



School Management for Quality Inclusive Education and Decentralised School Governance



**School Management
for Quality Inclusive Education and
Decentralised School Governance**

This study was funded by the European Union

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Preface

A Technical Cooperation Fund (TCF) has been set up as a joint collaboration between Ministry of Human Resource Development and European Union in 2010 entitled '*Exchange of International Best Practices in Education-Actions in India and Overseas*' leading to innovation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The project focuses on three central strands - Teacher Cadre Management and Performance Assessment; School Management and Leadership and Inclusive Education for Quality Improvement in SSA. The National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) was designated as the key nodal institution to ensure the effective utilisation of TCF for capacity development of national and state level administrators on the exposure to international and national best practices to improve school education. Save the Children was appointed as the Technical Support Agency (TSA) to implement the project.

The research study entitled "School Management for Quality Inclusive Education and Decentralised School Governance" was conducted by ERU Consultants Pvt. Ltd. under the leadership of the National Steering Committee constituted to provide guidance and monitor the TCF. I place my special thanks to Prof. Pranati Panda, Member Secretary and other members of the National Steering Committee for extending academic support and guidance for this project. Researchers of ERU deserve special thanks for undertaking this study and preparing the report. I also thank Dr. Renu Singh and others from Save the Children, New Delhi for facilitating the conduct of the study.

The study shares very critical perspectives on absence or marginal practices of decentralised school governance for quality inclusive education at elementary level. It calls for multipronged strategies to institutionalise inclusive practices as core to school education reform process. I hope that many state level policy makers, academics and professionals will find this study very useful.

Prof. R.Govinda
Vice Chancellor, NUEPA



Acknowledgements

School management is central to the successful realisation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, an initiative towards ensuring quality inclusive education under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in India. The present study was thus conducted to analyse and document the best practices in School Management for Quality Inclusive Education and Decentralised School Governance to support and feed into achieving the goal of SSA.

The successful completion of this study was possible with the financial support of European Union (EU). I would like to express my gratitude to EU for extending support to make this study a reality.

I am grateful to Prof. R. Govinda, Chairperson, and other members of the National Steering Committee for their valuable suggestions and inputs and for facilitating the successful completion of this research. I express my gratitude to Vimala Ramachandran and her colleagues at ERU for successfully conducting the study and Ms Annie Namala for her insightful comments and inputs. I am also grateful to A. K. Das who gave the initial headstart to this project. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Renu Singh, Senior Advisor, Save the Children for her overall technical guidance and Dr. Alex George and Saheed, Research Officer, Education, Save the Children, for coordinating the research. I thank Antony N. J. Project Director, Save the Children for coordinating the successful completion of the study. I also thank Shireen Vakhil Miller, Director, Advocacy, Media and Communications, and all my colleagues from Save the Children who extended their support to this study at different stages.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank NUEPA (National University for Education Planning and Administration) for taking up the publication and dissemination of the study findings.

I hope that this research on documenting good practices in school management will be a useful guide towards implementation and successful realisation of right based intervention for children to have quality and inclusive learning in schools across India.

Thomas Chandy
Chief Executive Officer
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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by Save the Children and Department of School Education and Literacy, MHRD, Government of India, with the specific objectives of mapping and synthesising research on policies concerned with school management with particular reference to quality inclusive education and decentralised school governance. While the literature survey covered all the states, the field visit (for best practices and key informant interviews) was done in eight states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Nagaland, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu¹). The study comprised of three components: (a) literature survey (b) key informant interviews and (c) documentation of good practices identified by the government.

The literature review found a wealth of published and unpublished studies on gender, inclusive education, the education of special focus groups (SC, ST and minorities), but there *was very little that linked them to decentralised school governance*. The overarching finding was that while some elements of inclusiveness or quality improvement or community participation or decentralised planning were evident—there was no substantive evidence of linkages between different levels/layers of decentralisation and how it facilitates quality inclusive education, or ‘best practice’ that demonstrated decentralised school management resulting in quality inclusive education. However, wherever there was a dynamic and highly motivated head master, the community involved and engaged and the overall school environment was positive and the school was managed well.

While school level committees have been created in almost all the states, (legally constituted, selected, nominated), they are known by different names—Village Education Committee (VEC in

MP), School Management Committees (SMC in AP), School Development and Management Committee (SDMC in Karnataka), Parent-Teacher association (PTA in many states), Academic Monitoring Committee (AMC in Kerala), Mother-Teacher Associations (MTA in many states) etc. Their role in school management has not been spelt out in SSA. However the RTE act does include school level planning. They are involved mainly in supervision of civil works, mid-day meals, monitoring enrolment and attendance of children, mobilising resources for school supplies and furniture and in one state (Nagaland) they also monitor the attendance and regularity of teachers. The scenario improves considerably when civil society organisations, corporate CSR bodies and special government programmes/projects like Mahila Samakhya, NGO projects like PESLE, Learning Guarantee Programme in Karnataka (2003-08), Hunar and Utthan in Bihar, Namma Shale (APF + SSA) and ICD in Karnataka and post earthquake reconstruction in Gujarat, mobilise the community.

The literature surveyed and case studies both reveal that the clarification of roles and responsibilities remains one of the weakest areas. This may be because of several factors: (a) lack of clarity about the extent of devolution of powers and responsibilities to school or village level committees and what they can do in different spheres of the school, (b) inadequate orientation and training of community level committees, headmasters/head teachers, and (c) systemic factors such as lack of opportunity for planning and priority setting at the school level. Even when schools do plan,

¹While the work of Aman Biradari in Delhi was included in the initial short-list, this was dropped from the final version.

they are not always fed into the activity plan approved for funding, known as Annual Work Plan and Budget (AW&B under SSA). While SSA spells out the importance of micro planning at the school level in forming the basis of district plans, the practice on the ground is different. District plans are made using approved templates and norms and the specific needs of each school are not collated and consolidated.

The case studies reinforce and reiterate the findings of the literature survey. *The case studies cannot be called 'best practices'—while all of them have some elements that are worth emulating, the decentralised school governance for quality inclusive education does not exist in practice or even in the minds of educational administrators.*

The Headmaster/Head Teacher are the key to a well-managed school. Even where the overall state framework does not provide for decentralisation, a motivated and highly committed head of the school can and does make a big difference. A combination of a good HM and a team of good teachers is the ultimate formula of a well-managed, sensitive and engaged school. The impact of a good leader could be the following:

- Teachers are regular and they teach
- Children are regular and drop rates come down
- Mid-day meal is prepared and served with care
- Community is involved and is mobilised to support the school. VEC and other school committees are active in managing school infrastructure
- CRC/BRC support is harnessed by a proactive HM/HT
- There is a sense of pride and ownership of the school amongst community members
- Additional resources in kind and cash are mobilised.

A highly motivated headmaster or headmistress can involve the community, access resources, energise the school and encourage teachers to do their best. He/she can create a vibrant learning environment, reach out to and harness the support

of cluster and block level structures like the BRC and CRC. Such a person can turn the school into a hub for learning, a centre for inclusive education and a place where the children and their families feel confident to come or reach out to. Project driven strategies could also facilitate school level or cluster level efforts to ensure inclusion of the most deprived. Convergence of a well-designed programme (KGBV), a motivated district office, interested implementation partners (NGO or Mahila Samakhya) can help create a well-managed residential school for girls. Partnership with a local industry or NGO can help reach out to children from very poor families and provide necessary support for learning. Providing a mechanism for the coming together of the community, the school, the administration and external resources (NGO, CSR body) can lead to a sense of joint ownership of the school (Namma Shale). A community project (for example, Uthan) can reach out to socially deprived children and connect them to the school. However, the response of the school depends on the sensitivity of teachers to extremely deprived children and the individual motivation of the head master/head mistress.

Role of communities in providing infrastructure and more recently in managing and funding schools was formally introduced under DPEP and formalised under SSA. Decentralised management and supervision of civil works and maintenance is reported as one of the important activities of school based committees. In some states, they also help identify/recruit local teachers in order to augment teaching resources. Various reports (audit as well as official SSA reports) suggest that the SDMC/VEC do not have a say in the design and allocation of resources meant for infrastructure development. At best, they monitor and supervise what is already allocated and in many cases designed. The Panchayat can mobilise and channel resources to the school like providing newspapers and books (Bihar, Gujarat), provide incentives (Tamil Nadu), ensure hygienic environment and sumptuous mid-day-meal (supplement with fish, eggs etc. in MP, Kerala). An engaged committee or Panchayat can



not only ensure enrolment of all children but also make sure children and teachers attend regularly (Nagaland).

Another overarching finding from case studies done in this project was that the VEC/MPTA, PTA and PRI are not involved in academic monitoring nor provide academic support. This holds true for all the states reviewed in this study.

Exploration of support from the cluster, block and district levels to improve quality of inclusive education revealed that academic support from these centres was uneven. Equally, these structures have not worked to improve decentralised school governance and they perceived their role as “supervisors”. The study also revealed that education was becoming more centralised with school related academic decisions taken at block, district or state level. Curriculum design, selection of textbooks, selection of pedagogies and evaluation of students were top-down and do not create opportunities or the space for need-based planning at the school level (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Gujarat, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, etc).

Decentralised community mobilisation efforts have improved enrolment but this cannot be said for inclusion of the most deprived communities or social groups. In particular, the multidimensional needs of CWSN still need to be addressed in SSA. While a lot has been done in highlighting the importance of inclusive education for CWSN, these ideas are yet to be translated into concrete strategies and activities on the ground. For example, while construction of ramps has been accorded importance (schools visited in all the states cited the existence of a ramp as a major achievement towards integration of CWSN), the needs of children with other kinds of disabilities have not received the same attention. Teachers in schools are neither fully equipped nor trained in dealing with varied types of CWSN. Additionally, the role of resource teachers for CWSN needs elaboration and clarification.

The pro-active involvement of community members was important and could inspire head masters and head teachers. Equally a highly motivated head master could actively involve the community. This is a two-way process. In some states (notably Kerala) an active Panchayat could energise both the VEC as well as the head master. The literature points to the need for synergy between all three—head master (the school as an institution), the VEC or SDMC (parents and community) and the Panchayat (local self governance institutions). Where the three came together then school governance improved.

Efforts made by state governments to introduce periodic assessment of learning outcomes are noteworthy. This may however need to be revisited in the light of the Right to Education. There are several studies that show that greater involvement of parents in the school and closer school-parent linkages could help enhance quality and thereby improve learning outcomes. The learning from innovative programmes of the government has not informed the SSA programme on the ground. As a result, key stakeholders at all levels do not prioritise quality inclusive education as a desired outcome of decentralised school governance. Quality continues to be viewed as a technical area that merits top down guidance and norms.

There are a number of state level innovative programmes run by NGOs in collaboration with SSA or by corporate CSR with SSA. A number of innovative approaches find mention in reports focusing on the inclusion of the most deprived. However, almost all the joint review mission (SSA) reports point out the need to examine and clarify as to what extent these strategies have fostered decentralised school level management and planning.

The research reviewed state policies of eight states. There are huge variations in terms of implementation. On one hand there is Nagaland where a communal school structure has resulted in effective supervision and mobilisation of

community funds, monitoring teacher attendance, financial and administrative monitoring (except academic supervision). And there is Kerala with the Panchayat having a major say in the school functioning. This is in contrast to Bihar where the VSSs are yet to be elected and their role in school management still to be identified and acknowledged or Tamil Nadu where decentralisation as a conscious strategy is yet to be addressed.

Despite the limitations of the study a few insights on the issue of quality inclusive education and decentralised school governance emerged. From the best practices documented it is apparent that though decentralisation has been recommended time and again, the hard fact is that the space for

genuine decentralisation and people's participation is intimately related to administrative and political practices in the states. Equally, making the schools functionally autonomous with a leader in-charge is also related to the larger administrative and political environment. Where the formal system promotes centralisation, the informal sub-system exacerbates it—thereby sidelining the headmaster and community-based institutions. Similarly, where the formal system delegates powers to the head master, it could be undermined by an informal system that makes sure the head master has little authority over the teachers or any other critical input like granting leave, ensuring attendance, ensuring adequate teaching time and of course teacher training.



Introduction and Methodology

This study, jointly commissioned by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (MHRD, Government of India) and Save the Children, was expected to analyse and document good practices, success stories and effective systems relating to school management with specific emphasis on quality inclusive education and decentralised school governance. The specific objectives of the assignment were to (a) analyse existing practices with specific reference to leadership and inclusive teaching learning processes to combat exclusion in schools, (b) to map and synthesise research on policies concerned with school management with particular reference to quality inclusive education and decentralisation, and (c) analyse and document innovative good practices that illustrate ways in which decentralised planning and governance facilitate inclusive education of disadvantaged groups of children as well as the good practices in providing quality inclusive education achieved through decentralisation.

The study was expected to review published and unpublished literature (since the commencement of SSA) accessed from the Technical Support Group of SSA, NUEPA and publications available in the public domain. The study has three components: a literature survey, key informant interviews in eight states, and documentation of good practices identified by the government. Given the broad scope of the issue, the contours of what this study should include were decided in a meeting chaired by Additional Secretary Ms. Anita Kaul and attended by Ms. Neelam Shami Rao (Director, SSA), Dr. Renu Singh of Save the Children and the ERU research team on 20th October 2010.

