitoring function is not seen as an isolated activity – it is closely linked to participation in selection of Shiksha Karmis, training, documentation and field support. This enabled the monitoring and support agency to tailor the training programme to the needs of the Shiksha Karmis and also follow-through evaluation findings with concrete inputs in training and other field support inputs.

13. Unlike most line projects, Shiksha Karmi Project from its inception has insisted on non-hierarchical participation of all actors. A top-down, centralised structure has been jettisoned in favour of a bottom-up, decentralised and concentric structure with the eventual beneficiaries – the children – at its centre. The setting up of Resource Units, the involvement of NGOs, and the drawing in of elected grassroots representatives have all contributed to a context specific flexibility in the project.

14. The Shiksha Karmi Project has tried to steer clear of targets (though they do seem necessary for planning and monitoring purposes), preferring to accord them indicative rather than decisive status. This has permitted the project to adopt a pace of expansion and innovation suitable to the environment. The planning document for the Third Phase (with DFID support) may be departing from the practice as evidenced in the very ambitious targets proposed for coverage and expansion.

15. Nothing however marks the SK as different as much as its attempt at evolving a new language and culture of social/educational intervention. The very notion of a SK or a Sahyogi (supervisor/supporter/helper rolled into one) and the emphasis, both in selection and training, on a positive attitude towards children, excitement about the chance to learn and teach, and a high energy level, have contributed to an above normal motivation level at all levels of the project. The insistence on participation, loosening hierarchies, developing social class and gender sensitivity, seeking collaboration and consensus, contextual pacing – has led to high identification and pride in the project, what one may call self-esteem. Equally important is the mix of autonomy and linkage, restraint in terms of claims, focus on demonstrable results and efforts at consolidation before diversification and expansion.

16. Overall, the Shiksha Karmi Project can be seen as a strategy of non-formalising a formal, hierarchic delivery oriented system of education, evolved and run in collaborative partnership with a variety of actors. It has attempted to revive the joy in a teaching – learning process and contributed to enhancing the otherwise low self-esteem of individuals involved in educational ventures. More than an inexpensive and creative way of delivering education, the Shiksha Karmi Project – as did some other efforts earlier – has managed to dispel the myth of excluded individuals and communities as mere apathetic recipients.

Areas of concern:

17. Notwithstanding the widespread acclamation and affirmation received by the Shiksha Karmi Project, in particular about its training methodology and the undoubted breakthrough in involving communities seen and classified as weaker/socially backward, the project appears marked by some serious constraints – both internal (conceptual/methodological) and external.

18. Parateacher programmes challenge the conventional wisdom that the more educated the teacher, the better the learning outcome. However, experimentation with alternative forms of education invariably raise concerns about quality, parity with the formal educational sector and thereby, difficulties of mainstreaming. There is fear about equity issues in relation to regular and parateachers, about institutionalising a dual system of education, and whether the poorest and the most disadvantaged are being fobbed off with the second best.

19. Despite a highly positive rating of the project, evaluations point to deficiencies in both training and curricula. Though the students from both day schools and Prehar Pathshalas have done well and are increasingly gaining admission into regular schools – they remain weak in mathematics and language. Even with respect to its various training modules, the project is facing the problem of declin-

ing enthusiasm in on-the-job concurrent training i.e. once the Shiksha Karmis have been working for a few years they do not seem to find the training as useful. Possibly this is because of a greater emphasis on general values and orientation rather than developing core competencies in different subjects. Doubts, for instance, have been raised about the quality of the subject specialists in the Resource Units as also the Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis. The major problem, however, remains one of eventual parity with and absorption into the system of formal government schoolteachers. True that the presence of many inducement schemes, the setting up of a grievance redressal and discussion forum in the shape of the Vichar Manch have so far kept these negative/disruptive tendencies in check (viz. the veritable absence of court cases), yet the tension remains.

20. Similar problems afflict the management and review structure. Evaluators and donors are constantly in the search for hard research data. The task of generating data in ever more complex formats falls to the lot of the Shiksha Karmis. And this can lead to an overload. The very process of constant meetings, reviews, training and concurrent evaluation – even when geared towards a participatory, non-hierarchic and non-judgemental culture – leads to time spent away from joyful, capacity-enhancing activities.

21. These general issues become highlighted in the context of social and gender inequity and stereotyping. Successive evaluations and bilateral reviews have expressed concern about lack of a gender perspective among SKP functionaries. Given that an overwhelming proportion of children who are not in school are girls, the project could have made girls participation the top most priority. While workers and collaborating organisations are keenly aware of the gender gap in educational access and continued participation, the project does not have a clearly articulated strategy to encourage the participation of women and girls. This is not to say that nothing has been done – the creation of Mahila Prashikshan Kendra and the appointment of Mahila Sahyogi are indeed noteworthy. Given that women from backward communities and remote areas have been left out of educational processes, most of the women workers are drawn from relatively higher castes and forward communities. Even their numbers are also quite modest. In view of the fact that many of them come from the better-off strata, it will be difficult to increase participation of girls from the weaker sections as also increase the presence of women from these strata in the VEC. This remains a very important area of concern in the project.

22. A special problem arises from the centrality accorded to NGOs in the programme. For a start, there is a paucity of quality NGOs in the state. Many of them are small and ill equipped to take on larger organisational or specialised tasks. This problem has already affected the pace of decentralisation. Second, NGOs with a proven track record are today over-subscribed, what with every new scheme (and not just educational) seeking active NGO participation. We may soon be faced with a problem of too many schemes chasing too few NGOs. Finally is the problem of NGO culture – resistance to external accountability and a high degree of transience in personnel.

23. The above issues of autonomy and linkage are likely to get exacerbated in relation to both the DPEP and Lok Jumbish projects and the consolidation of Panchayat Raj institutions. So far, the Shiksha Karmi Project and Lok Jumbish have enjoyed a healthy partnership, partly because the founding fathers/mothers and key actors were common. The DPEP was for long seen as a competing vision. It has now been introduced in 19 districts of the state. Even though, DPEP proposes to use the Shiksha Karmi Project training model, doubts remain as to the viability of this marriage. Alongside the currently unspecified but likely to grow role of Panchayat Raj institutions in the state, it remains to be seen how well the Shiksha Karmi Project management structure copes with the new demands.

24. Overall then, looking at the issues internal to the project, given its reliance on high levels of motivation and excitement marking different participants, a feeling grows that the project may suffer due to an overloading of expectations. More so, when proposals for expansion are considered.

25. Many of the above issues have consciously been addressed by the project, albeit to varying levels of satisfaction. The larger environmental concern arises because of questions regarding the commitment and ability of the state government to sustain the project – particularly given the serious fiscal crisis. As of now, the state government seems committed to an expansion of primary education, and the Shiksha Karmi Project is afforded pride of place. Yet, the reliance on external donors will continue, possibly enhance. Even though the Shiksha Karmi Project is more human rather than finance intensive, ensuring external inputs does cost money.

26. One could, of course, argue that since the model is community centric, as long as communities continue to value the programme they would simultaneously generate and demand resources and support for it. This remains the challenge.

Section I

The Background

'Being innovative and geared towards a target population/area which is extremely difficult to reach, this is a high-risk project. The greatest risk is that of an uncontrolled expansion of the Shiksha Karmi system coupled with a withdrawal of the regular primary school teachers. If this happens, the target group will be left with a downgraded educational facility far worse than had the programme never been launched. The Shiksha Karmi concept means an activation of the educational system, an intensification that puts more demands on the backstopping and supporting capacity of the government bodies rather than less.' (Shiksha Karmi Project, Project Document, Revised 1987, page 4)

The Shiksha Karmi Project, now about to enter its third phase, is a dynamic initiative to extend universal primary education to remote villages and hamlets in Rajasthan where government education has either collapsed or is non-existent. The deployment of fully qualified teachers to desert, tribal or remote villages is often problematic as the terrain, dialect and socio-cultural norms make it difficult for outsiders to be both attracted and effective. The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) seeks to provide quality basic education with particular emphasis on girls, scheduled castes and tribes and other marginalised groups by addressing problems of teacher absenteeism, poor enrolment, high dropout rates and inadequate access through a process of developing and training a cadre of local parateachers who are acceptable to the village community. It seeks to put in place an extensive system at village, block, regional and state levels to provide training, support, guidance and accountability for these Shiksha Karmis (SK), literally education workers.