Reviewing the experience of the government under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, senior officials clarified that while there has been considerable interest

in decentralisation, quality of education and inclusion issues, the coming together of all the elements under the rubric of “school management” was relatively uncommon. However, in view of the Right to Education (RTE), the government would like to collate existing policies and practices of decentralised school management for quality inclusive education as well as decentralisation as an administrative mechanism to encourage and promote quality inclusive education.

It was suggested that the researchers review SSA literature (covering all the states, as far as possible where information or documentation is available) available with the Technical Support Group (TSG) and in national institutions such as NUEPA and NCERT. In addition, it was suggested that ERU review literature available in the public domain through the Internet and educational publications. During the very first meeting with GOI and SCF it was clarified that based on the experience of SSA all the states and union territories may not have good practices related to quality, inclusiveness and decentralised school management. Therefore GI specifically asked the team to review available literature with national institutions (TSG, NUEPA and NCERT) and limit the in-depth study to eight states. In addition the study also covered Delhi; however the research team was asked to exclude Delhi from the final report as no good practices were available in government schools.

Reviewing the experience of SSA, the government suggested the following states for an in-depth study through key informant interviews and field visits. The officials of the government drew upon their knowledge and available documentation to select states that have promoted decentralisation, have reached out to the most marginalised/

Concepts as defined for the study

What do we mean by inclusion?

According to the Constitution of India and time-to-time government policy directives, children belonging to SC, ST, OBC and minorities are identified as needing special efforts to ensure they are not excluded from education opportunities. In the last fifteen years the government has also highlighted the need to include CWSN (children with physical and medical challenges). Inclusion is not just enrolment in school but making available appropriate educational support, material and an inclusive environment whereby they do not experience any discrimination. The Right to Education (2010) has underscored this.

Therefore we are specifically looking for inclusion of the following:

- Out of school children (girls and boys)–either dropped out or pushed out in the 6-14 age group.
- Children from nomadic groups, minorities, tribal, scheduled caste, OBC, those living in remote areas, urban street children, migrants and children with special needs–girls and boys
- Given the gender relations in India, girls in any social group or area who need special attention

What do we mean by quality?

- Teachers present and teaching
- Teaching-learning happening in the school/ classes
- Teaching learning material available with teachers and students

- Children learning, learning outcomes monitored and tracked
- Adequate infrastructure–play grounds, classrooms, boundary wall, drinking water, toilets etc. as per RTE norms
- Accessing local talent to augment educational resources, sports and games and extracurricular activities
- Availability of trained teachers for CWSN
- Community involved and responsive through VEC, SDMC etc.

What do we mean by school management?

- Headmaster appointed, present, has been trained and capable of managing the school
- Headmaster providing leadership in the school by managing the following: (a) teachers (b) committees like VEC/SDMC, MDM, (c) ensuring availability of quality inputs (d) supply of textbooks and incentives (where applicable)
- Accessing funds meant for the school (from SSA) and managing it with support from VEC/SDMC and mobilising additional resources from community/Panchayat
- Development and maintenance of school infrastructure
- Coordinating with block and cluster level to identify and depute teachers for training

Source: Meeting held on 20 October 2010 with MHRD and SCF in New Delhi.

deprived through social/educational inclusion programmes for socially disadvantaged and children with special needs (CWSN); and states that have made an effort to improve the quality of education at the school level by empowering headmasters and teachers. *During the discussion it emerged that we may not find all three aspects in the same state or same school and that we may have to pick elements of good practices from each case study.*

1. **Andhra Pradesh:** For well managed and decentralised KGBV programme and decentralised quality improvement efforts. A good practice in decentralisation and quality education.
2. **Bihar:** For introducing focused programmes for Maha Dalit (Musahar) community and ensuring participation of the most marginalised social group in elementary education. A good practice in inclusion.

3. **Gujarat:** For empowering headmasters and introducing decentralised management of school. A good practice in decentralisation.
4. **Karnataka:** For a holistic approach to school development and building capabilities of SDMCs, teachers and resource agencies
5. **Kerala:** Where the Panchayat and local bodies are engaged in village level planning. A good practice in decentralised school management.
6. **Madhya Pradesh:** For Jana Shiksha Adhiniyam and the legacy of EGS programme that has empowered local bodies to take more active interest in education. Good practice in decentralisation.
7. **Nagaland:** For the *communitisation* programme that has effectively devolved financial and administrative powers to the village council and the VEC. Good practice in decentralisation.
8. **Tamil Nadu:** For introducing the Activity Based Learning Programme that has revitalised and re-energised the school system and introduced child centred pedagogy. Good practice in quality inclusive education.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of the review of secondary literature has been that most of the reports focused independently on inclusive education, quality, decentralisation, VEC, School Management Committee (SMC), School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC), community participation, or Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti (VSS) –there is almost no material that looks at them together. Equally (as also pointed out by Dr. R. Govinda 2002), there is not much published work on decentralised school management, and even less that links it to inclusive education and quality improvement. Equally, while there is a wealth of published and unpublished studies on gender, inclusive education, the education of special focus

groups (SC, ST and minorities)–again, there is very little that links them to decentralised school governance.

The issue of quality of education has been central to the education debate in India for over a decade. Since the launching of DPEP in 1993 and SSA in 2003, the government, donor agencies and independent entities have commissioned studies on classroom processes, learning assessment surveys, teacher training, curriculum development, textbook reviews and evaluation of education quality. However, the quality issue has not been woven into the decentralised governance debate.

The idea was to select best practices where they existed–unfortunately the best practices identified by the state governments did not include social welfare/tribal welfare managed schools or government supported madrasas. The state governments selected the schools from those directly managed by the education department.

Therefore the challenge we faced was that while issues of quality, inclusiveness, community participation and decentralisation have all been studied independently, there was little evidence on these being linked to school governance.

We faced a similar challenge during field visits. The respective state governments identified the “best practices” and this was done after the objectives of this study were shared with the Directorate of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). We encountered a similar problem–some elements of inclusiveness or quality improvement or community participation or decentralised planning were evident–but we did not find any one “best practice” that demonstrated decentralised school management that resulted in quality inclusive education. However, there were examples of schools managed well, wherever there was a dynamic and highly motivated headmaster, the community was involved and engaged and the overall school environment was positive.

How state governments identified good practices for documentation

Andhra Pradesh:	SPD assigned the task of selection of a good practice school to the state gender coordinator, who in turn consulted GCDO and DEO and selected the KGBV and schools. The criteria used were: <i>“infrastructure, strength, facilities, community participation, active Special Officer and staff, and better performing students for the study.”</i> (Government of AP, SSA dated 6 Jan 2011).		
Bihar:	Bihar Education Project officials picked schools that had 100 percent enrolment, dedicated HM and where ramps and toilets were in place for CWSN children.		
Gujarat:	Selection made by SPD SSA and the consultants in charge of quality initiatives and gender-best representing the issues the study intended to examine.		
Karnataka:	SPD studied the MHRD letter and criteria and selected 2 schools, one that is part of the Namma		Shale programme and the other ICD (Institutional Capacity building). However as the ICD was very new both the schools selected were from Namma Shale.
		Kerala:	SPD called all core SSA staff and discussed the criteria spelt out in MRHD, GOI letter and then selected the 2 schools.
		Madhya Pradesh:	MHRD sent a letter to SPD SSA, who in turn sent it to Director, SIEMAT, who selected 3-4 districts. A short list of schools that conform to good enrolment, integration of CWSN and high levels of community involvement was done before final selection.
		Nagaland:	Selection done after team reached Nagaland, most accessible schools that have been documented before.
		Tamil Nadu:	SPD delegated this to a senior state consultant who consulted with the Chennai Municipal Corporation and picked 2 “awarded” schools—for learning and inclusive education.



What did the Survey of Literature Reveal?²

The overarching finding of the literature survey is that there is no substantive analysis of the linkages between different levels/layers of decentralisation and how it facilitates quality inclusive education at the school level. While many important dimensions of decentralised management are referred to in the studies and reports—they are not always linked to quality education, inclusion or to equity issues.

The larger political and administrative environment influences the scope and extent of decentralisation in educational management. The literature reveals that school level committees have been created in almost all the states. They are known by different names—Village Education Committee (VEC), School Management Committees (SMC), School Development and Management Committee (SDMC), Parents-Teachers Association (PTA), Academic Monitoring Committee (AMC), Mother-Teacher Associations (MTA), etc.

They are legally constituted, however in most states members are nominated or “selected”—meaning that the headmaster selects them. In some states like Bihar there is a proposal to link it to Panchayat Elections (Bihar’s Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti). In Nagaland they are legally constituted and part of the larger state government’s decision to strengthen the village councils. The 2009-10 NUEPA study on VECs reveal that the constitution of the committee differs across the states. In almost all the states they are “selected” or “nominated” and in some states the parents are selected and the rest of the members are nominated. The study also reveals that their role in school management is not as envisaged in SSA or more recently in RTE. They are mainly involved in supervision for civil works, mid-day meal, monitoring enrolment and attendance of children, mobilise resources

for school supplies and furniture and in one state (Nagaland) they also monitor the teachers. Field level evidence shows that a full meeting of the VEC is rare and normally two or three members meet and take decisions. In some states, the members were not aware of their roles and responsibilities. (A Singh, NUEPA, 2011).

Other field based case studies point out that the scenario improves considerably when civil society organisations, corporate CSR bodies and special government programmes/projects like Mahila Samakhya, NGO projects like PESLE, Learning Guarantee Programme in Karnataka (2003-08), Hunar and Utthan in Bihar, Namma Shale (APF + SSA) and ICD in Karnataka and post-earthquake reconstruction in Gujarat mobilise the community.

Role definition remains one of the weakest areas—according to most research studies and case studies, the orientation/training regime remains weak and there is little clarity on the ground about their responsibilities, their powers and what it is they can do in different spheres of the school. Their role in civil works and enrolment drives has got greater visibility than other roles they are expected to perform. Almost all studies show that their role in ensuring regular attendance of teachers or to ensure teaching learning takes place is still quite limited. With the exception of Nagaland, the school or village committees have no jurisdiction over teachers.

Role of communities in providing infrastructure and more recently in managing and funding

²This is a summary of the main findings. A detailed section on the findings of the literature survey, with bibliography of reports and case studies is given in part 2 of this report.

The Indian scene at the grassroots level presents too varied a picture to draw a generalised view of the context... while some states have gone a long way in transferring not only powers, but also a substantial proportion of state funds to Panchayati Raj bodies, some others have chosen to keep considerable control in the hands of the bureaucracy at the decentralised levels. Some states have gone for the establishment of quasi-legal bodies such as VECs and SMCs to oversee governance of education at the local levels, whereas several other states have yet to move towards such decentralised management structures. In some cases, not much progress has been made beyond galvanising PTAs to take greater interest and participate in school-related activities. Each of these models also implies varying perceptions of the policy makers and planners regarding the value of decentralisation and local governance. Designing capacity-building activities to suit such varying contexts presents a big challenge.

Govinda and Dewan, NUEPA 2003

schools has been around for over 60 years in some states. This was formally introduced under DPEP and formalised under SSA. Decentralised management and supervision of civil works and maintenance is reported as one of the important activities of school based committees. In addition, the committees (school level, village level or Panchayat level) manage mid-day meals (MDM), manage the school grant and mobilise additional resources. In some states, they also help identify/recruit local teachers in order to augment teaching resources in the school. In many states they also take responsibility for improving the overall school environment and could also mobilise additional funds from the local government to build the boundary wall or level the playground. Where the total sanitation programme is being implemented by the government, school toilets and drinking water is provided through the total sanitation programme

(notably Uttar Pradesh). Various reports (audit as well as official SSA reports) suggest that the SDMC/VEC do not have a say in the design and allocation of resources meant for infrastructure development, i.e., school building, toilets, playground, kitchen for mid-day meal, boundary wall, ramps, etc. At best, they monitor and supervise what is already allocated and in many cases designed (some states have standardised building plans). However, some schools in many states have been able to mobilise additional resources from the community or the district administration/Municipal Corporation to augment infrastructure or to ensure proper maintenance.

An important insight is that, even where the committees are actively engaged in monitoring or executing civil works, only one or two members (mostly the chairperson or other influential members alongside the head master or head teacher) of the committee do the supervision.

Enrolment of children has improved as a result of community mobilisation efforts, special enrolment drives and focused programmes for specific groups of children (Badi Baata Andhra Pradesh, inclusion of CWSN children in Chennai Corporation, Prabhat Pheri in Madhya Pradesh). However this is not the case when it comes to academic matters, tracking learning outcomes and monitoring the regular teaching learning process in the schools.

One of the overarching findings from literature and the case studies done in this project is that the VEC/MPTA, PTA and PRI do not have the capability to do academic monitoring or provide academic support. Given that children coming to government schools are the poorest and also given that the poorest are least educated, the parents are not in a position to monitor education. In many states they are barely literate. In Bihar, for example, it may be a bit unfair to expect parents of 'Musahar' children to supervise the teaching learning processes within the classroom. Recognising this limitation the authorities have identified a Tola Sevak from the community who performs this role. Given the

distance and the different perceptions of what the community-based groups are capable of doing—there is sometimes tension between teachers and parents if and when they “interfere” in quality issues.

The prescribed curriculum and related TLM are top-down in nature and do not create opportunities or the administrative space and scope for need-based development of material and need-based planning at the school level. This is also the case in the Tamil Nadu ABL programme where the material is designed and produced centrally. However where there are highly motivated and proactive teachers or HM—as demonstrated in the case studies from Kerala, AP, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and MP—they are able to do some degree of academic planning at the school level and use innovative and creative ways of teaching.

Enrolment and retention rates have improved across the country and SSA documentation reveals that regular enrolment drives and involvement of the community has led to greater number of children coming into the school system. Many JRM reports highlight the efforts made to bring children from most marginalised groups into the school system as a result of which, India has achieved near universal enrolment of children up to the age of 11 years. The study done by the TSG of SSA (Ritwik Patra, 2007) on out of school children documents the mobilisation efforts to ensure the enrolment and participation of special categories of children in MP, Orissa, Andhra, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Assam. Similarly the case studies done in early 2000 and in 2007 (Ramachandran ed. 2003 and Ramachandran and Jandhyala 2007) document a number of innovative approaches to get out-of-school children back to school, reach out to erstwhile child labour and enrol them and more importantly, enable girls in many areas to get back to the formal school system after attending bridge courses. In almost all the studies the mobilisation efforts involved the community, the teachers, local non-governmental groups and the

school system. However all the studies done on inclusion of the most deprived in schooling do not throw light on decentralised school governance, but delves into how children were enrolled.

JRM reports and research studies reveal that inclusion of children in border areas and tribal/forest areas remains weak. Similarly, transition rates from primary to upper primary and secondary show significant dropout rates in case of marginalised sections and minority religions, and there are significant gender differences. Literacy rates among SC, ST and Muslim minority children still lag behind in many states. In brief, decentralised community mobilisation efforts have improved enrolment but this cannot be said for inclusion of the most deprived communities or social groups.

SSA and its predecessor DPEP have accorded priority to gender equality—but like in other areas, gender issues are not linked to decentralised school management efforts. The literature on gender issues and decentralisation is independent and does not draw any linkages, except for enrolment drives and bringing girl children into the school. There are a few exceptions, namely:

- Under the KGBV scheme localised mobilisation has led to greater participation of girls in upper primary schools. The provision of hostels has made a difference to girls living in remote areas. The KGBV scheme has therefore promoted inclusiveness by enrolling girls from below poverty line families, the most backward community, girls with disabilities, and in some areas, girls from minority communities. In Rajasthan, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tripura girls from the backward Sahariya and Dalit communities have benefited from KGBV programmes. The literature points to the particular benefit of girls in tribal areas—namely Tripura, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Because of this aspect of the programme and almost 100 per cent retention, the KGBV scheme is believed to be one of the best government programmes that has promoted inclusion of the most deprived and

also school level planning for bridging courses and enabling girls to complete 8th class.³

- Provision of cycles under the NPEGEL and similar schemes like Chief Ministers Scheme in Bihar, Kerala (for tribal girls and cycle clubs) and Tamil Nadu has also helped in retention of girls beyond the primary stage. The decision to provide cycles is not “local” but its implementation is decentralised because it involves identification of needy girls from remote or inaccessible villages and hamlets.

SSA (and the earlier DPEP) has turned the spotlight on CWSN and children with special needs have been flagged in almost all the monitoring meetings. However, this is again not an integral part of decentralised management—except for building ramps in schools and appointment of a resource person at the block level. Teachers in schools are neither fully equipped nor trained in dealing with CWSN. SSA provides for only two IE resource teachers at the block level to take care of 25-30 schools. They are far too inadequate in number besides they are not fully equipped to provide required medical and health inputs and support. Another important insight that emerged from JRM report is that the community members (VEC and similar bodies) are not trained to identify CWSN and bring them into the formal school system.

The pro-active involvement role of community members could inspire headmasters and head teachers. Equally a highly motivated headmaster could actively involve the community. This is a two-way process. In some states (notably Kerala) an active Panchayat could energise both the VEC as well as the headmaster. The literature points to the need for synergy between all three—headmaster (the school as an institution), the VEC or SDMC and the Panchayat. Where the three come together then school governance improves. This is evident in Karnataka where the Namma Shaale programme (collaboration between SSA Karnataka and Azim Premji Foundation) has been able to forge this synergy.

The seminal study on head teachers in school management done by R. Govinda (2002) in Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, MP, Mizoram and UP points out that head teachers have not been trained for school management. In almost all the states teachers are promoted as head teachers and therefore not equipped to do the job. As a result it is only in those schools where there is an exceptional head teacher who is committed and proactive that good management practices are evident. Again, this study also points to the agency of the individual rather than a systemic process to foster good school management practices.

A study done in Haryana on the teachers’ perception of the role of the head teachers in school improvement revealed that there was no role differentiation and the teachers and the head teacher played all six roles, namely organiser, academician, facilitator of examinations, rapport building with students and rapport building with the community (R Singh 2003). Apart from being the senior most, the teachers did not see the head teacher as having a significantly different role in overall school management.

Headmasters cannot or do not act alone. He/she can become an effective leader when (a) they have the administrative mandate to manage teachers—including ensuring their regularity, granting leave

³Expansion of KGBV across the country is noteworthy; in some states like AP there is an effort to open exclusive KGBV for CWSN children. Therefore this exclusive school defeats the SSA goals of inclusive education and inclusion of CWSN into regular schools. Equally, expansion of KGBV to all backward blocks may pose a challenge—in some areas like West Bengal—girls who are in upper primary are enrolled into KGBV and the scheme does not necessarily reach out to out-of-school girls. The national evaluation done in 2007-08 also points that NGOs running the programme also try and enrol girls into KGBV because residential facilities and education is completely free of cost. The additional problem is that girls who complete class 8 have nowhere to go and they drop out after 8th class—AP is an exception and the state government has extended the program to class 10.

and streamlining additional duties, (b) have a good working relationship with an active Village Education Committee or School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) that is responsive, (c) have the support of the administrative oversight bodies like the Block and Cluster Resource Centres and Block Education Officer, (d) receive funds regularly and all the incentives meant for children are delivered on time and (e) most importantly can ensure teachers get academic support when needed and are able to determine their capacity building needs.

Leadership at the school level is a complex issue—a highly motivated and creative headmaster could do a lot to make sure his/her school is a well integrated institution and that the children are cared for and taught in a nurturing environment. However, such leaders are few and depend a great deal on the individual. In the absence of a supportive environment and required administrative authority, most headmasters say that they are not able to do much.

Many teachers interviewed in a recent study (Ramachandran et al 2008) said that they could at best ensure that teachers are present—but are at a loss in making sure that they teach, or cannot ensure they are not allocated other duties. For example before the passing of RTE, teachers in Rajasthan were given additional work by the district administration and some were even asked to monitor self-help groups. Teachers in West Bengal were preoccupied with political party work. Teachers in many states were absent and found to be engaged in private businesses. Therefore even when teachers were present, teaching time in schools was limited. The headmasters admit that given the informal system of power and patronage, they could do nothing if teachers spent time chatting on their mobile phones. The problem of teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation is rooted in the management ethos of a given state. As Rashmi Sharma points out, “Teacher motivation needs to be seen against the signals that were being given to the teacher through supervision

that had little to do with the teaching-learning process, meagre academic resource support, and in the case of Rajasthan, the threat of transfers.” (Sharma and Ramachandran, 2009)

The literature we surveyed repeatedly pointed to the importance of an active VEC or SDMC. However, where literacy levels are low the parents are not able to play a proactive role in the committees. Therefore the government has highlighted the importance of training and building the capacities of committee members to make significant contribution to overall school management. This has not happened on the ground because the training programmes have not been developed keeping in mind the needs of the community (JRM reports). More importantly, most of the training programmes are one-time efforts (example PTA training in MP) and this does not build on the emerging needs of the committee to manage the school effectively. However, the exception is in Karnataka, where SSA, in collaboration with APF promotes and supports large-scale capacity building programmes of the SDMC members under the Namma Shaale programme.

The JRM reports point out that in many states the BRC/CRC personnel visit schools to conduct administrative duties and functions assigned by seniors. The quality academic support from these centres is uneven. Equally, these structures have not worked to improve decentralised school governance and they perceive their role as “supervisors”. It may be worthwhile stating that in most of the states visited; more than 50% of posts at the block level had not been filled in.

The data that is collected and compiled from the community and the school is sent upstream. This information is not always shared with the community or discussed in SDMC/VEC or used for school level planning. The cluster and block resource centres and education offices are not mandated to use this as a means to improve school governance. School budgets and planning is carried out largely at the district level, and even when

planning at school level is meticulously done, as in Kerala, the recommendations do not always find a place in the documents of SSA.

A number of studies on school management and school governance in Gujarat reinforce the findings of other national studies. One study in four districts revealed that teachers spend a lot of time coordinating with block and district level offices (for example BRC) and attending meetings. As a result their time management is poor and they are not able to devote time to better manage their schools (V. R. Acharya 2007). Another study done in Kutch, Amreli, Kheda and Dang districts revealed that the role of the BRC in quality improvement and fostering better school level teaching learning practices is fairly low. The BRC spends more time in administrative and data collection work and less on academic issues including remedial education (K Kumar and J.K. Gupta 2006). Another multi district study also revealed that education is becoming more centralised with school related academic decisions taken at block, district or state levels. Curriculum design, selection of texts, selection of pedagogies and evaluation of students are also centrally decided. There is an over emphasis on meetings and report preparation and reduction in attention to non-cognitive areas of learning (M. R. Parikh, Patel and Tiwari 2006).

Teacher absenteeism, increasing enrolment of children in private schools and increasing number of private schools have compelled the government to focus on quality aspects of education in the government schools. While this is a significant development in SSA, the state governments do

not view decentralised school governance as a strategy to improve quality of education—they view decentralisation more as tool for enrolment, maintaining school infrastructure, mid-day meal management, etc. The holistic school development plan envisaged under RTE has not yet been implemented on the ground.

In the last seven years assessment of learning of children has been seen as a tool to monitor quality. The Learning Guarantee Programme (a time bound pilot initiated by Azim Premji Foundation in Karnataka in collaboration with SSA) used assessment and sharing the outcomes as a tool to energise the school and focus on learning outcomes. However, once the pilot phase was over and the Karnataka government created the KSQA0 (Karnataka State Quality Assessment Organisation) the two-way process of testing and sharing with the school and community gave way to testing alone (Ramachandran and Jandhyala 2007). Similarly, efforts like CLIP (Andhra Pradesh), Integrated Learning Improvement Programme (West Bengal) and the ongoing ABL (Tamil Nadu) have made efforts to improve the pedagogic practices and introduced child centred learning processes. Again these efforts have been initiated by the state government and they are not designed to improve school governance for quality education. Interestingly there are some studies that show that greater involvement of parents in the school and closer school-parent linkages could help enhance quality and thereby improve mean scores of children (Bernhardt, 2005). Notwithstanding these insights, quality inclusive education is not seen as a desired outcome of decentralised school governance.



State Level Initiatives

The literature survey reveals a range of state level innovative programmes run by NGOs in collaboration with SSA or by corporate CSR with SSA. They have demonstrated some good practices. However, the literature also reveals that many of them are stand-alone initiatives and are not systemic in nature that is sustained over a long period.

The work of Bodh Shiksha Samiti in the slums of Jaipur (**Rajasthan**) is interesting. They work with the teachers and the community to create an environment that is without fear where teachers visit families of the students and maintain a continuous dialogue. The schools are embedded in the community and the efforts have made a big difference to the participation of the most marginalised in schools. However the lessons of this notable effort have not been integrated into the formal system. In a set of case studies done of DPEP schools in Rajasthan (Sandhan, Jaipur, 2005-Unpublished) exceptionally motivated Headmasters were able to build active linkages with the community and also manage the teachers well. The case studies also point to a synergetic relationship between the head teacher/head master and the community—they can support and reinforce and energise each other. A study on local democracy (G. R. Arvind, 2009) also reveals that a good HM along with an active community based organisation in the area can make a big difference and can turn the school around as he/she provided the opportunity for parents to be involved in four village schools in Rajasthan. The agency of the headmaster or the head teacher in effective school management has been documented in different parts of the country. In most cases however, the initiative for such a mutually supportive relationship comes either from a highly motivated leader in the community, the school or the painstaking work of

facilitators, as evident in the recent initiative in **Karnataka** where the Namma Shale programme is being jointly incubated by SSA of Karnataka and Azim Premji Foundation.