To place the project in perspective, it is important to keep in view the educational context of Rajasthan. Rajasthan is geographically the second largest state in India (342,239 sq. km) with a population of 44 million (23 million men, 21 million women) as per the 1991 census. The sex ratio at 913 Female to 1000 Male and infant mortality rates at 77 per 1000 live births are extremely adverse. Equally troubling are the literacy rates at 39% as against 52% all India. The average literacy rate for women stands at 20.4% as against the national average of 39.2%. For women in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the situation is far worse at 8.3% and 4.3% respectively (Census 1991).

Disparities in Literacy Rates by Social Group and Gender

Group	Male %	Female %	Total %
All Rajasthan	55	20	39
ST	26	8.3	17.2
SC	19	1.2	10.3

Source: 1991 Census.

Of the 7 million primary age children (6–11 years) in Rajasthan, the proportion attending primary schools is 52.8% (3.7 m). Only 37.4% of primary age girls attend school. The dropout rate in primary schools (between class 1 and V) is around 55% and under 30% of children complete education to age 14+ (Census 1991). Though there has been substantial progress post-Independence in the number of educational

institutions, enrolment and literacy rates – the overall picture remains bleak. At the beginning of the last decade (1991) around 6200 villages and 20,000 small habitations did not have any access to primary school facilities.

Rajasthan Literacy status (percentage) by social/economic group, gender (rural)

By land size group:	**Landless**	**Marginal**	**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**
Male	44.70	52.60	61.70	63.70	65.90
Female	5.70	14.50	17.90	19.80	21.40
By Occupational group:	**Agriculture**	**Salaried**	**Wage earners**	**All others**	**Total**
Male	57.20	83.30	44.90	70.40	60.40
Female	14.60	42.10	6.00	29.20	19.00
By social group	**ST**	**SC**	**Other Hindus**	**Minority**	**Total**
Male	39.10	51.80	66.40	45.90	60.40
Female	7.50	9.10	23.90	7.80	19.00

Enrolment Rate by income, social group and occupation (rural)

By per Capita Income	**Up to 1500**	**1501-2500**	**2501-4000**	**4001-6000**	**6000 +**
Male	76.00	69.60	75.50	87.90	89.70
Female	31.80	32.10	40.10	55.90	65.40
By land size group:	**Landless**	**Marginal**	**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**
Male	63.10	73.80	76.60	83.60	80.00
Female	15.02.	36.40	41.80	45.20	47.00
By social group	**ST**	**SC**	**Other Hindus**	**Minority**	**Total**
Male	57.10	58.40	76.80	71.90	68.50
Female	42.90	46.40	64.80	58.40	55.80

Source: NCAER/HDI Survey 1994

Many reasons have been advanced as explanations for Rajasthan's educational backwardness. In addition to the usual lack of finances and political commitment, analysts highlight:

- Social conservatism and rigidity – in particular negative attitudes towards education, more so for girls. Child marriage is common, and investment in girls education is considered to have negative economic and social consequences for the family
- Difficult geoclimatic conditions
- Neglect of education in the pre-Independence period
- Insufficient educational infrastructure
- Unsatisfactory quality of education
- Non-involvement of village community in education
- Centralised and unresponsive management structures

In brief, problems exist at both the demand and supply ends of primary education i.e. a lack of enthusiasm for education, more so for girls and children from Scheduled

Caste, Scheduled Tribe, minorities and underprivileged communities is exacerbated by both a lack and poor quality of teachers and educational facilities. The Shiksha Karmi Project is designed to address some of these problems, more specifically poor enrolment, particularly of girls; high dropout rate; teacher absenteeism; and poor local relevance of the curriculum.

This is the way they go to school!

Savitri's family is anything but well off. But when she dropped out of school here in Viraatnagar, it wasn't because of poverty. Her own classmates — and teacher — made it impossible for the 15-year-old to continue. "The moment I enter the room in school, the other children make faces. They start singing '*bhangi aayee hai, aayee hai, bhangi aayee hai*!' ('The bhangi has come'.) The words of the song are foul and insulting." Savitri is from a family of manual scavengers. A group that's among the most vulnerable within dalits. The official label for them is 'bhangi'. Many here are from the Mehter caste. And quite a few of these groups now call themselves Balmikis. With even other scheduled castes practising untouchability towards them, they end up pretty close to the bottom of the social heap. Women scavengers cleaning dry latrines tend to draw their pallu over the noses and grip it in their teeth. That offers them some protection in their unsanitary work. The children at the school mimic this when Savitri enters. "They bite a side of their collar, push their noses up. Sometimes put a hanky on their faces. I would start crying, but it didn't matter to them.

Source: P Sainath, The Hindu, 28 November 1999

The Shiksha Karmi Project was initiated in 1987 as a collaborative venture between the Government of Rajasthan (GOR), Government of India (GOI) and Sida. The first phase – July 1987 to June 1994-involved an expenditure of Rs 211.35 m, shared in a ratio of 9:1 between Sida and GOR. The second phase (July 1994 to March 1998) involved an expenditure of Rs 618.11 m shared equally between GOR and Sida, after adjusting the unspent balance of Phase 1. As negotiations for the next phase of the project were on, Sida withdrew support for the project following the explosion of nuclear devices by India in May 1998. Subsequently, DFID agreed to step in and Phase III of the project is currently in the process of being finalised.

In a little over a decade that the project has been in operation, its activities have spread to 2697 villages in 146 blocks covering all the 32 districts in the state. The project now caters to 202,000 students (84,000 girls) through 2700 day schools, 4335 Prehar Pathshalas (schools of convenient timings), 97 Angan Pathshalas (courtyard schools) and has put into place 6085 Shiksha Karmis (5390 men; 695 women). 20 of the day schools have been upgraded to upper primary schools.

As part of the support mechanism, the project now operates through 9 Resource Units. It has established 13 Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (Residential training schools for women) that have trained 349 Mahila Shiksha Karmis. The project has also activated 2137 Village Education Committees (VEC) and has involved 188 Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis and 331 Mahila Sahyogis. In addition over 45 Subject Specialists and 798 Master Trainers are involved in helping with training of Shiksha Karmis.

In the project villages 87% of the boys and 78% of the girls are enrolled in day schools and Prehar Pathshalas. The average attendance rate has increased to 85% with as many as 576 villages reporting 100% attendance. The retention rate too has gone up to 65%. A sample study of 50 villages done in 1998 revealed that average

academic achievements in day schools was between 40–60%, while in Prehar Pathshalas it stood a little lower between 30–40%. Students from SK schools are now gaining admission to regular schools and their standards compare favourably with government primary schools. (Vijay Sherry Chand et al., IIM Study, July 1998)

Overall, it is noteworthy that of its 202,000 students 71% come from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes, 41% of whom are girls. Equally that 1% of children in SK schools are disabled. *Finally that while in 1996–97, average expenditure per student on primary education was Rs 1260 per year; it was Rs 1,480 in SK schools.* This, given the difficult environmental conditions (communities/locations) in which the project operates, is quite commendable. Also, while the project does not levy charges on individual students, the local communities contribute significantly towards maintenance costs, particularly of buildings, to the tune of 30% of building costs, indicating substantial community involvement and participation. However the project has not been as successful as hoped in addressing the problem of enrolment and retention of girl students or significantly increasing the pool of women parateachers or Mahila Shiksha Karmis.

Expenditure incurred on the Shiksha Karmi Project (In Million Indian Rupees)

	GOI Share	GOR Share	Total
Phase I (July 1987–June 94)	190.60	20.69	211.35
Balance of Phase I Liabilities carried forward to Phase II	59.75	6.15	65.90
Phase II (July 1994–March 1998)	388.30	334.70	723.00

Source: Shiksha Karmi Board: reimbursement Claims of Shiksha Karmi Project, Dated 21 July 1998.

Sida reimbursed Indian Rupees 190.60 million in Phase I (approx. 48 million SEK) and 338.30 million in Phase II (approx. 60 million SEK).

Section II

Main Elements of the Project

"The tragedy in India is not that the rural poor do not value education; the tragedy is that they do. And it is not available to them". (Shiksha Karmi – A Paradigm Shift in the Delivery of Primary Education; S. Anandalakshmy and S. Jain, 1997)

All across the country, there are dozens of innovative and creative efforts aimed at attracting children into school, retaining them and engaging them in a pedagogical adventure which can win the approval of all participants, children, teachers, parents and state authorities. Each of these projects or experiments is designed to address problem areas and conditions that deter the achievement of the eventual goal, i.e. universal primary education.