A number of interesting studies on **Assam** also reveal similar dynamics. Under the Bidya Jyoti initiative of the government, parents and community members were provided a platform under the Learning Improvement Programme to organise extracurricular activities, remedial classes during vacations and also encourage the children. The mid-day meal managed by local mother's group ensures that hygienic and nutritious food is served to the children (VPS Raju, 2009). In minority concentration areas the EGS programme in Assam encouraged the community, the VEC and the Shiksha Mitra to manage the mid-day meal well and also take special care to improve infrastructure (Chang Kakati S. and Singha A., 2009). Another study on the state pointed out that there is a need to consciously develop the skills of the community as the involvement of the Panchayat is essential to ensure decentralised management of the school (Kanwar and Sarma, 2009).

The **Maharashtra** Rajashri Shahu Sarvangin Shikshan Karyakram in Kholapur (NCERT, 2006) built effective linkages between the community, the Gram Panchayat and the school in order to monitor quality of education. Interestingly, quality was defined for the purpose of the project as consisting of the following elements: (a) regular attendance of children, (b) monitoring the progress of each child through regular evaluation, (c) retention of children in the school and (d) ensuring effective utilisation of all the provisions related to school infrastructure, mid-day meal, textbooks and supplies and school grants. The study reveals that effective participation of the

VEC and PTA in monitoring made a difference on the ground.

The 8th JRM of SSA pointed out that in **Mizoram** and **Jharkhand** the total responsibility for civil works was delegated to the VEC, and this included transportation of material for construction and selection of the contractor to execute the work. The report also pointed out that in most cases the village Pradhan and the HM jointly take responsibility for civil works and other members of the VEC are not as active.

A case study done in **Orissa** (Dash and Panda, 2009) showcased an active VEC, which was involved in all activities of the school because of the proactive role played by the headmaster of the school. The Janshala programme of the government made efforts to foster community ownership in the school. However this could not be sustained after the programme ended in 2003. Similarly, under SSA the Government of Orissa involved 26 NGOs as partners to address the schooling needs of children who migrate to West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. The NGOs followed the children

SRUJAN: A school community based child-friendly programme

SRUJAN a cluster approach to education where the community has a strong participation in creating a learning atmosphere in schools; where teachers act as facilitators; provide space for the community and children to take part in child friendly activities like storytelling festival, art and craft, traditional games, music and dance, nature study and village project, etc. This programme helps to connect the community knowledge with the school curriculum, both in the context of curricular and extracurricular activities.

The activities adopted in Srujan are

Child Friendly: Storytelling festival, traditional games, art and craft, music and dance

Community based: Orientation of PRIs, conduct Jati Mahasabha

The traditional tribal leaders as well as the Panchayati Raj members take part in all these activities and provide support to the school activities that ensures the assimilation of local culture in school education.

School based: Preparation of bilingual TLM for bridging the language gap, collection of children's folklore.

In the Srujan programme, both in-school and out of school children and tribal and non-tribal children are participating in different child friendly activities.

This provides a better scope for building a sense of fellowship among all the children across different ethnic groups.

Key results

This is a programme where the school-community relationship has been improved and retention of tribal children has been made possible. Community resources as learning resources connecting experiential knowledge into school knowledge are happening. There is improved communication between teachers and community members leading to regular attendance of children and assessment of learner's performance. The overall result is encouraging in terms of children and community participating in story telling festivals, games, art and craft, etc.

The programme helps in sensitising the teachers, parents, and community members towards the education of tribal children.

Srujan activities have been conducted in 2067 CRCCs covering 27000 schools. More than 10 lakh children have participated in the child friendly activities during the year 2009-2010. Communication between teachers and community has vastly improved so that regular attendance of the children is achieved and learners' performance is also assessed.

(Orissa State Report 13th JRM, SSA)

to brick kiln sites and facilitated their education in their own mother tongue. They also coordinated with the Governments of AP and West Bengal to ensure enrolment of these children (Government of Orissa website). The 13th JRM of SSA showcased Samiksha—a monitoring tool with 80 indicators over five domains in order to make all the local and institutional stakeholders aware of quality of education. This is a new initiative that started in November 2010 and it is too early to make any assessment of its effectiveness.

Tamil Nadu government introduced a School Improvement Scheme (SIS) in 2008-09 where they conducted school improvement conferences in 8 districts where private/non-government agencies were also invited. Being a new programme, not much information is available on how these conferences were followed up with school level initiatives (GOTN 2010).

In **Gujarat**, the integrated education scheme involved the VEC and community members to help in the distribution of kits to children with special needs (CWSN). This was done during important national days (Independence Day) and during important festivals. This process led to increased community awareness—however these efforts were driven from the state SSA office and their district and block offices. They were not anchored at the school level (Chudasama et al, 2006). However, where the CRC took care of all the administrative work related to the school, the VEC, MTA and PTA were able to work at the school level in monitoring civil works, ensuring attendance of children, etc. The flip side is that it could also be seen as an effort where all administrative and financial powers are held by the BRC and CRC and the school level committees are given specific responsibilities like enrolment drive, monitoring civil works, etc. (Shah et al 2006).

Gujarat is also a state where community level efforts have contributed to ensuring the participation of children of migrant families. The Panchayat and the VEC provide information about migrating families

to the school and the BRC in Surat, Surendra Nagar, Mehsana and Panchmahal districts. (Gohil et al 2006). Joint SSA, AIF and NGO efforts to run hostels for children of migrating families have also led to greater inclusion of the most deprived. This particular programme is run in partnership and was designed from above and the local community and the school are involved in running and managing the hostels (AIF, 2006). Similarly, the work done by Pratham in Kutch in the aftermath of the earthquake (Saxena 2006 and Ramachandran and Jandhyala 2007) recognised the role of the Panchayat and Gram Sabhas. The performance of the children in schools is presented in the Gram Sabha in the form of a child-wise Dhan Patrak (educational profile for every child)—thereby raising awareness about quality of education and enabling parents to track the learning of the children. This experience shows that information about the learning of every child can become a powerful tool in the hands of the parents and the larger community to make schools accountable. It is not clear to what extent this approach was appreciated by the head teachers and head masters and the school system. Apparently this programme has not been sustained after Pratham decided to discontinue it.

The involvement of Meena Manch in mobilising girls and sensitising parents to send their daughters regularly to school have been highlighted in the 13th JRM report for **Uttar Pradesh**. Similarly the 7th JRM notes the effort in **Jammu and Kashmir** to involve religious leaders in the VEC to enrol children and ensure regular attendance. **West Bengal** has tried to make the CRCs functionally autonomous to respond to the needs of the school—however the effectiveness of these efforts has not been documented. In **Uttarakhand**, local high schools were encouraged to adopt primary schools and support the education of girl children.

The 8th JRM and 11th JRM reported that **Chhattisgarh** has issued guidelines for formation of three separate committees to monitor class-wise quality improvement and evaluation (class evaluation and quality committee), PTA and SMDC.

The appointment of temporary teachers is also handled by the Panchayat. However the reports also point out that there is a lack of clarity of roles and that the meetings are not regular. In the 11th JRM the lack of participation of women and parents from the most disadvantaged communities was highlighted. While the role of Jan Bhagidari Vikas Samiti in monitoring civil works was welcomed, it was also pointed out that they need training to become effective monitors.

The 13th JRM highlights the efforts made in **Orissa** to use school mapping to track out of school children and retention in school. The use of GPS to map un-served habitations in **Manipur** and the on-line tracking system in **Maharashtra**, the comprehensive registration of out of school children with detailed individual profile has also been mentioned. It is not clear if the data is actively used at the school level. The community based mapping of urban migrants in UP and

Interventions for SC, ST and muslim minorities in states visited by the Mission

Areas	Interventions	States
Scheduled Caste		
Access	Escort facility (Tola Sewak) for Musahar children	Bihar
Quality	Bodhi Vriksha (Reading improvement programme at primary stage)	Bihar
Innovation	Bal choupal, Pehcha, Eco-Tourism, Parakh, Radio Programme, Srujan	Uttarakhand
	Incentives to meritorious students	U.P
OoSC	Utpreran- Special RBCs	Bihar
Community involvement	Environment building and empowerment programme for Musahar community	Bihar
Scheduled Tribes		
Quality	Appointment of Vidya volunteers in tribal schools, provision of MLE books	A.P
	Bilingual dictionary in tribal language, preparation of curriculum and learning materials by involving tribal teachers with support of MLE experts	Jharkhand
	Training of BRC/CRC on MLE Scaling up MLE schools, orientation of teachers on MLE	Orissa
Access	Relaxation in norms for opening primary schools in tribal areas	A.P
Community mobilisation	Badi-Bata- massive enrolment drive	A.P
	Jati Mahasabhas	Orissa
Innovation	Activity study centres in selected slums and in ST concentrated areas	Maharashtra
Muslim Minorities		
Access	Providing bus passes to the upper primary students in Urdu schools	Maharashtra
Quality	Parent's awareness programme	Karnataka
	Block level seminars on science & technology for Muslim children	Karnataka
	Formulation of a committee to select Urdu books for reading practices, articles by Muslim children in Hindi newspaper on different aspects	Bihar
Innovation	Supply of computer sets and educational CDs to Urdu medium schools	Maharashtra
	Life skill development programme	UP, Bihar
	Child cabinet, Documentation and translation of Dalit children's' folklore	Orissa

Source: 13th JRM, SSA January 2011

Maharashtra and introduction of mobile schools for urban poor migrants have been mentioned in the 13th JRM. Almost all the JRM reports showcase innovative approaches to reach out to the most deprived (see table from 13th JRM below). To what extent have these strategies fostered decentralised school level management and planning is not clear.

Several JRM reports, notably the latest (13th JRM) highlights the challenge faced in mainstreaming **CWSN children**. Since the commencement of SSA identification, enrolment of CWSN has increased and 3 million children have been enrolled in 2010. Equally another 138 thousand children have been covered through home-based education. The 13th JRM noted that in many states proper methods are not used for identification and there are not adequate trained personnel to identify various kinds of disabilities. In **Andhra Pradesh**, the Annual Village Education Tracking (VET) survey enabled the government to identify the children and enrol them. Pre-integration camps have been quite effective in UP. Notwithstanding these commendable efforts there is a shortage of special educators who can, in-turn, train teachers in school and provide need based support to the schools. In almost all the states the facilities for home based care and education is limited. This could be done with active involvement of the community. However, school level planning for the inclusion of children with special needs is yet to take off.

Insights from State Level Initiatives

Systemic improvement through decentralisation; increased community participation empowered and autonomous headmasters have been recommended time and again. The hard fact is that the space for genuine decentralisation and people's participation is intimately related to administrative and political practices in the states. Equally, making the schools functionally autonomous with a leader in-charge is also related to the larger administrative and political environment, where the formal system promotes centralisation and the informal sub-system exacerbates it, thereby sidelining the

headmaster and community-based institutions. Similarly, where the formal system delegates powers to the headmaster, it could be undermined by an informal system that makes sure the headmaster has little authority over the teachers or any other critical input like granting leave, ensuring attendance, ensuring adequate teaching time and of course teacher training.

Leadership cannot emerge in a vacuum—the education system as a whole needs to be geared to create space for autonomous working at different levels. Given the legacy from the pre-independence period, the force that has driven the system is centralisation and control. Even after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment devolving powers to local self-government institutions, the school as an institution has remained outside the ambit of the Panchayat. The teachers and headmasters continue to be seen as government functionaries who are accountable to their bosses in the district and state administration. They have a fixed place and status in the hierarchy and as so many studies have shown, they have little say in the way the school is run. Almost all aspects of the school are decided at higher levels, leaving the headmaster and his/her teachers as implementers of government directives.

The notification of the Right to Education offers opportunities and also poses many challenges. The 13th JRM rightly points to the need to institutionalise the Village Education Registers in light of the RTE and use it as the basic mechanism for tracking every child at the village/habitation/settlement level. This can be done effectively if the school is seen as an autonomous unit that can plan and respond to the emerging needs and challenges. Linked to this are the recurring recommendations and observations in almost all the SSA JRM reports (and even the JRM reports of DPEP) to strengthen the partnership between the community and the school and seriously work towards school level planning and decentralised need based strategies to reach out to the most deprived and to improve the functioning of the school. Improving training

and capacity building of VEC and similar school level and village level bodies have also been underscored over the years. States that have notified the RTE (only six as of March 2011) need a lot of support to re-conceptualise educational management and plan from the school upwards. In order to do this, the headmaster or the head teacher has to be viewed as the fulcrum around which the school revolves. He/she should be empowered to work with the local community to develop situation specific strategies for quality inclusive education. The academic and administrative supervisory institutions like the CRC, BRC, DIET and other arms of educational administration need

to be geared to foster and promote decentralised school governance.

The literature we surveyed points to numerous innovative strategies involving efforts that selectively try to foster community participation or enrolment and retention of out of school children. It also points to mobilising the community to enhance enrolment or integrate children with special needs or introduce new classroom pedagogies or supply teaching learning materials. However, we did not see evidence of a holistic plan for decentralised school governance and decentralised planning.