The genesis of the Shiksha Karmi Project can be traced to the night school experiment by SWRC, Tilonia. On finding that many children of school going age were not in schools but instead working on the farm or the homestead, SWRC set up night schools. A person from the same village with education up to standard VII or VIII was hired as a teacher. Experts assisted in designing a curriculum that was meaningful and appropriate for the learning group. Training inputs were provided to the teachers. In the process, it was established that children were excited about learning and developing their cognitive skills. An evaluation comparing children from the night schools to those from regular primary schools reported comparable levels of achievement. It is this experiment which forms the basis of the Shiksha Karmi Project.

At the core of the project lie two beliefs:

i. There exists significant unmet demand for education, even though the situation differs by caste/class/community/gender and location.

ii. If the educational services offered enjoy community support, even 'ordinary' (not having requisite formal qualifications) persons, if given opportunity, training and support can rise to a high level of performance and contribute to social development in a significant manner.

The concept of the Shiksha Karmi is based on a supposition that a change agent, especially in the field of education, can work effectively if he/she belongs to the same locality. The concept is particularly important for remote and backward villages (with non-existent or non-functioning educational facilities) where it is difficult for an outsider to stay or be accepted. In such conditions, educational qualifications appear to be of lesser importance than the teacher's willingness and ability to function as a social worker.

Parateachers in India

Shiksha Karmi Project introduced the concept of parateachers in primary education. Who is a parateacher? What distinguishes her/him from primary school teachers?

– She/he is a local person – the first distinguishing feature about parateachers is that this person is by definition a local person, who has links with the community. While Shiksha Karmi Project of Rajasthan has strictly adhered to this notion, the Shiksha Karmi Yojana of Madhya Pradesh and the

Volunteer Teacher Scheme of Himachal Pradesh have diluted this and have also appointed "outsiders".

- Social background of the parateachers is also seen as an important factor – caste, gender, community identity and the economic status of parateacher is an important consideration.
- Qualifications: Relaxation in the minimum prescribed qualification in order to create space for a local person who will be committed to her/his area and on whom the community can exert some influence/pressure is another important feature of parateacher schemes.
- Community involvement in recruitment: The involvement of the community in the identification of potential candidates and their recruitment is an important feature of programmes that work with parateachers.
- Continuing professional support and training: Intensive pre-service training followed by continuing professional support is seen as an important aspect of programmes that work with parateachers.
- Honorarium, salary and the spirit of voluntarism – Though the salary or remuneration of the parateachers are fixed on the notion of voluntarism, the teachers themselves do not see themselves as volunteers. Notwithstanding different perceptions, the honorarium paid to parateachers varies from Rs 500 per month in the EGS Scheme of Madhya Pradesh to Rs 1800 in Shiksha Karmi Project, Rajasthan.

Source: DPEP – Parateachers in primary education – an in-depth study of selected schemes; 1999 (This study was done by BODH Shiksha Samiti, Jaipur, Rajasthan)

The sequencing of the project operates as follows:

- Identification of villages/hamlets where primary schools are non-existent or non-functioning, or where a significant proportion of children are out of school.
- Energising the community to demand a functioning school.
- A SK school is established after two local residents, preferably one female, with educational qualifications of class VIII and V respectively, are with the help of the community, identified and appointed as Shiksha Karmis after specific, intensive training.
- Training for Shiksha Karmis is regarded as a continuous process designed to upgrade qualifications, improving and promoting teaching abilities, reinforcing solidarity among them to act as social activists and providing motivation and support. The training is both pre and post appointment.
- The project operates three different kinds of schools – Shiksha Karmi day schools; Prehar Pathshalas (schools of convenient timings) to cater to children unable to attend day school; and Aangan Pathshalas (courtyard schools) which are non-formal schools, mainly for girls to prepare them for entry to regular day schools or prehar pathshalas.
- The project has evolved a structure of training, support and monitoring by involving Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis (SKS) drawn from both the formal school system and NGOs. In addition, the project has created a category of Mahila Sahyogis (MS), part-time workers, mainly to escort girl students.
- To address the gender imbalance in the appointment of Shiksha Karmis, the project has set up Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (residential training schools) for Mahila Shiksha Karmis.

– The project involves a process of regular school mapping and continuous monitoring through specialised institutions, NGOs and Village Education Committees. This permits regular feedback and mid-course correction. More than basic research and evaluation, the focus is on problem solving.

The project seeks to combine the openness and flexibility of NGOs with the legitimacy accruing to the official government system. A key element of the Shiksha Karmi process is its emphasis on consensual functioning, with all decisions related to schools, selection of Shiksha Karmis, location of prehar pathshalas/angan pathshalas, mapping etc. taken in VEC meetings and eschewing a target approach i.e. the pacing of the project is related to the contextual need. Equally, implementation seeks to adhere to a spirit of partnership, such that decision-making and control over critical issues such as selection of personnel, pace of expansion, forums and strategies for problem solving and generating approvals does not become bureaucratised and pass into the hands of government project authorities or experts. Slow reformism to ensure sustainability rather than radicalism marks the project's style.

Community Participation in Shiksha Karmi Project

- A dialogue is generated around and about the school – within the educational administration and the teachers. Initiate dialogue within the village, with the Panchayat, local leaders and/or concerned persons. A group from the village taken into confidence. Decision taken to open a Shiksha Karmi Project school.
- The village identifies two people (age group 18–33) – 8th Std. Pass for men and 5th Std. Pass for women. In early years Shiksha Karmi Project did not insist on women – because of very low literacy rate among women.
- Criteria of selection – positive attitude, high energy levels and excitement about new chance to learn and be a teacher.
- Focus – local youth, sense of belonging, identify with the community and willingness to work together. Back-up, academic support and supervision by Shiksha Sahyogi.
- Intensive training (system evolved over the years) of 37 days (Sandhan Model) or 50 days (Sankalp Model). Selection through training. Trainers drawn from Schoolteachers, local unemployed graduates, NGOs etc. Training of trainers.
- Training focus on subjects, teaching methods, to keep in touch with the families of children, keep dialogue open, elicit support of families/leaders to ensure attendance etc.
- Combination of different "kinds" of schools – there were 2600 Day Schools, 4829 Prehar Pathshalas, 97 Angan Pathshalas (for girls) and 21 Upper Primary Schools as of March 1999. The local committee decides what kind of school they need or what combination of inputs their village needs.
- One Village Education Committee for every Shiksha Karmi School – 11–15 members representing all castes, minority groups, educationally deprived groups and women. Impact on school environment and facilities.
- After 1994 – encouraged by the positive response in Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi Project introduced School Mapping and formation of village level forum to generate demand, educate the community, monitor and support the Shiksha Karmi.
- NGOs involved at the Block level for training, educational support, monthly meetings etc. Total of 28 NGOs involved in Shiksha Karmi Project.

Shiksha Karmi Project started as a "people's programme" – originally the driving force was the community. Community participation started by official acceptance of

the problem of dysfunctional schools and the need for an alternative means of creating and running a functional school. Community involved in selection of SK, providing support in enrolling children (focus on girls evident), day-to-day support and monitoring. There was greater reliance on community support during the early years, now greater reliance on "systems" – management, training, supervision etc. Does mainstreaming necessarily lead to less community participation?

Project Structure:

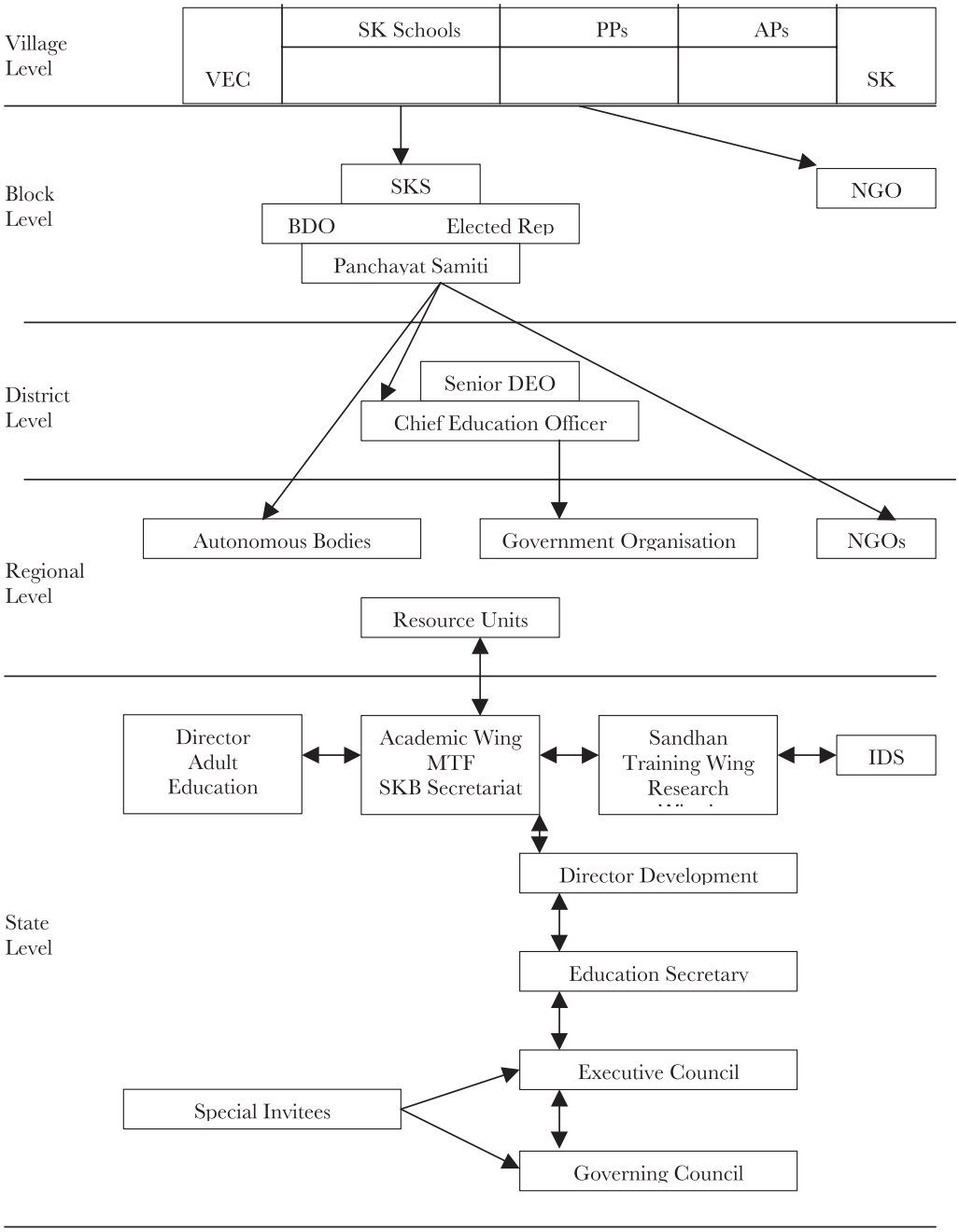
The Shiksha Karmi Project is being implemented by the Shiksha Karmi Board (SKB), an *autonomous* agency under the overall control of the state education minister. The SKB is closely supported by an NGO called Sandhan, which is involved in policy level decision-making, development and implementation of training as also concurrent monitoring and evaluation. The last function also involves a premier research institute, the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur (IDS). However, the role of the IDS has somewhat reduced over the years.

During Phase II of the project, a decision was taken to decentralise the project. Currently, there are 9 Resource Units drawn from both NGOs and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIET). At the block level, the structure comprises of a supervisor – Shiksha Karmi Sahayogi, the BDO and the Pradhan. Finally at the village level, there is a village education committee.

In addition to this basic organisational structure, the project deploys a Mahila Task Force (MTF) to address the gender imbalance and to ensure greater gender sensitivity. More importantly, particularly during the second phase, significant areas of Shiksha Karmi Project functioning overlapped with Lok Jumbish, another large project supported by Sida. Till 1998 funds for building construction, school mapping, educational charts, school uniforms etc., (not provided for in the Shiksha Karmi Project) were met through Lok Jumbish. The Shiksha Karmi Sahyogi formed part of the Lok Jumbish cluster team. The current situation is however unclear.

Of late, the World Bank supported District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) has been initiated in 19 of the 32 districts of the state. *The Shiksha Karmi Project thus has significant overlaps with both Lok Jumbish and DPEP. Overall, it now forms part of the larger state strategy for UPE and works in collaboration with state functionaries, research institutions and NGOs. Finally, after the passage of the 83rd constitutional amendment and the setting up of an elected Panchayat structure, the project has sought to develop links with elected representatives at different levels*.

Organisational Structure



Source: Manju Singh, 1999.

Overall, the Shiksha Karmi Project displays a healthy mix of autonomy and linkage. The autonomy in the management structure comes from the involvement of NGOs and nurtures the non-formal components. The linkage to the government administrative structure, both the Departments of Education and Panchayat Raj, ensures sustainability of intervention. Unlike a parallel stream unrelated to or competing with the state managed educational delivery system, the Shiksha Karmi Project is designed in the spirit of partnership.

The secretariat of the Shiksha Karmi Board is associated with project planning and implementation; monitoring research and evaluation and training; and financial monitoring. In addition, it is in charge of the Mahila Prashikshan Kendras and the Mahila Task Force. In turn it reports to a Governing Council which meets once a year and an Executive Council which meets quarterly. The Regional Resource Units handle similar functions at a decentralised level. Since this system is relatively recent, it has still to acquire a final shape. Similarly, the interface with Lok Jumbish and the DPEP programmes is still in a process of evolution and consolidation.

Shiksha Karmi Schools, Prehar Pathshalas and Aangan Pathshalas:

As indicated earlier, there are at present 2700 day schools, 4335 Prehar Pathshalas and 97 Angan Pathshalas. Together, they cater to 202,000 students of which 84,000 are girls students (17th Report, March 1998). 20 of the day schools have been upgraded to Upper Primary Schools. Each school is expected to have two Shiksha Karmis, one of them a Mahila Shiksha Karmi. Shiksha Karmi schools are essentially day schools. This is the mainstay of the project. In addition the project also runs school with convenient timings – Prehar Pathshalas (anytime school) and courtyard schools or Aangan Pathshalas.

Share of Prehar Pathshalas by region, all children and girls

	Tribal		Dang		Desert		Plains	
	All	Girls	All	Girls	All	Girls	All	Girls
Enrolled Children	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Prehar Pathshalas	20	33	12	28	10	19	21	45
	80	67	88	72	90	81	79	55

Source: A review of gender issues in Shiksha Karmi Project and an assessment of the Prehar Pathshalas; Vijay Sherry Chand et al; Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, July 1998.

The salient feature of Prehar Pathshalas is that decisions regarding the location and timings are taken in consultation with parents and the community. These schools run for 2 hours – mostly in the evenings or night. Admissions are open throughout the year and the schools follow a multi-grade teaching system. There are variations in the physical facilities, and it is said that facilities are provided according to the norms of the project. Most of them are run in community buildings (75%) or in school buildings (25%). As of 31 March 1998, Prehar Pathshalas accounted for 8821 boys and 22359 girls – with girls constituting 71.71 per cent of the 31180 children enrolled. A recent study of gender issues and Prehar Pathshalas in the Shiksha Karmi Project by Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (July 1998) revealed that "Prehar

Pathshalas played an important role in improving girls' access to education. They account for 30.65% of the total number of girls enrolled; PPs account for only 7.18% of the enrolled boys… The most significant impact of enrolment has been in the tribal areas." (IIM Ahmedabad, July 1998)

Angan Pathshalas

Responding to the educational needs of girl children who are not in school, and who are engaged in domestic farm and non-farm work Angan Pathshalas were started in Shiksha Karmi Project in October 1992. They were set up in areas where there were no formal schools or where there were no educational facilities for children. They are run primarily for girls in the 6–14 age group, but boys in very remote areas are also admitted. These schools are run in the courtyard (Aangan) of the Shiksha Karmi or in any other home. The primary aim of the Aangan Pathshalas is to promote girls' education and reach out to girls who are not able to come to school. On significant feature is the involvement of the local people and their contribution by way of a space for the school and land – where necessary. Another significant factor is that the overall responsibility of running Aangan Pathshalas rests with NGOs in majority of cases.

As of March 1998, 105 Aangan Pathshalas were functioning. There were 57 Shiksha Karmis (32 women and 25 men). Out of 4023 children who were enrolled, 2201 were girls and 1822 were boys. A study done in 1997 revealed that the overall performance of the children was satisfactory – i.e. 53.9% of children scored above 48% marks in Hindi, Mathematics and Environmental Sciences.

Source: Study of the working of Aangan Pathshalas, Shiksha Karmi Board, December 1993 and Academic Achievement of Children in Aangan Pathshalas – A Study; Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur March 1997.