State Policies and Practices

(Promoting decentralised school governance for quality inclusive education⁴)

Nagaland

Policy: The word “communitisation” was coined in 2001. With the enactment of the Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institution and Services (Act no. 2) 2002 (Nagaland Communitisation of Elementary Education Institutions and Services Rule, 2002) on the 15 April 2002, the education department began working towards communitisation of elementary education. Implementation began in September 2002 and by 2003, the department had communitised 402 schools in 218 villages. The state government decided to communitise all elementary schools w.e.f. 1 January 2004,

The aims of the communitisation process are: (a) promoting government-community partnership at the grassroots, (b) empowering the community by delegating management and supervision of government schools to the VEC and (c) ensuring accountability of teachers in the villages to local communities by giving the latter the power of disbursing salaries to them (Singh and Ashok, 2007).

In a communitised village, the Village Council constitutes a Village Education Committee (VEC). The VEC comprises a VEC chairman selected by the Council and the following members—Village Development Board (VDB) Secretary, head teacher of the communitised school, three representatives from among parents (which includes at least one woman), two representatives of teachers, a member from the Village Council, a representative each from different church denominations in the village, two members from the village community which includes, at least, one woman, sub inspector of school (SIS) of the area and the head teacher of the Government Middle School (GMS) as member secretary. The VEC may also include other residents

of the village. The VEC members (other than those who are ex-officio members) have a term of three years while a parent or a guardian will discontinue as a member once his/her ward ceases to be a student of the school. The VEC meets once in three months. A Common Education Committee (CEC) is constituted in case more than one village shares a communitised school (Singh and Ashok, 2007).

The following powers were devolved to the school-VEC:

- Civil works: supervision and mobilisation of community funds for furniture
- Monitoring teacher attendance and performance, teachers need to take VEC permission for leave, salary of teacher is paid by VEC and there is a no-work and no pay rule
- Managing school grants, including teacher grants
- Financial and administrative monitoring-supervise mid-day meals (through women’s group)

Practice: Communitisation has empowered the VEC as the legal local authority to manage elementary education in the village. To be able to do that, it has certain powers and functions-administrative, academic and financial. The administrative functions of the VEC include disbursing salaries and granting casual leave to teachers and the staff of the school, procure furniture, stationery, etc. and select/recommend appointment of substitute teachers against long-term vacancy.

⁴Detailed state-wise narratives are given in part 2 of this report.

It also has limited academic functions like ensuring universal enrolment and retention of all children aged 6-14 years, implementing annual plans and programmes of the government, and ensuring free textbooks reach the children and that the mid-day meal is well managed. The VEC operates a savings bank account under the joint signatures of the chairman and member secretary of the committee. It also mobilises resources from the community, forms an education fund, sanctions and incurs expenses from this fund, maintains proper accounts of income and expenditure and has them audited.

Kerala

Policy: Under the Kerala Panchayat Act Amendment 1999, devolution and decentralisation process was initiated with adequate freedom to act. In this, Panchayat Education Committees and Ward members became members of PEC. All schools are to be monitored and resources to be utilised. SSA approves the budget for the school and the school plan developed by the PEC. This is not always reflected in the SSA plan. All the funds are routed through the Panchayat and some of the Panchayat use their own resources for the school. PEC in association with PTA conducts remedial camps during vacations, organises educational fairs and melas, cultural fairs and mobilises resources for school development.

KCF 2007: Promotion of constructive and critical pedagogy based on NCF—promoting participation of teachers in the preparation of TLM; in some schools the students are also involved. This is an example of decentralisation of efforts to improve quality. School teachers are involved in BRC and CRC levels. The state has prepared a school level academic assessment manual (for continuous comprehensive evaluation) and a booklet is maintained for every child.

Guidelines: Every HM has to appear before the PEC and present the status report. All HMs under that Panchayat are present in these monthly or bi-monthly meetings. The Sarpanch chairs this meeting.

Practice: Special drives are organised through PTA and teachers to enrol all children with special focus on gender equity and promotion of education of the girl child. Make efforts to include all migrant children—most of them from Orissa and Bihar.

Other initiatives:

- There are school based writers forum and readers forum and literacy festivals are organised. In some schools there are similar groups for mathematics, science and social studies.
- In the pilot project in Kollam District (2007-08), year of effective governance was initiated to strengthen convergence of MPTA, PTA and PRI. This is specifically related to school management. This has a potential for replication across the state. This does not include academic matters.
- While the guidelines of what is expected of BRC and CRC is common across SSA, the unique aspect of Kerala is that (a) they are well staffed, (b) they are well organised and proactive, (c) their involvement in the school is evident and not just limited to data collection and (d) they provide inputs in academic and co-curricular activities.
- However the level of interaction or coordination between PEC (Panchayat Education Committee) and the BRC is limited—they act on their own and both of them are involved in school affairs. In every PEC meeting BRC is represented. Key informants informed that they are not sure if the jurisdiction of the two would clash at some point of time.

Bihar

Policy: The focus in Bihar has been on enrolment and bridging social and gender gaps. A large number of teachers have been recruited in the last 4 years. Bihar Vidyalaya Shiksha Act of 2000

provides for election of Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti. The reconstitution of Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti is expected to take place alongside the forthcoming Panchayat elections in 2011.

VSS role has been defined to include supervision of civil works, oversee financial transaction, organise campaigns to enrol out of school children and girls, ensure that they are retained and that the school functions on a day to day basis. They are not involved in any academic matters inside the classroom.

To address inclusion, state government schemes under SSA are: for minorities, Hunar, which focused on girls and vocational skills with education) and for special focus groups like Maha Dalit Musahar, Utthan.

Bihar has Persons with Disability Act, 1995, whereby all CWSN are expected to be enrolled in formal schools or special schools. Notwithstanding the commendable efforts made, enrolment of all children with disabilities remains a challenge. As a result the government has taken a policy decision to harness the support of NGOs.

Practice: The Sarpanch is the head of both the VSS and the Panchayat. The SHG or Mata Committees manage the mid-day-meal. Menu is fixed from above. There is one Panchayat Shiksha Mitra in every school, appointed by the Panchayat, in order to address teacher shortage. They have adopted the MP EGS approach where the Panchayat can ask for a school.

There is a committee of HM and teachers in every school that develops and also purchases TLM.

Other significant state initiatives: Bicycles are given to all the girls reaching class 6, including girls studying in Madrasas. In January 2008, the state developed a Comprehensive Disability Policy for Bihar. Apana Vidyalaya in tribal majority villages and Angana Vidyalaya are for 9+ years girls from SC and ST dominated areas.

Karnataka

Policy: Village Education Committees have been constituted through a special government order in 2001 where the Chairman is from the elected Panchayat. The Samudaayadatta Shaale (school towards the community) seeks to introduce school level management to improve the overall functioning of the school.

In 2001, the state introduced Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC), a programme that involved NGOs to reach out to children with special needs and Keli Kali (Listen and learn), in 2003 Cooliyinda Shalege—from child labour to school, Baa marali Shaalege (come back to school), Baa Baale Shaalege (bringing girls to schools) and Beediyind Shaalege (from street to school) programmes were started. In 2005-06 the Tent School for migrant child workers was initiated.

Practice: In 2007 the government introduced the Namma Shale (My School—a School-community connect programme) that is being run in four clusters in four districts⁵. This programme has introduced a rainbow stakeholder module—where the 7 important stakeholders—teachers, parents, children, SDMC members, CBO members, GPs and government education department are sought to be involved in all the school development issues from monitoring to capacity building. The SDMC have come together to form a federation and the programme has created space for active participation of women.

As part of SSA a permanent structure has been created at the block level to deal with CWSN children—IERT (Inclusive Education Resource Teachers) These teachers are trained and are networked with local NGOs to work strategically to make schools inclusive.

⁵Four clusters in Karnataka—local NGOs and local PRI involved. Gavadagere Hunsur Mysore 20 Kundur Honnali Davanagere 17 Mirjan Kumta Uttara Kannada 17 Rukhmapur Surpur Gulbarga 18

Madhya Pradesh

Policy: Jana Shikshan Adhiniyam is the overarching policy instrument to promote decentralisation. The power to manage the school was devolved to the Panchayat in 2002. There has also been financial decentralisation (to spend the budget decided under SSA) and a Public Education Report prepared by Panchayat. This is presented to the District Administration. The Panchayat can make demands from District administration and PRI at the district level Zilla Parishad.

The JSA act provides for PTA and Teachers Association. This body is expected to ensure enrolment of all children, monitor regular attendance of teachers, mobilise local resource persons for teaching, monitor ongoing learning of children and organise remedial education and mobilise resources for small requirements at the school level. The JSA spells out the rights and responsibilities of teachers, community and parents to provide quality education to all children, organise remedial teaching and ensure equal treatment of all children. The Act also specifies that there will be no punishment of children.

Practice: The Panchayat can channel funds they get for overall development to the school and when SSA funds are delayed, they give a loan to the school. There are severe bottlenecks in funds releases from state government to Panchayat and it was reported that regular payment to community appointed teachers remains a challenge.

Inclusiveness is promoted through community mobilisation through Mahila Shiksha Abhiyan and Ma-Beti sammelans. The Shishu Shiksha Kendra caters to pre-school education needs of children of 3-5 years to free girls from sibling care.

The state has introduced a madrasa modernisation scheme where 102 madrasas have been assisted in construction and teacher salaries. However, during interviews and field visits it was noted that children in the madrasas are also enrolled in regular schools.

The state has initiated a learning enhancement programme called Dakshata Samvardan. This is a state level programme.

The Gram Sabha helps identify CWSN along with the PTA. They prepare a data base of CWSN and see that they are enrolled. BRC and CRC help run community camps to explain and link them to those who provide aids and appliances.

Tamil Nadu

Policy: Till 1981, the Directorate of School Education was expected to supervise the schools that were under the jurisdiction of local bodies. In 1981, the Government of Tamil Nadu took over the service of the teachers working in the Panchayat union schools and the powers vested with local bodies relating to education were transferred to the Directorate of School Education.

In 1989, the state government transferred the powers vested with corporations and municipalities relating to education to this directorate and all the teachers working in municipalities and corporations were absorbed as government servants.

As per G.O.Ms.No.53, School Education dated 26 April 2002 and G.O.Ms.No.108, School Education dated 31 July 2003, Four-Tier Committees at State, District, Block and Village levels have been constituted to implement and monitor the programme. The Principal Secretary, School Education Department is the Chairperson for the State-level Committee. The District Collector is the Chairperson of the District-level Committee. The Panchayat Union Chairman is the Chairperson of the Block-level Committee. The Panchayat President is the Chairperson of the Village Education Committee and a Ward member holds the position in urban areas (State's AWP&B, 2010-11).

In 2008, the Government of Tamil Nadu notified the roles and responsibilities of the Village Education Committees, in order to synchronise state level practices with SSA framework.

Practice: Today local bodies/school committees look after maintenance of school buildings.

TN has a tradition of having strong, autonomous headmasters and they are highly respected. Teacher transfers are not done frequently and it is possible for teachers to remain in a school for a long time. The head of an institution is solely responsible for institutional planning and management. He or she decides how to use the available resources and how to initiate steps to mobilise the resources. He or she involves the teachers, parents, other associations, etc. towards the achievement of qualitative education for younger generations. The powers of the headmaster/head teacher are as follows:

- Supervising the teachers
- Maintaining attendance of teachers and records
- Reviewing the notes of lessons
- Sanctioning of leave to teachers
- Preparation of statement for claiming pay for teachers
- Conducting District Level examination

ABL was introduced in 2003 with a view to enhance quality and make education child centred. The objectives of the programme were: (a) to ensure that a majority of the children can read, write and acquire basic math skills, (b) to address child development in a holistic way, not merely in the academic areas, (c) to enable the development of all faculties of the child, (d) to create opportunities for children to learn with the teacher as a facilitator, (e) to make classroom practices attractive for children and (f) to retain children in the school system.

Interestingly the practice of ABL has led to greater inclusiveness in the classroom. Children sit in groups according to levels of ability; no one is excluded. CWSN children are also included in the groups, according to their level. There is no hierarchy between teacher and children. Fear and corporal punishment has disappeared. The headmaster and head teacher work with teachers in a collaborative manner. Teacher training is need-

based and one BRT is in charge of 4-6 schools each. He/she visits the school every week and there is a close working relationship between BRT and HM. The ABL programme has enabled decentralised training and capacity building of teachers.

TN has done significant work with CWSN. The state government initiated advocacy for integration through the electronic media. In Chennai city the children are integrated into regular schools for four days a week and they attend special school once a week. The government has appointed and trained resource persons for specific learning disabilities.

Gujarat

Policy: The decentralisation process started under DPEP was taken forward under SSA. What is noteworthy in Gujarat is that there has not been any major shift in policy change since DPEP and there has been a steady devolution of powers to the local level backed up by Ordinances and legislated through an Act.

Ordinances setting up VEC and Ward Education Committee was enacted in 1996 and this was approved by the legislature in 2003. This was in the form of an amendment to the Bombay Primary Education Act of 1945. Gujarat has also notified a separate Village School Construction Committee and a similar one in urban areas,

There is a clear delineation of the roles of different decentralised structures—District, Taluka and Village. For example the District Panchayat recruits primary school teachers through a staff selection committee. The Taluka Panchayat oversees execution of programmes. As the funds are transferred from the district to the village, the middle level structures have become weak. The funds for Meena Manch, Residential Alternative Schools, payment of Bal Mitra salaries, Civil Works, Disbursement of teacher and school grant and IED grant for CWSN have now been devolved to the village level or the school level. With the exception of teacher salaries all the funds are transferred

from the district to the school. As a result the Headmaster has a lot of autonomy and powers.