One of the main objectives of the project has been to improve the participation of girls and also enhance the pool of women teachers. However, despite setting up Mahila Prashikshan Kendras, the number and proportion of women Shiksha Karmis remains low. This is also reflected in the proportion of girl students. Some improvement has over time been affected in the gender balance through the Aangan Pathshalas, which were originally meant exclusively for girls, by introducing Mahila Sahyogis (to escort girls to school), by increasing the proportion of Mahila Shiksha Karmi Sahyogi and through the intervention of the MTF.

Status as of March 1998

	Unit	Achievement
1.	District Covered	32
2.	Blocks Covered	140
3.	Block/Unit	200
4.	Day Schools	2600
5.	Prehar Pathshalas	4335
6.	Upper Primary Schools	20
7.	Aangan Pathshalas	105
8.	Shiksha Karmis	6085
	Male	5390
	Female	695

9.	Mahila Prashikshan Kendras	13
10.	Resource Units	9
11.	Village Education Committees	2137
12.	Shiksha Karmi Sahayogi	188
13.	Master Trainers (after training)	798
	Male	757
	Female	41
14.	VEC Members	19 917
	Male	13 244
	Female	6 673
15.	Mahila Sahyogis in	331
	(a) Day Schools	53
	(b) Prehar Pathshalas	178
	c) DS + Prehar Pathshalas	100
16.	Enrolment	202 000
	Boys	118 000
	Girls	84 000
17.	Participation DS	85%
	Participation PP	80%
18.	Retention DS	65%
	Retention PP	55%

Source: 17th Report, SK Board.

The project has been able to significantly improve enrolment, attendance and retention rates in its area of operation, though the proportion of girls remains significantly lower than that of boys. Studies on the achievement of students in SK day schools and Prehar Pathshalas reveal that while these schools compare fairly favourably with regular primary schools, there are significant variations among blocks and students face considerable difficulty with both mathematics and language. A detailed study (Srivastava and Jain, 1995) of 50 Shiksha Karmi schools (5 each from 10 Blocks) and 53 students of the last semester drawn from selected Prehar Pathshalas focusing on achievement levels in Hindi and mathematics revealed that:

- The performance of students of Class V of SK day schools showed an above average proficiency in Hindi (71.3%). The scores ranged from 61.6% in one block to 79.6% in another block. The testing was carried out for word knowledge, grammar, writing ability and reading comprehension.
- The performance in mathematics suffered by comparison averaging at 50.7% (Range 33.9% to 63.4%).
- Unlike the performance of SK day schools, the overall performance in Prehar Pathshalas can only be described as average. The students averaged at 52.3 in Hindi and 49.4 in Mathematics.

Part of the weakness can be traced to inadequate pedagogic training of Shiksha Karmis, insufficient attention paid to developing new textbooks and curricula and an insistence on using Hindi rather than local dialect as medium of instruction. Nevertheless, student interest remains high, helped no doubt by more informal and innova-

tive ways of involving students, taking them out on field trips and by close interaction with and support from the village community and external agents. The courtyard schools too have made steady progress, even though the original concept had to be diluted to admit boy students and employ male Shiksha Karmis.

Enrolment of Children belonging to Deprived Classes – March 1998

Category	Sex	SC	ST	OBC	Total
Day School	B	15027	36108	27490	78625
	G	7690	18504	15999	42193
	T	22717	54612	43489	119818
Prehar	B	1234	4106	1814	7154
Pathshalas	G	2817	8318	6003	17138
	T	4105	12424	7817	24346
Total	B	16261	40214	29304	85799
	G	10561	26822	22002	59385
	T	26822	67036	51306	145164

Overall these categories account for 63.4% of total students.

Source: 17th Report, 1998.

In view of the fact that 63.4% of children in the three categories of SK schools belong to underprivileged communities, their performance in SK schools compares quite well with the performance of children from similar background in formal schools. While there is no study to substantiate this observation, teachers in formal schools who were informally interviewed by the researcher during the last three months alleged that the performance of children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was below average possibly because an overwhelming number of children from poor families are first generation learners and have little support from their families. Many of them also have to work at home – especially during peak agricultural season, graze animals, pitch in other home based work and family occupation. Given such domestic work responsibilities, it is not surprising that the performance of girls from poorer families is particularly unsatisfactory. Nevertheless given the overall situation of children from poor families, the performance of SK children is quite heartening.

Training:

The concept of the Shiksha Karmi Project rests on the assumption that barefoot teachers belonging to the local community, once intensively trained and enjoying local community support can overcome the lack of formal educational qualification. The initial training module consists of a 37/50-day programme, supplemented by recurrent and advanced training programs for 10 days every winter and 20–30 days every summer. In addition the programme organises remedial training camps for weaker Shiksha Karmis. This is as important as the formal interactions and extension of support through Shiksha Sahyogis. The trainers are drawn from the existing pool of teachers, outside specialists from NGOs and DIETs as also senior Shiksha Karmis.

To meet the goal of one male and one female SK in every SK school (the proportion of female Shiksha Karmis is currently around 12%), the programme has also set up Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (13) which have so far trained 349 female Shiksha Karmis. In addition the programme also trains members of VECs, both to help with school mapping exercises and to oversee the effective functioning of the SK schools, primarily in association with the Lok Jumbish project.

Training Cycle in Shiksha Karmi Project

Shiksha Karmi	41 Day induction training (earlier 37 days or 50 days depending on the model being used – Sandhan or Sankalp)
	30 Days First Training
	30 Days Second Training
	20 Days Training after two years
	10 Days Training – every subsequent year.
	2 Days monthly review, planning and difficulty removal meetings.
Master Trainers	In addition to the above – SKs selected as Master Trainers undergo a 26 days MT training.
Shiksha Karmi Sahyogi	10 Days additional training
Mahila Sahayogi	1 Day additional training
MPK Teachers	10 Days quarterly training every year

Source: Report of the Management Review of Shiksha Karmi Project, MSG, December 1997

The training programmes are residential and participatory. This facilitates intensive interaction between trainees and resource persons. Training programmes are need based depending upon performance of Shiksha Karmis in previous training, work done in schools and test results. Training methodology is based on innovative activities and discussions, self and co-learning. It encourages participatory approach, positive acceptance and respect for Shiksha Karmis, virtues of self-discipline, social and gender equity and depends heavily on master trainers as role models. Special efforts are made for female Shiksha Karmis and to reduce gender stereotyping.

Training Camps for Shiksha Karmis (August 1997–March 1998)

Type	Number	Duration (days)	Beneficiaries
a) Induction Camps	38	37	1553
b) In-service Camp			
Summer Vacation	166	20/30	4785
Deepawali Vacation	95	–	3383
Winter Vacation	26	–	924

Source: 17th Report, SK Board, 1998

However the feedback from training institutions and from independent reviews of training programme (content, duration, periodicity) indicates that significant improvements are required to enable Shiksha Karmis to become effective subject teachers, that the process of assessing the competencies of Shiksha Karmis remains weak, that there is a serious shortage of master trainers, and that gender stereotyping is difficult to counter.

Mahila Prashikshan Kendras

The Mahila Prashikshan Kendra (MPKs) were visualised as an intervention to increase the number of Mahila Shiksha Karmis and through them effecting an increase in the enrolment of girls in SKP schools... The first MPK was established in Mada, Dungarpur in 1990 in collaboration with People's Education and Development Organisation. Since then and until February 1998, 13 MPKs have been established... Selection of the trainees is done by SKB in co-operation with members of the Mahila Task Force Resource Unit that is located closest to it... While selecting a great deal of flexibility is adopted in respect to educational qualifications. The average time taken to convince identified women to join MPKs varies between two to three months and in come cases it has taken as long as a year, involving more than one visit by a MTF member to the trainees homes... The selected trainees are administered a test at the time of entry and depending on their competencies are placed in one of the three or four levels of the teaching programme corresponding to Grade 2 to 5... The MPK curriculum is based on the existing textbooks of Grade 1 to 5 used in the SKP. There is regular evaluation and monitoring to review the progress of each trainee in various aspects including academics, extracurricular activities and general behaviour. All trainees are required to stay at the centre until they reach the required level of competency, which is found out through tests. Training is organised in periods of 3 months followed by a gap of one month in which trainees visit their homes. In each academic year there are three such cycles of three months training, each of which is followed by a break of one month. The time taken by an individual to reach the desired level of competency varies and is dependent on factors such as the initial level of the trainee, her previous educational background and her ability to learn... After graduation, they are then required to successfully pass the 37 days course to qualify to become a SK...