Practice: Because BRC and CRC do not have direct financial powers what is noteworthy is that their academic role has greater importance and is highlighted. , Their academic functions have been highlighted much more. However, the headmasters have not been trained to manage the school and this gap is being addressed by a joint programme of the government of Gujarat and the Indian Institute of Management—whereby systematic training of headmasters is underway. It is too early to assess its impact.

Andhra Pradesh

Policy: The 1986 Mandal Parishad Act changed the shape of PRI and created the Mandal (a cluster of around 25 Panchayats). This was the first effort at devolution of powers.

In 1998, AP Community Participation Act (Act No 13) created the following committees: school committee at habitation level, PEC at the Panchayat level and Mandal Education Committee, Municipal Education Committee and District Committees. The main purpose of these committees is to participate in micro planning and habitation planning. This policy (that came into being during the Janashala programme) was discontinued with the commencement of SSA in 2003.

The state also created the School Education Committee (SEC) which is governed by the Andhra Pradesh School Education (Community Participation Act), 1998. As per this Act, each school has to constitute the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that consisted of the teachers in the school and the parents of all the children studying in the school. The PTA elects four persons from among the parents of children studying in the school, at least two women, and one a person of SC/ST/backward caste/minority to the SEC. The SEC was elected every two years and at the time of this study there had been three batches of the SEC in 1998, 2000 and 2002. The SEC had a total of

five members: the headmaster or senior teacher of the school and four parents elected by the PTA. Andhra Pradesh has also attempted to link SEC to the PRI structure. In every village Panchayat, a Panchayat Education Committee was constituted with the Sarpanch as chairperson, headmaster of high school/upper primary school as convener, two members from each SEC (the SEC chairperson and a woman) and NGO members. Donors who donated Rs. 50,000 or more were made life members. In a similar fashion, the Mandal Education Committee and Zillah Education Committee, with members elected from among the membership of lower tier committees have been established.

Between 2005 to 2007, the effectiveness of these committees began to decline and by 2009 these structures became fully dysfunctional.

Today, under the RTE Act of 2010, Academic Monitoring Committees have been notified. As per the RTE, they are required to monitor quality of education (teacher absence, teachers have to take permission of AMC to take leave, civil works, other infrastructure and student progress (performance). 66136 AMCs have been constituted so far using a combination of nomination, ex-officio nomination and selection of parents.

Under RTE 2009 (Right to Education) Act the Government of Andhra Pradesh decided in principle to extend statutory status to these committees too. In a recent communiqué, the government asked the PRI bodies to treat local government schools as community assets and the impact of this directive is yet to be assessed

Practice: One of the major policy level challenges is that there are parallel systems of educational administration, especially with reference to the KGBV programme. There is the District Education Office, the District SSA office, a separate board for residential schools, the AP Social Welfare Residential Education Institution Society, AP tribal Welfare Residential Institution Society, AP State Vikalanga Corporation and a Disabled Welfare Department. All of them manage KGBVs.

GOAP has extended all the KGBVs up to class 10; they are run by various government societies/bodies. Where there is no government society to run the KGBV, the SSA Directorate manages them directly.

Child labour (girls) enrolment drives are run by NGOs and not the government, children are,

however, admitted to government schools or through the Mini Gurukula that act as short-term bridge courses, they are sent to the KGBV. Boys are admitted to residential schools.

According to senior officials of the government the progression of decentralisation stopped mid way in 2009 due to the political turmoil in the state.

Unique aspects in the eight states visited

Nagaland	Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institution and Services Act, 2002	VEC selected by Village development Board and has powers to monitor teacher attendance (no work no pay rule), pay/withhold salary and monitor school level grants
Kerala	Drives for parental awareness and literacy by school teachers, Eco-consciousness among school managements. Kerala Panchayat Act Amended 1999.	All funds routed through Panchayat, some of them allocate more resources. Panchayat Education Committee monitors schools including utilisation of resources. HMs present status report to PEC at regular intervals.
Bihar	Utthan programme to address inclusion of Maha Dalit (Musahar)	Tola Sevak interface between families and school, escort, provide academic support and motivation to enrol, attend and learn.
Karnataka	Namma Shaale (<i>My school</i>), a school-community connect programme since 2007 (in 4 clusters). An SSA-APF joint initiative in the state of Karnataka, with support from KSTC (Karnataka State Trainers' Collective).	Proactive engagement with community of parents, Panchayat, school and local NGO/facilitators to build ownership and enhance quality.
Madhya Pradesh	Jan Shiksha Adhinyam (1998) the overarching framework and power to manage school devolved to Panchayat in 2002	Palak Shikshak Sangh (PTA) to oversee school functioning, help identify CWSN and also inclusion of girls through Mahila Shikshan Abhiyan and Ma Beti Sammelan
Tamil Nadu	Activity Based Learning (since 2005)	Child centred and activity based pedagogy has re-energised the school and provides for multi level learning in the classroom. Has been very effective in integrating CWSN in the school with all children.
Gujarat	Legislative approval for Village Education Committee and Ward Education Committee in 2003. Training of HM initiated in collaboration with IIM.	Clear delineation of roles of different decentralised structures—district, Taluka and village. With exception of teacher salaries all funds transferred to school.
Andhra Pradesh	Efforts in promoting MLE (Multi Lingual Education); Preparation of MLE Primers; KGBV identified as a best practice in the country; Under RTE, Academic Monitoring Committees have been notified in 2010. Extended statutory status to these committee and schools treated as community assets.	The AMCs yet to take off. KGBV well run and managed, with great autonomy and extended up to class 10.



Overview of the Case Studies

The concept of autonomously managed primary and elementary schools is still new. The recently enacted Right to Education Act (RTE) provides for the preparation of School Development Plans and the maintenance of Village Education Registers. The state governments identified good practices (with the exception of Delhi) and they showcased specific aspects of decentralised school management for quality inclusive education. It is important to note that no single good practice brings together all elements of decentralisation or quality education or inclusion.

Insights from the Case Studies

The case studies reinforce and reiterate the findings of the literature survey. There are no surprises. In fact most of the case studies cannot be called “best practices”. While all of them have some elements that are good and worth

emulating, the decentralised school governance for quality inclusive education does not exist in practice or even in the minds of educational administrators.

The overarching message from the 16 case studies is that the Headmaster/Head Mistress/Head Teacher are the key to a well-managed school. Even where the overall state framework does not provide for decentralisation, a motivated and highly committed head of the school can make a big difference. A combination of a good HM and a team of good teachers is the ultimate formula of a well-managed, sensitive and engaged school. The impact of a good leader could be as follows:

- Teachers are regular and they teach
- Children are regular and dropout rates come down
- Mid-day meal is prepared and served with care

S. No.	State	Case study
1.	Andhra Pradesh	Hemalatha Lavanam Memorial KGBV
2.	Andhra Pradesh	Mandal Parishad Upper Primary School, Vishakapatnam District
3.	Bihar	Rajakiya Madhya Vidyalaya, Patna (Rural)
4.	Bihar	Utthan Inclusive Education in Patna (Rural)
5.	Gujarat	Mahadevpura Primary School, Mehsana District
6.	Gujarat	Fatehpura Anupam Primary School, Mehsana District
7.	Karnataka	Government Urdu Higher Primary School, Davangere District
8.	Karnataka	Government Higher Primary School, Uttara Kannada
9.	Kerala	Government Upper Primary School, Trivandrum District
10.	Kerala	Government Upper Primary School, Palakkad District
11.	Madhya Pradesh	CSR partnership, Middle School, Raisen District
12.	Madhya Pradesh	Madhyamik Shala, Sehore District
13.	Nagaland	Government middle school, Dimapur District
14.	Nagaland	Three schools, Jotsoma Panchayat, Kohima
15.	Tamil Nadu	Chennai Primary School, Manjakollai
16.	Tamil Nadu	Chennai Primary School, Pulioor

- Community is involved and they are mobilised to support the school and the VEC and other school committees are active in managing school infrastructure
- CRC/BRC support can be harnessed by a proactive HM/HT
- There is a sense of pride and ownership of the school
- Mobilise additional resources in kind and cash.

Headmasters and Head Teachers are not given any specific training in school management and therefore their understanding of what constitutes good management practices differs according to the person. There are no systemic good practices but we came across individuals who had made a big difference. Even in Nagaland, where Communitisation is a systemic intervention to devolve powers to the community, the HM and the Chairperson of the VEC influence management practices.

The devolution of financial powers to the Panchayat Education Committee or the Village Education Committee (as the case may be) energises village level committees. This was quite evident in Kerala, Gujarat, Nagaland, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. However, the committees manage the funds according to the norms decided at higher levels and they do not have the authority to determine how funds could be allocated in the best interest of the school. Interference and constant oversight by block or district level bodies, especially in monitoring how the funds are used, could make the VEC less active. In almost all the states, one or two members of the VEC and the headmaster/head teacher manage the funds. All members are not equally involved or interested. The representation of women remains a token in most states, except Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The VEC and similar bodies like SMC, SDMC, PTA and MTA lack clarity on their role. While many of them can provide leadership, not much has been done to build the capabilities of the members. Equally, majority of active members in these committees do

not send their own children to government schools. Therefore they do not have a stake in improving the quality of education in the schools.

Another important insight of the study was that interviews and focus group discussions were held with school level committees like VEC, SDMC and the PRI institutions. The committee meeting was convened in the school and in the Panchayat. The disadvantaged community in the given area were expected to be included in the committee, however their participation was not significant. Though there was considerable awareness about the problems/challenges faced by socially disadvantaged groups and CWSN children, these committees were not aware of their role in making school inclusive.

Given that government primary schools covered in the case studies cater to the very poor, it was indeed worrying to note that there was little clarity on inclusion. While the integration of CWSN has received a lot of attention and support from SSA, the inclusion of migrant children, those from extremely poor families, those who experience any kind of stigmatisation in the community (HIV related) has not received the same degree of attention. Equally, the problem of seasonal child labour—a major issue in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Bihar has not been acknowledged or dealt with even in areas where there is a significant population of seasonal migration. Inclusion is about reaching out to all the un-reached and this has not been fully understood or appreciated. In almost all the states, inclusion was equated with CWSN—and providing ramps was reported as being the main inclusion strategy.

Almost all the case studies show that their involvement in academic matters remains fairly limited and they at best ensure children come to school. With the exception of one school in Kerala, where the community asks children to read newspapers, they keep track of inputs (like textbooks, uniforms, other incentives) and are rarely involved in measuring learning outcomes.

The SSA programme has positioned the BRC and CRC (or MRP or BRT as the case may be) as part of a systemic effort towards academic decentralisation. All the states have created these structures. The case studies reveal that they are not effective because of the following reasons:

- BRCs in most states manage 100 to 200 schools (Bihar 200, Gujarat 130, and Madhya Pradesh 150 to 200). In AP the MRP manages around 50 schools. In Chennai city they handle only 6 schools. Their ability to provide decentralised academic support is greatly hampered when they have to manage a large number of schools. Chennai was the only exception. Therefore the CRC is the key to decentralised academic support.
- The BRC and CRC are understaffed in most states (except TN and Kerala).
- They do not have an understanding of school management issues and they perceive their role as a link between the school and the block and district administration.
- Politically powerful or teachers with clout become BRC/BRP and therefore the informal roles played by them is significant. In reality they are not resource centres but an administrative unit. A significant proportion of their time is spent on administrative matters.
- Therefore they are not the key to decentralisation, but are middle level management bodies for MIS and to assist the District Education office.

Almost all the quality initiatives and interventions are designed and planned at the state level. Planning is done at the state level and a calendar of activities and budget is sent down to the school level. However, where there is a proactive head, he/she can make a difference. SSA is a norm based (civil works, size and design of room, colour of painting) or guidelines based programme. A lot is decided at the state level, or some aspects

like IED, KGBV, 20-day teacher training, etc. are nationally driven. Even programmes like ABL in Tamil Nadu and Nali Kali in Karnataka are driven from above. While there is recognition that the agency of a motivated or creative HM or HT can make a difference and thereby create schools that are “good practices”, there has not been effective devolution of all aspects of school management namely academic, administrative and financial.

What Makes a Good Practice?

Headmaster/Headmistress/Head Teacher Driven:

- A headmaster can achieve a great deal and drive quality and inclusion even when he or she gets little support from the administration.
- A highly motivated headmaster or headmistress can involve the community, access resources, energise the school and encourage teachers to do their best.
- A team of teachers led by a HM who allows teachers space to participate equally in determining priorities, one who has a vision for his/her school and one who has built a good rapport with the community can create a vibrant learning environment.
- A committed and motivated headmaster can reach out to and harness the support of cluster and block level structures like the BRC and CRC. Equally, the resource teachers working at block and cluster levels respond positively to a school with a motivated headmaster.
- Dynamic head who is also creative and whose value system is in sync with the Constitution of India (secularism, non-discrimination) can inspire and lead teachers, students and even the community. Such a person can turn the school into a hub for learning, a centre for inclusive education and a place where the children and their families feel confident to come or reach out to.

Project Driven:

- A project that provides for a social mobiliser (Tola Sewak) to ensure the inclusion of the most deprived can harness the support of the community, the Panchayat and other stakeholders.
- Convergence of a well-designed programme (KGBV), a motivated district office, interested implementation partner (NGO or Mahila Samakhya) can help create a well-managed residential school for girls.
- Partnership with a local stakeholders or NGO can help reach out to children from very poor families and provide necessary support for learning.
- Providing a mechanism for the coming together of the community, the school, the administration and external resources (NGO, CSR body) can lead to a sense of joint ownership of the school (Namma Shale).
- A community project (Aman Biradari) can reach out to street children or other deprived children and connect them to the school. However, the response of the school depends on the sensitivity of the school to extremely deprived children and the individual motivation of the head master/head mistress.

Panchayat or School Committee Driven:

- The Panchayat can mobilise and channel resources to the school like providing newspapers and books, provide incentives, ensure hygienic environment and sumptuous mid-day-meal (supplement with fish, eggs, etc.). An engaged committee or Panchayat can not only ensure enrolment of all children but also make sure children and teachers attend regularly. In some exceptional cases, they can also monitor if learning is happening in the school.
- When SSA funds are delayed, the Panchayat can loan funds to the school (including salary of

community teachers) and take up school related issues with the administration.

- Panchayat or tribal council can become an effective bridge between the school and the district administration to ensure appointment of teachers, sort out administrative problems and mobilise additional resources for the school (in kind, cash and by way of labour).
- Community-by way of SHG or women's group can augment resources and help and support the headmaster/head teacher on a regular basis.
- In exceptional situations the Panchayat or the community (school committee) can convert the school into a hub for learning about the environment, about hygiene and cleanliness (water and sanitation), child protection and child rights. They can motivate the head master and teachers and sustain positive practices over a long period of time.
- Involvement of the community in school development and infrastructure can help mobilise additional resources for infrastructure, computers and material and books for teaching and learning.

Can Supervisors Facilitate Decentralised School Governance?

- Block and cluster level structures created by SSA have not proactively facilitated decentralisation or school-based support for inclusive education or quality improvement.
- Academic planning and support remains top-down, sometimes emanating from the state and sometimes even nationally. The block and cluster level resource persons do not have the autonomy nor do they all have the capacity to facilitate school level or even cluster level planning for quality education.
- Similarly, efforts for inclusive education (to reach out to the most deprived, to CWSN and

to girls) are not driven by block and cluster level structures. Most programmes for inclusion or equity are either project driven or state driven. They have not been able to think or plan for locally specific strategies to suit the requirements of a specific area or school.

- There may be exceptions, for example under ABL in Tamil Nadu, block and cluster level structures were geared to provide school based support and training. Again this was a carefully planned project strategy.

KGBV as an Overarching Good Practice in Equity, Inclusion and School Management⁶

Walk into any Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), and one finds a bustling place full of adolescent girls. Even a brief interaction with the girls and the adjectives to describe them seem so very inadequate-enthusiastic, focused, energetic, bold, expressive, and quite obviously the leaders of tomorrow. Clearly something seems to be going right in these residential upper primary schools.

The antecedents of the KGBV go back to Mahila Samakhya programme and the 1990s when the Jomtien and Dakar (2000) commitments were to make gender in school education indeed a systemic focus and concern. DPEP was heralded for bringing gender centre stage in the processes to universalise primary and subsequently elementary education. Many things happened-access was assured, communities were mobilised for education and especially for girls education, teachers were sensitised on gender issues, textbooks and the whole curriculum were revised using a gender lens, there was a focus on provision of water and toilets. In short, the achievement on gender parameters became a key determinant to measure successful implementation of the elementary education programmes. The gender outcomes of these efforts began to be evident in the spurt in girl's enrolment at the primary level thereby reducing gender gaps, reduction in the gender gap in learning levels at the primary level, increased recruitment of women teachers

and greater women's participation in school committees among other things.

While there was a lot to celebrate, there were, however, many troubling and persistent issues. Drop-out and completion rates among girls were worrisome, especially among the 11+ age group. While on the one hand the country felt that it had tackled the large problem of out of school children, the persistence of the problem in geographical pockets, in particular social groups and among an older age group raised the bar on the hurdles to be encountered and overcome.

It is in this background that the need for a special focus on older girls in the 11-14 years age group was recognised. Experiences of the Mahila Samakhya programme and its strategy of providing residential accelerated learning through the Mahila Shikshan Kendras to reach out to marginalised girls and enabling them to successfully achieve basic numeracy of the primary level were instructive. There was also the experience of the MV Foundation that showed that residential learning is a quick and assured way of helping marginalised children who are outside the pale of education. All this fed into the design of the KGBV programme.

The KGBV Design

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya programme (KGBV), a central sector programme, has been designed to reach girls made most vulnerable as a result of age, location and overall social marginalisation. The objective of the KGBV

⁶This brief note on the experience of the KGBV programme in addressing issues of decentralised management, inclusion and quality education draws on the brief field visits made to KGBVs in AP, Gujarat and Bihar as well as the secondary reports such as Vimala Ramachandran, et al (2007), Report of the National Evaluation of the KGBV programme, Commissioned by GOI; Kameshwari Jandhyala (2007), New Beginnings Expanding Horizons: KGBV programme in Gujarat, Commissioned by Care Gujarat and SSA Gujarat; Kameshwari Jandhyala and Nishi Mehrotra (2011) Overcoming academic barriers: Challenging gendered academic bogeys, KGBV in UP, Commissioned by Care UP.

Objectives and Scope of the Scheme

“The scheme would be applicable only in those identified Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) where, as per census data of 2001, the rural female literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is more than the national average. Among these blocks, schools may be set up in areas with:

- Concentration of tribal population, with low female literacy and/or a large number of girls out of school
- Concentration of SC, OBC and minority populations, with low female literacy and/or a large number of girls out of school
- Areas with low female literacy
- Areas with a large number of small, scattered habitations that do not qualify for a school

The criteria for eligible EBB will be the same as in the NPEGEL scheme of SSA.

Gender disparities still persist in rural areas and among disadvantaged communities. Looking at enrolment trends, there remain significant gaps in the enrolment of girls at the elementary level as compared to boys, especially at the upper primary levels. The objective of KGBV is to ensure access and quality education to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level.

The components of the scheme will be as follows

Setting up of residential schools where there are a minimum of 50 girls predominantly from the SC, ST and minority communities available to study in the school at the elementary level. The number can be more than 50 depending on the number of eligible girls. Three possible models for such

school have been identified and given in Annex. I(a) to I(c).

- To provide necessary infrastructure for these schools
- To prepare and procure necessary teaching learning material and aids for the schools
- To put in place appropriate systems to provide necessary academic support and for evaluation and monitoring
- To motivate and prepare the girls and their families to send them to residential school

At the primary level the emphasis will be on the slightly older girls who are out of school and were unable to complete primary schools (10+). However, in difficult areas (migratory populations, scattered habitations that do not qualify for primary/upper primary schools) younger girls can also be targeted.

At the upper primary level, emphasis will be on girls, especially, adolescent girls who are unable to go to regular schools.

In view of the targeted nature of the scheme, 75% girls from SC, ST, OBC or minority communities would be accorded priority for enrolment in such residential schools and only thereafter, 25% girls from families below poverty line.

Established NGOs and other non-profit making bodies will be involved in the running of the schools, wherever possible. These residential schools can also be adopted by the corporate groups. Separate guidelines are being issued in the matter.

(Source: KGBV Guidelines, GOI, 2003-04)

programme is to ensure access and quality education to girls of disadvantaged groups by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at the elementary level.

The KGBV programme offers many insights which the mainstream education system could look to when addressing issues of inclusion, in exploring the dimensions of what constitutes quality

education for the marginalised and in setting up decentralised management systems that nurture and develop these processes.

The KGBV scheme was launched during 2004-05 with 750 residential schools allocated to different States with educationally backward blocks. Currently there are 2783 KGBVs in the country—a significant number that could not only make a difference on the ground but could also enable the government to draw lessons and apply them to mainstream government schools.

Inclusion Central to the KGBV

Issues of inclusion are central to the KGBV design and consequently targeting has been very effective. Required to be started in educationally backward blocks, the programme in the first instance addresses exclusion in its broadest sense. It has moved beyond broad parameters of exclusion to unravel the layers of exclusion.

The programme seeks to prioritise the following category of out-of-school girls:

- Living in scattered habitations with no school at close proximity
- In difficult terrains
- From migrating populations
- Child labour
- In difficult circumstances like abusive homes, orphan girls, girls who are differently abled, daughters of sex workers etc.
- Social groups such as SC,ST, OBC, Muslim

minorities with high rates of out of school older girls

- Girls with special needs (CWSN)

The 2007 National Evaluation of the KGBV programme reported that, “the scheme has been able to create access to schooling facilities among the most disadvantaged. Though there is a mix of different age groups of the girls enrolled, most of the States have more of the older girls who are dropouts. “It further stated that, “... the most positive feedback that we received from the 12 states visited pertains to the participation of girls from socially disadvantaged social groups. 26.36 per cent of the enrolled students in the 12 states visited were from SC group, 31.43 per cent from ST group, 26.45 per cent from OBC, 8.75 per cent from BPL and 4.31 per cent from Muslim community.”

This effective targeting has been possible as a result of the mix of strategies and approaches adopted to map, identify and reach out to vulnerable girls. These included:

- Household surveys focused on identifying out of school girls
- Girl specific micro-planning
- Intensive community household level dialogue and sensitisation
- Building partnerships with programmes such as Mahila Samakhya and NGOs to reach out to the isolated pockets and small groups of out of schoolgirls who are often left out of the mainstream attempts to ensure universal elementary education

Given the scale of the programme there have been several glitches and gaps. In the initial stages there was a tendency in some cases to enrol very young girls vitiating the upper primary thrust of the programme. This has been corrected in most cases except in very difficult terrains where all girls have almost insurmountable obstacles to reach a school and there is no option but a KGBV. In some states like West Bengal, there has been a temptation to convert the KGBV into a hostel for girls already enrolled in upper primary schools.

Finally a chance to study!

In a recent visit to a KGBV in Gujarat, out of the 115 OBC girls in the KGBV, 95 % reported that they were child labour, working in cotton and potato farms. And more than 70 % had never been to school!

*Field notes, Kameshwari Jandhyala,
January 2011*

Despite commendable targeting, reaching out to the Muslim minority remains limited and is the challenge of the future. The National Evaluation also cautioned against being too sanguine and urged the need to be sensitive to the “possibility of extant hierarchies relating to class within the marginalised groups.... while targeting.”

Meeting Learning Needs of First Generation Learners

“...The KGBVs can be the model schools where it can be effectively and visibly demonstrated that educational backwardness of many generations can be overcome and girls can be role models. The learning needs of such children merit greater understanding. It is essential to work out what methods and materials to use to accelerate learning, how to enable children to reach grade level knowledge and skills.”⁷

Meeting the teaching learning needs of the girls in KGBV is a big challenge as they include girls who have never been enrolled and many who have dropped out of school at an early stage. Girls face problems on several fronts:

- Adjusting to the alien residential environment along with girls from different social backgrounds
- Being first generation learners coping with formal education and overcoming fears of learning
- Even for the school dropouts, learning poses a major challenge as they have not acquired or retained anything from their brief stint in the school
- Low self esteem and self-confidence is often a key barrier to be overcome

Preparing for Upper Primary Education: Accelerated Bridge Courses

While reaching the KGBV is a major challenge, it is after they enter that the girls in the KGBV face the biggest hurdle coping with the textbook, age appropriate learning and an environment that is totally new and quite alien to their lived experiences. For those who have never gone to school and even for those who had dropped out

of school at a very early stage, studying is a daunting task. Effective targeting has posed its own challenges in that several girls in each KGBV have never been to school and need an intensive bridging course before they can avail of the opportunity of upper primary education that the KGBV offers.

Developing a bridge curriculum and TLM and training teachers to handle the bridge courses has become an imperative for the KGBV programme. Assessing learning levels and placing girls in learning appropriate groups, and then, enabling the girls to move ahead as competencies are reached has resulted in retention as well as building the confidence of the girls that despite all their disadvantages they too can learn.

Care India for instance, in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, has been working consistently with the KGBVS to develop a structured bridge curriculum and pedagogy. In almost all KGBVs some form of bridging has been introduced and the duration ranges from 4-6 months. The whole bridging intervention needs much more rigorous attention in terms of nature of inputs teachers require, bridging curriculum and pedagogy and continuous assessment that is at the heart of the bridging approach.