Source: Pages 59–63, A review of gender issues in Shiksha Karmi Project and an assessment of the Prehar Pathshalas; Vijay Sherry Chand et al; Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, July 1998.

The assessment of Mahila Prashikshan Kendras responsible for the pre-induction training of Mahila Shiksha Karmis indicates that these institutions too suffer from weak material facilities. The monitoring mechanisms are weak. There is also some dissatisfaction with the curricula. The Mahila Prashikshan Kendras seem to be marked by a high turnover of teachers. Equally, many women find the long duration of residential stay – between six months to two years – difficult to cope with. Nevertheless, the integral position given to training within the SK model has undoubtedly contributed to its success, since most Shiksha Karmis have low educational qualifications and require constant motivation.

Staffing:

Established procedures govern selection and recruitment across the Shiksha Karmi Project, all of which are laid out in manuals. The linchpins of the project, the Shiksha Karmis, are selected in a participatory process that involves representatives of the Board interacting with the Village Council, the Pradhan and the BDO. Once the Gram Sabha votes on the creation of a Shiksha Karmi school, spot tests are held to identify eligible Shiksha Karmis. Candidates are then put through induction training before final selection.

A Shiksha Karmi is at start paid Rs 1800 p.m. with clear incentives and a laid out career path. He/she can become a master trainer (after 3 years), a SK Sahyogi (after 6 years) and a senior SK (after 8 years and passing secondary school). At that stage the salary is equivalent to a grade 3 teacher in a government school. Shiksha Karmis found incompetent can be removed from service by the Board.

The selection of Shiksha Karmis and personnel of the Board is based on detailed interviews. The Board and Sandhan select the staff of Resource Units. The Resource Units managed by NGOs are governed by the respective NGOs procedures. Master trainers are recruited through open advertisement.

As of March 1998, the project employed 6085 Shiksha Karmis (5390 M and 695 F) indicating the difficulty in meeting the Phase II target of at least 25% Mahila SK. What however is significant is a high proportion (about 58%) of the Shiksha Karmis were drawn from economically and educationally backward classes – SC, ST, OBC.

The Shiksha Karmi Project, in addition to career advancement leading to eventual parity with government teachers, provides for reimbursement of expenditure for further study, full pay leave for examinations, and state honours for meritorious service. There are the usual benefits – medical facilities, incentive money, festival gift money, benevolent fund etc.

To address both work and personnel related issues, forums have been created at every level. These, alongside regular review and planning meetings, help resolve outstanding issues. In addition, the project has set up a Vichar Manch (Council for open dialogue and discussion) at every level of review and planning to specifically address personnel issues. Thus while review and planning meetings make Shiksha Karmis accountable, Vichar Manch meetings serve to make Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis and Resource Unit staff accountable. The effort is to institutionalise an open and transparent system where all are accountable to all. It may be noted that the Shiksha Karmi Project has so far managed to retain a fairly unique work culture and avoid being embroiled in court cases, a condition that afflicts the government educational service.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Support Structures:

Monitoring and evaluation systems exist at all levels. In addition to regular review and planning meetings, there are formal appraisal mechanisms in place. It, however, needs to be admitted that the existing Management Information System leaves much to be desired.

External evaluations of the project have been periodically carried out – both by concerned donor agencies as also independent research institutes mandated to look at specific parts of the project. There is of course the concurrent monitoring and evaluation carried out by the IDS earlier and the Sandhan Research Unit now. It is this latter system which has permitted continuous mid-course correction, more so since all these studies have been participatory.

What, however, is more unusual is the degree of support activities, both formal and informal. The role of SK Sahyogis, Mahila Task Force, Resource Unit staff, subject specialists, as also Master Trainers and external consultants has been quite remarkable in keeping motivational levels high and helping quality improvement.

While the primary validation for the project has been sought (and received) from the village community – the effort to involve both government and elected functionaries, especially at the block and village levels – has made a marked difference. So too has the unusual degree of support extended by the state government, helped no doubt by the stability and continuity in the Board secretariat. The emphasis on participation and consensus, as also slow reform, has facilitated in generating a supportive environment.

Financial Management:

The project has evolved detailed guidelines and regulations to ensure better management of finances. As indicated earlier, Sida and GOR supported the first two phases of the project. The first phase (July 1987 to June 1994) involved an allocation of Rs 211.34 m, 90% of the amount coming from Sida. At the end of Phase I, there was a saving of Rs 65.90 m (Sida share 59.75 m) mainly because of unspent balances with NGOs and Panchayat Samitis.

Phase II (July 1994–March 1998) involved substantial expansion. In addition to the unspent balance, fresh expenditure stood at Rs 505.96 m shared in a 1:1 ratio between Sida and GOR. An additional Rs 118.64 m was spent between April and June 1998 (shared equally between Sida and GOR), bringing the overall cost of Phase II to Rs 690.50 m (65.90 unspent balance + 624.60 fresh allocation). Since Sida pulled out of the project in May 1998, and the third phase with financial assistance from DFID is still to commence operation, the financial picture since June 1998 remains somewhat unclear.

Accounts of the SKB are audited annually by statutory chartered accountants as also by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Government of India. So far no major discrepancies in accounts have been pointed out.

Section III

Main Strengths

By all accounts, the Shiksha Karmi Project can be looked at as a successful educational and social intervention. In about a decade of operation, it has expanded significantly – both spatially and in population terms. *It has been able to validate its key hypothesis – that a demand and a hunger for learning exists in all segments of society and that ordinary persons, appropriately selected, trained and supported, can function effectively as teachers and social change agents. It has also demonstrated the efficacy of government – NGO partnership, bringing the relative strengths of each to the programme.* Equally, it has managed to forestall the normal bickering over credits and turf characteristic of programmes involving multiple agencies. Most significantly, it has earned approvals at different levels, not just from students and programme functionaries, but the village community, elected representatives and government officials. To have managed this in a difficult environment – given its focus on out of school children, and those hitherto excluded (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Other Backward Castes/minorities/girls) – and at a unit cost not significantly higher than the outlay per student in government schools – does demonstrate that given commitment even an educationally backward state like Rajasthan can aspire to meeting UPE targets.

Focus on the excluded and gender balance:

The project is specifically geared to reaching the unreached – Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes – mainly in remote areas. Existing evaluations confirm impressive educational gains amongst these groups. The Shiksha Karmi Project has been fairly successful in reducing the tribal gap, and to a lesser degree, the gender gap. As such, the Shiksha Karmi Project strategy can be easily extended to the contiguous central Indian tribal belt. Much of this has become possible because of an emphasis on recruiting Shiksha Karmis from lower social groups.

Social Groups	SC/ST%	OBC %	Others %
Formal govt. teachers	20	19	61
Shiksha Karmi Teachers	40	27	33

Source: IIM Study (1998)

Similar success has not been achieved in the case of women reflected both in the low proportion of girl students and Mahila Shiksha Karmis. Much of this can be explained by the relative paucity of women in relevant communities available, willing to and able to work as Shiksha Karmis. Thus, for instance, a much higher proportion of Mahila Shiksha Karmis has had to been drawn from the upper castes. Nevertheless, note must be taken of the efforts made by the project to redress the gender bias – Mahila Shikshan Kendras, Mahila Task Force and Mahila Sahyogis.

Notwithstanding efforts made to address gender imbalances, as compared to Rajasthan Lok Jumbish (up to June 1999[1]), the leadership of Shiksha Karmi did not give girl's education the attention it deserved. This was pointed out in successive

[1] After June 1999, Rajasthan Lok Jumbish discontinued special initiatives to promote/encourage girls' participation through a range of women's development and girl's empowerment strategies. In particular the women's development activities initiated to ensure meaningful and effective participation of women in VECs and 50% women workers at all levels were withdrawn.

bilateral reviews/evaluations. Though most officers associated with SK agree that they cannot achieve universal elementary education unless they make concerted efforts to address gender imbalances, the Shiksha Karmi project did not create an environment where girls' education was given top priority.

Implementation through autonomous body – Shiksha Karmi Board:

In 1986–87, Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan agreed to set up a Society called Shiksha Karmi Board to implement the Swedish assisted innovative education programme. This government sponsored NGO was registered under the Societies Registration Act, akin to most other NGO in India. There was however one significant difference. The formal head of the society is the Education Secretary of the state. This structure, it was hoped, would provide the flexibility and openness of a NGO alongside outreach, legitimacy and authority of the government. Funds meant for the project would be "safe" and not absorbed into the general treasury account of the State. Given the perceived inflexibility of mainstream structures, this was also seen as a necessary mechanism to reach out to children in remote areas through paraprofessional teachers and to mobilise girls. It was argued that relaxing rules for recruitment and organising intensive ongoing support and training would not be possible within the rigid formal school system. And even if the formal system can accommodate "parateachers" (as it is being done under the Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh), administrators remained fearful about cadre formation and unionisation. Societies provided a "nice halfway house".

The Shiksha Karmi Board set a new precedent in India. Establishing an autonomous body for the implementation of a donor assisted government programme marked a radical departure in development administration. Today nearly all donor-aided projects are implemented through autonomous societies registered under Societies Registration Act of 1860. Even the Total Literacy Campaign (which is not externally assisted) adopted this structure. The government registered societies under the formal leadership and control of the civil service (Education Secretaries or District Collectors). Empowered Committees were constituted with nominees of the State Government, Government of India and nominees from civil society. The World Bank assisted District Primary Education Project (DPEP) too adopted this model.

Officials who created these structures argue that bypassing the mainstream was necessary to ensure greater flexibility on the one hand and tighter financial control on the other. Smooth flow of funds, greater flexibility, genuine decentralisation and appointment of committed people (not just experienced people) makes a difference. They also say that as long as mainstream systems remain rigid, the government cannot but create autonomous structures. Bypassing the main artery becomes a necessity when it is clogged, atrophied or fossilised.

How does this structure interact with the mainstream? Experiences of different state level structures reveal a disturbingly mixed picture. While innovation, flexibility and responsiveness are hailed as the hallmark of these structures, they essentially remain outside the mainstream. For example Mahila Samakhya Societies (Implementing Dutch assisted women's empowerment programmes) in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have been able to reach out to poor rural women and involve them in empowering educational processes. The interaction of these

structures with the mainline education department however, is minimal despite the Education Secretary of the State being the Chairman of the Society. They consequently remain islands of sorts. Similarly, the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi (both formerly Swedish assisted programmes) projects with their emphasis on instituting a process oriented structure of functioning have managed to reach out to their target population – the very poor.

Autonomous bodies have been able to create a different work culture. Monitoring mechanisms are tight; officials working in these projects admit that accountability to the donor makes a difference. Liberal provisions for travel and other allowances go a long way in motivating workers. The flip side is that there is simultaneously greater scope for "misuse" of flexible procedures – especially in appointing support organisations, sub-contracting project related work, hiring consultants, authorising foreign travel and so on. There have been cases where main line administrators create financial and other bottlenecks when they feel that the "goodies" are not shared or believe that proper procedures are not being followed. Interestingly, the Shiksha Karmi Board is integrated with the mainline education department of the State. This cannot be claimed for the Lok Jumbish Project which has recently been at the center of political and administrative controversy.

What makes Shiksha Karmi unique? Officials argue that the SKP was always positioned as a low key project that was not competing with the mainstream but was aimed at addressing problems that could not be tackled in the formal school system. It was never seen as an alternative to the formal stream, but one that compliments the formal school system. Most importantly, a significant number of officials, educationists, teachers (including the teachers union of Rajasthan) and NGOs identified with the project. This wide base of involvement permitted the project to overcome a 'normal' shortcoming marking special schemes – that of being seen as 'captive' to specific individuals or a group. And lastly, the working style, expenditure pattern and facilities compared with the mainstream – it was never seen as a well-endowed project that was flushed with funds. In a resource deficit state like Rajasthan, this image of austerity and simplicity went a long way in creating a positive public image.

Training:

Central to the successful operationalising of the SK project and process is the system of intensive training and concurrent evaluation. The designing of a variety of training modules, not just for project functionaries but also for the VECs – all of which are contextual and need based – forms the core of the project. The 41/50 day induction training are residential and participatory in nature. Rejection of the conventional didactic training method (that is still used in the formal school system) marked a major departure. Training is based on discussions, self-learning, co-learning through exercises and a range of activities including songs, role-play, practice teaching etc. The training modules have been developed and revised over the years. The induction training is followed by two thirty days training programmes in the first two years, a 20 day training after 2 years and a 10 day training programme every year. In addition the Shiksha Karmis also participate in a 2-day monthly review, planning and difficulty removal meeting. *The training system is one of the strengths of the project; it is also an important area of concern.*

Monitoring:

The Shiksha Karmi Project was probably the first significant attempt at involving research bodies, not as external evaluators but as co-participants, in an ongoing and concurrent process for course correction and problem solving. The Institute of Development Studies and Sandhan were the two main partners. Over the years a number of reputed organisations, experts and NGOs have participated in monitoring and evaluation. While the major responsibility for concurrent evaluation was shouldered by IDS, Jaipur, other organisations were contracted from time to time to conduct research studies and evaluations. They include the Indian Institute of Management of Ahmedabad; Management Services Group of New Delhi, Bodh Shiksha Samiti of Jaipur; Sankalp of Shahbad Baran and Urmul Trust of Bikaner.

NGOs, DIET and DRU functioning as Resource Units

IDS, Jaipur	Concurrent Evaluation, research and documentation.
Sandhan, Jaipur	Selection, training, documentation, research studies, monitoring and field support in 39 Panchayat Samitis and 494 schools.
SIERT, Udaipur	Selection, training, monitoring and field support 23 Panchayat Samitis and 315 schools.
DIET, Jodhpur	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 23 Panchayat Samitis and 436 schools.
Rajasthan Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad, Udaipur	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 11 Panchayat Samitis and 264 schools.
Urmul Trust, Bikaner	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 7 Panchayat Samitis and 264 schools.
Zilla Proudh Shiksha and 220 Samiti, Kota	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 17 Panchayat Samitis schools.
Sankalp, Mamoni Baran	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 2 Panchayat Samitis and 96 schools.
DIET Bharatpur	Selection, training, monitoring and field support in 16 Panchayat Samitis and 277 schools.
Regional Resource Unit, Banswara	Selection and field support in 10 Panchayat Samitis and 34 schools

What is interesting is that the monitoring function is not seen as an isolated activity – it is closely linked to participation in selection of Shiksha Karmis, training, documentation and field support. This enables the monitoring and support agency to tailor the training programme to the needs of the Shiksha Karmis and also follow-through evaluation findings with concrete inputs in training and other field support inputs.

Decentralisation and Community Participation:

Unlike most mainline projects, Shiksha Karmi Project from its inception has insisted on non-hierarchical participation of all actors. A top-down, centralised structure has been jettisoned in favour of a bottom-up, decentralised and concentric structure with

the eventual beneficiaries – the children – at its centre. The setting up of Resource Units, the involvement of NGOs, and the drawing in of elected grassroots representatives has all contributed to a context specific flexibility in the project.

A recent study on "Community Participation in Shiksha Karmi Programme" by IDS, Jaipur in 1999 has identified the Village Education Committee that is attached to every school as the heart of community participation. Apart from ensuring that all children in the 6–14 age group are enrolled in school and complete five years of schooling, the VEC also lends support to the Shiksha Karmi, pitches in survey activities, supports improvement of physical infrastructure, provides space for Prehar Pathshalas and Aangan Pathshalas and monitors the working of the school. SKP vests authority and responsibility in the village level committees. This is a valuable experience for educational planners.

Community ownership:

While all social development projects appeal to community participation, this is most often only as beneficiaries. By involving the village/hamlet community through the VEC from the very inception and as central to the key decision of when and where to set up a day school, PP or AP as also in the selection of the Shiksha Karmis, the project has been able to generate a high order of community validation. Studies show that many VECs meet fairly regularly and enthusiastically.

Easy pace:

Most projects promise dramatic breakthroughs in a short time. The Shiksha Karmi Project has tried to steer clear of targets (though they do seem necessary for planning and monitoring purposes), preferring to accord them indicative rather than decisive status. This has permitted the project to adopt a pace of expansion and innovation suitable to the environment. Incidentally, the planning document for the Third Phase (with DFID support) may be departing from the practice as evidenced in the very ambitious targets proposed for coverage and expansion.

New language and culture:

Nothing however marks the SK as different as much as its attempt at evolving a new language and culture of social/educational intervention. The very notion of a SK or a Sahyogi (helper) and the emphasis, both in selection and training, on a positive attitude towards children, excitement about the chance to learn and teach, and a high energy level, have contributed to an above normal motivation level at all levels of the project. The insistence on participation, loosening hierarchies, developing social class and gender sensitivity, seeking collaboration and consensus, contextual pacing – has led to high identification and pride in the project, what one may call self-esteem. Equally important is the mix of autonomy and linkage, restraint in terms of claims, focus on demonstrable results and efforts at consolidation before diversification and expansion.

Overall, the Shiksha Karmi Project can be seen as a strategy of non-formalising a formal, hierarchic delivery oriented system of education, evolved and run in collaborative partnership with a variety of actors. It has attempted to revive the joy in a teaching – learning process and contributed to enhancing the otherwise low self-esteem of individuals involved in educational ventures. More than an inexpensive and

creative way of delivering education, the Shiksha Karmi Project – as did some other efforts earlier – has managed to dispel the myth of excluded individuals and communities as mere apathetic recipients.

Section IV

Areas of Concern:

Notwithstanding the widespread acclamation and affirmation received by the Shiksha Karmi Project, in particular about its training methodology and the undoubted breakthrough in involving communities seen and classified as weaker/socially backward, the project appears marked by some serious constraints – both internal (conceptual/methodological) and external.

Parateacher programmes challenge the conventional wisdom that the more educated the teacher, the better the learning outcome. However, experimentation with alternative forms of education invariably raise concerns about quality, parity with the formal educational sector and thereby, difficulties of mainstreaming. There is fear about equity issues in relation to regular and parateachers, about institutionalising a dual system of education, and whether the poorest and the most disadvantaged are being fobbed off with the second best.

Without discounting these fears and concerns, it does need to be acknowledged that in the absence of the Shiksha Karmi Project, a little over 200,000 students may have remained deprived of any schooling whatsoever. After all, the project does focus on the hitherto unreached. It is also evident that enrolment, attendance and retention rates have steadily improved – comparable to the formal schools. This is noteworthy because many of the students come from communities and areas with low access to and involvement with education.

This apart, all evaluations, despite a highly positive rating of the project, point to deficiencies in both training and curricula. Though the students from both day schools and Prehar Pathshalas have done well and are increasingly gaining admission into regular schools – they remain weak in both mathematics and language. The latter is specifically attributed to the project's insistence on using Hindi as the medium of instruction rather than the locally prevalent dialect, a reflection of the prevailing dominant view of national integration. It is believed that communities speaking different dialects of Hindi have consciously opted for education in the language of the mainstream. Similarly, tribal groups have also expressed preference for primary education in Hindi. However, at the primary stage, the curriculum could be transacted in the local dialect in order to make it more accessible to children. The issue of textbooks – content/language – remains a deeply contentious question. Caught between the conflicting demand of local identification and regional/national cultural homogenisation, innovative texts can be and are easily dismissed as subversive. There is equally a managerial and organisational question related to both the difficulties associated with preparing customised texts and ensuring equivalence – particularly since a prime objective is ensuring mainstreaming. This issue has not been addressed systematically; as a result (evaluations/reviews have observed) course material is marked by inappropriate language and lack of regional specificity.

Even with respect to its various training modules, the project is facing the problem of declining enthusiasm in on-the-job concurrent training i.e. once the Shiksha Karmis have been working for a few years they do not seem to find the training as useful. Possibly this is because of a greater emphasis on general values and orientation rather than developing core competencies in different subjects.

Both the above issues are closely related to the problems of staffing – not just career advancement paths or materiality or positive inducements (travel tours, study/examination leave, awards) – but the quality of staffing at different levels. Doubts, for instance, have been raised about the quality of the subject specialists in the Resource Units as also the Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis. The major problem, however, remains one of eventual parity with and absorption into the system of formal government school-teachers. True that the presence of many inducement schemes, the setting up of a grievance redressal and discussion forum in the shape of the Vichar Manch have so far kept these negative/disruptive tendencies in check (viz. the veritable absence of court cases), yet the tension remains.

Similar problems afflict the management and review structure. Evaluators and donors are constantly in the search for hard research data. The task of generating data in ever more complex formats falls to the lot of the Shiksha Karmis. And this can lead to an overload. The very process of constant meetings, reviews, training and concurrent evaluation – even when geared towards a participatory, non-hierarchic and non-judgemental culture – leads to time spent away from joyful, capacity-enhancing activities.

These general issues become highlighted in the context of social and gender inequity and stereotyping. Successive evaluations and bilateral reviews have expressed concern about lack of a gender perspective among SKP functionaries. Given that an overwhelming proportion of children who are not in school are girls, the project could have made girls participation the top most priority. While workers and collaborating organisations are keenly aware of the gender gap in educational access and continued participation, the project does not have a clearly articulated strategy to encourage the participation of women and girls. This is not to say that nothing has been done – the creation of Mahila Prashikshan Kendra and the appointment of Mahila Sahyogi are indeed noteworthy. Given that women from backward communities and remote areas have been left out of educational processes, most of the women workers are drawn from relatively higher castes and forward communities. Even their numbers are also quite modest. In view of the fact that many of them come from the better-off strata, it will be difficult to increase participation of girls from the weaker sections as also increase the presence of women from these strata in the VEC. This remains a very important area of concern in the project.

A special problem arises from the centrality accorded to NGOs in the programme. For a start, there is a paucity of quality NGOs in the state. Many of them are small and ill equipped to take on larger organisational or specialised tasks. This problem has already affected the pace of decentralisation. Second, NGOs with a proven track record are today over-subscribed, what with every new scheme (and not just educational) seeking active NGO participation. We may soon be faced with a problem of too many schemes chasing too few NGOs. Finally is the problem of NGO culture – resistance to external accountability and a high degree of transience in personnel.

The above issues of autonomy and linkage are likely to get exacerbated in relation to both the DPEP and Lok Jumbish projects and the consolidation of Panchayat Raj institutions. So far, the Shiksha Karmi Project and Lok Jumbish have enjoyed a healthy partnership, partly because the founding fathers/mothers and key actors were common. Lok Jumbish, with the withdrawal of Sida support, now faces an element of uncertainty. The DPEP was for long seen as a competing vision. It has now been introduced in 19 districts of the state. Even though, DPEP proposes to use the Shiksha Karmi Project training model, doubts remain as to the viability of this marriage.

Alongside the currently unspecified but likely to grow role of Panchayat Raj institutions in the state, it remains to be seen how well the Shiksha Karmi Project management structure copes with the new demands.

The project proposal for Phase 3 of the Shiksha Karmi Project (DFID support) carried out a risk analysis for the project. The main results were as follows:

- Shiksha Karmi Project management and leadership is strong/durable enough to ensure the continuing quality of the programme.
- Quality with respect to community involvement, teacher effectiveness and coverage, particularly in tribal and desert districts will however be negatively affected by expansion.
- More serious is the project's ability to meet its gender equity targets.
- The plan to merge the Department of Education with Panchayat Raj and coordinate between DPEP and Lok Jumbish is likely to create confusion about roles and procedures.
- The high budget deficit faced by the state may affect the sustainability of the Shiksha Karmi Project.

Overall then, looking at the issues internal to the project, given its reliance on high levels of motivation and excitement marking different participants, a feeling grows that the project may suffer due to an overloading of expectations. More so, when proposals for expansion are considered.

Many of the above issues have consciously been addressed by the project, albeit to varying levels of satisfaction. The larger environmental concern arises because of questions regarding the commitment and ability of the state government to sustain the project – particularly given the serious fiscal crisis. As of now, the state government seems committed to an expansion of primary education, and the Shiksha Karmi Project is afforded pride of place. Yet, the reliance on external donors will continue, possibly enhance. Even though the Shiksha Karmi Project is more human rather than finance intensive, ensuring external inputs does cost money.

One could, of course, argue that since the model is community centric, as long as communities continue to value the programme they will simultaneously generate and demand resources and support for it. This remains the challenge.

Concluding Observations:

Overall, from the viewpoint of Sida, involvement with the Shiksha Karmi Project has resulted in a worthwhile partnership. The project is widely recognised as cost effective and not a temporary solution or a second-best programme. The state government remains formally committed to Shiksha Karmi as a key resource institution for revitalising primary education in remote areas of Rajasthan. Not only has the Shiksha Karmi Project developed into a meticulous, pedagogically sound and comprehensive parateacher programme, it has forged strong links with the mainstream, providing training to around 85,000 regular teachers. The project thus not only demonstrates creative routes of adding to the educational resources of the state; it has the potential of positively influencing the mainstream. Further the project has high outreach potential as a model for education in other regions, particularly remote desert areas and tribal areas.

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