Enriched Curriculum

“The experience of the KGBVs across the country has shown that a curriculum that goes beyond the textbook and what has been called as an ‘enriched curriculum’ has been effective in bringing out the potential of most girls in the KGBV. Opportunities for expression, creativity, freedom to dream, and above all to face academic challenges with confidence are emerging as hallmarks of the KGBV programme across the board.”⁸

⁷Vimala Ramachandran, et al (2007) Report of the National Evaluation of the KGBV program, Commissioned by GOI

⁸Kameshwari Jandhyala and Nishi Mehrotra (2011) Overcoming academic barriers: Challenging gendered academic boogies, KGBV in UP, Commissioned by Care UP

The striking feature of the KGBVs is what has been referred to as an enriched curriculum. Libraries, computers, sports, arts and craft, dance, music and generally developing expressive skills are offered to the girls. Students are learning sports, karate, cycling, dance, music, theatre and so on. They are active participants in many public forums gaining accolades for themselves and their KGBV. Every KGBV is attempting all this under the rubric of life skills education.

A lot more planning is necessary to infuse energy and meaning into life skills. There is a wealth of experience in the country in life skills education (Mahila Samakhya, Sandhan Life Skills Modules, Care India's Social Learning curriculum, Nirantar's women and health modules and the work of Doosra Dashak)—it would be useful to expose teachers, administrators and partner NGOs to the potential of a good life skill education programme.

Decentralised Management

KGBV by design allows for decentralised management in addressing both equity and quality education issues. The determinants of this are the autonomy and freedom enjoyed by the warden and institution in decision making.

- The key player in this process is the warden. She along with the Block/cluster coordinator of SSA takes most decisions regarding the running of the KGBVs
- Admissions to the KGBV is done by a small committee. The composition varies across states but by and large it is a decentralised committee that includes the warden, CRC, HM of the nearby school and representatives of the local VEC/SMC.
- In most cases financial delegations to the KGBV level has been done where the warden and the CRC manage the recurring expenditure budget jointly.

- Wardens we met talked of the autonomy they enjoyed. Within the institution they enjoy a great degree of freedom to plan the day and have the flexibility to change the day's schedule, change the menu, and various activities in the KGBV.

Concerns/Issues

The KGBV seems to be seen as a stand-alone intervention and not as a part of the overall quality initiatives of SSA. As a result, the KGBV is not benefiting from all the quality interventions being introduced by SSA.

There is a perception that the KGBV is a hostel for poor girls and not a formal upper primary school. And hence not enough is being done to strengthen the academic dimension of upper primary education in the KGBVs. If this is not nipped in the bud then the full potential of the KGBV may not be realised. There are some good examples emerging such as the thrust on strengthening science education by Care India in the KGBV programme in UP.

Teacher training needs much more attention. Teacher capacities need attention to handle multi levels, especially in handling science and math at upper primary level.

Greater attention to life skill curriculum is needed across the KGBV programme both in terms of the curriculum to be used as well as part of teacher training.

Wardens who are also often the Head teacher in charge, need training in school management so they are equipped to address both the curricular as well the management dimensions of the KGBV.

A major concern with the girls is what after the KGBV? Girls want some forward planning for them and do not see just marriage as their future. Quite obviously forward planning and linkages are emerging as crucial issues. In some states like AP

where the KGBV has been extended up to the 10th class, questions of what next still persist. MP for instance, has started counselling for girls. While all KGBVs have introduced some vocational training, a lot more needs to be done. Currently the approach is very ad hoc and sketchy. The vocational skill

development needs to move beyond basics. It requires greater depth and planning to translate into a possible livelihood. The recently formed National Skill Development Mission affords an opportunity for convergence to address this component in a more serious and concerted manner.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The following observations are based largely on the interactions with teachers, head masters and other stakeholders we met during the course of doing the case studies. They are being shared with a purpose of engaging diverse stakeholders in the process of school education, as well as to generate discussion and debate. The recommendations cover diverse concerns in school education, and the effort here is to restrict them to the issues specific to our research. We hope that these will work as catalysts to bring about the desired changes in school governance.

Decentralisation

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution devolves power to decentralised local authorities as far as possible, whether they be Panchayat, Village Education Committees or municipalities, and to School Boards. This in turn means that the management of schools, including the use and management of funds, could be decentralised to local authorities.

Our observations lead us to conclude that there is a need for:

- a. Raising awareness among community level organisations like VEC/VSS/SDMC/PTA etc. who do not have clarity on their roles and responsibilities. Orientation programmes organised and conducted on a regular basis with various stakeholders including parents, may help committed individuals in these bodies to identify with school development plans and their own roles within these plans. Community participation is an important instrument to improve the day-to-day functioning of schools.
- b. There is a need to shift from one time training regime to one that is need based, continuous and built into the system. While we came across sporadic instances of orientation programmes, the exception was Karnataka, where SSA, in collaboration with APF, promotes and supports large-scale capacity building programmes of SDMC members under the Namma Shaale programme which is being run in selected clusters of four districts.
- c. Without, for a moment, questioning the commitment and motivation levels of community representations in school committees, the reality is that they are ill equipped to monitor quality. This involves academic issues including teaching learning processes and learning outcomes. They are involved in the administrative aspects of the school and monitor the infrastructure development and its maintenance, enrolment and retention issues and in some states even teacher attendance and performance. It is therefore unfair to expect them to provide leadership in this domain without building their capabilities.
- d. Strengthening the partnership between the community and the school. One way could be to regularly share information with the VEC/VSS/SDMC/PTA. Currently data collected by CRC/BRC officials is only being sent upwards to the district and state. Sharing this with the community representatives will lead to higher level of involvement in school administration.
- e. Ensuring adequate representation of parents in community level organisations. In most of the VEC/VSS/SDMC bodies, there is hardly any presence of parents, and their voices are heard only occasionally. Karnataka is perhaps one state where federated SDMCs exist and parents are reasonably active (thanks to the joint role of Karnataka government and Azim Premji

Foundation). Replication of models like the present may be studied and applied to other parts.

- f. Organising awareness classes and continuing literacy sessions for parents at the respective school level since a majority of parents of the children studying in government schools today are either semi-literate or illiterate. Madhya Pradesh has developed modules for such orientation programmes, but these are one-time interventions and need to be conducted at regular intervals. This responsibility may, in due course of time, be delegated to the local SDMC bodies or national missions like Saakshar Bharat, or Mahila Samakhya. The role of Karnataka State Trainers' Collective in the mass literacy campaign and its current participation in strengthening community participation in Karnataka is a good example of such action. In addition, there are scattered examples of parental literacy and awareness drives (teacher-parent interface) in existence in few schools of Kerala. These efforts may offer some cues.
- g. Strengthening the BRC/CRC staff and structure. As of now, it appears that BRCs/CRCs add only to the administrative strength of education department and contribute little to academic learning in government schools. Barring a few exceptions like Kerala, these structures are either underutilised or not utilised. Of these two structures, CRCs could play a crucial role in the school learning. This aspect needs to be addressed immediately. Most of CRCs are understaffed.
- i Fill in vacancies at the earliest.
 - ii. Reassess and rationalise the geographical area covered by each staff (150 -200 schools).

iii. Change their perceived role as “data collectors and supervisors” to “support”. Presently, there is over emphasis on meetings and report preparation, which results in reduction of attention to cognitive areas of learning.

iv. Build capacities of staff to start addressing the issues related to elementary levels. BRC /CRC support roles still continue to be restricted to primary level as defined under DPEP, even though, under SSA, they need to look beyond.

h. Revisiting the specific role of DIETs, which are currently not perceived to be under SSA. All DIETs must be mandated to also train existing teachers.

Inclusive Education

In our research, we came across some interventions that attempt to ensure greater access to education for deprived categories like children from SC/ST/OBC, minorities, and girls. UTHAN in Bihar works towards inclusion of the poorest of the poor, the ‘musahars’ (maha-Dalits). Another programme, ‘Hunar’, in the same state, provides vocational education opportunities to Muslim girls, while ‘Meena Manch’ in various states focuses on gender empowerment issues. In Madhya Pradesh, some flexible and sensitive schooling strategies focus on including minorities, children in backward regions, remote locations and difficult terrains. Additionally, DIETs in MP conduct regular training programmes for teachers from Madrasas on ‘hard spots’ in various subjects.

Though strategies for ensuring increased access to schooling are still largely focused on Madrasas, there are examples of minorities being included

in regular schools across states. In Nagaland, the team did not come across any strategy to include children of migrants from Bangladesh, who according to officials have now acquired large numbers.

There is clearly a need for:

- Greater synergy and coming together of strategies to include all in the same school/ same area. The strategies to inclusion of SC or ST children or girls or children from migrant families or children with special needs need to converge in the same institution and need to help teachers look at diversity as a strength that could help children appreciate the value of social equity and justice. This is a powerful way to help nurture the values enshrined in the Constitution of India.
- SSA could actively encourage this kind of synergy by documenting and highlighting programmes or schools that look at equity and inclusiveness as a continuum—thereby making sure that every single child in the community is welcomed into the school and given the opportunity to learn and grow.

CWSN

The 13th JRM noted that in several states, proper methods are not used for identification of CWSN, and adequately trained personnel to recognise various kinds of disabilities are simply not available. There is a shortage of special educators to train teachers in schools and provide need-based support to these schools. In almost all the states, facilities for home based care and education of CWSN are limited. School level planning for the inclusion of children with special needs is yet to take off. This needs to be done with the active involvement of the community.

We have similar observations from our research. The category of CWSN which is most attended to and for which the largest provisions, human and financial, have been made is the orthopaedically challenged category. Almost all schools visited, including KGBVs, by our teams across all states, had ramps in place; some even had specially designed washrooms. Funds were available and being utilised for such construction. However, it was noticed in several schools of Nagaland, MP, Bihar, Karnataka and Kerala, existence of a ramp is no guarantee that all CWSN of this category have been admitted, even when such children were detected in the neighbourhood during community surveys. Of course no child was actually denied admission, but there is a clear need for:

- a. Making available trained therapists/counsellors /teachers for provision of adequate home based care and counselling for parents and children. A large number of problems associated with special needs require constant supervision and handholding of both the child and his/her immediate family members. Shortage/absence of appropriately trained staff across all states was evident, particularly in Nagaland, where identification of such children and their support at the community level has not been undertaken at all due to this reason.
- b. Preparing plans and making adequate arrangements to train teachers at school level, to engage with children having hearing/speech problems, and visually challenged or autistic children. For orthopaedically challenged children or children with mental retardation (MR), presently only lip service is being done. Though considered 'included', MR children have been found to be actually excluded from the classroom processes, since the teachers have not been trained to deal with multi-level teaching.

c. Planning for, and making available, not only specially trained teachers but also the essential technical appliances at school level. This obviously calls for a separate budget, which may not be justified if there are just one or two children who require these in any school. In such cases, a cluster level approach could be adopted, where trained staff as well as special appliances and teaching materials could be made available for a group of CWSN. Transportation needs of such children to such central locations in the cluster may also need to be addressed. The needs of such children, as well as teachers, need to be factored in more thoroughly while making provisions for school education.

School Management

What does school management consist of? In some of key informant interviews and interactions with the head teachers, the general response to this question was that school management tasks were:

- 90% academic (regularity of teachers/other staff–personnel related, student participation and progress–quality related, and distribution of incentives)
- 10% logistics (timely opening and closing of schools, ensuring full enrolment/regular attendance; supervision and management of financial matters, infrastructure maintenance, ensuring proper sanitation, school development planning, etc.).

To put it in very simple words, proper school management means making the school functional.

The head teacher is the fulcrum around which the school revolves and who is ultimately responsible for 'good school management'. However, a universal observation in the team's interactions

with head teachers across states was that none of the head teachers had ever attended an orientation programme/focussed training on school management. It is simply their motivation, commitment and experience that guides them in managing their school well. There is hence a strong need to empower them, to build capacities at this level, and to develop specific strategies for *quality inclusive education* by building relationships and working with the local community. Head teachers, as well as the academic and administrative supervisory institutions like the CRCs, BRCs, DIETs, and other arms of educational administration, need to share with the community real time data on schooling, and develop school plans together with them. This may truly then be classified as decentralised school governance.

KGBV

KGBV institutions have a lot of promise for girls' education. Almost all states have expressed satisfaction over the introduction of this scheme. But the question posed everywhere was "what after class 8?" With the exception of Andhra Pradesh where the state government has taken a special initiative to extend educational facilities in KGBVs up to class 10, this is seen as a stand-alone intervention.

- a. There is a feeling among SSA staff of different states that at this point in time, there is a need to first consolidate what has been achieved by KGBVs. Large scale expansion of these institutions must be undertaken only after a thorough review.
- b. There is a perception that the KGBV is a hostel for poor girls and not a formal upper primary school. Hence much more needs to be done for strengthening the academic dimension of upper primary education in these institutions.

Recommended Good Practices and Policy/Programmatic Environment

Policy/programmatic environment for good practices in the states visited:

Nagaland	Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institution and Services Act, 2002	VEC selected by Village development Board and has powers to monitor teacher attendance (no work no pay rule), pay/withhold salary and monitor school level grants
Kerala	Drives for parental awareness and literacy by school teachers; Eco-consciousness among school managements; Kerala Panchayat Act Amended 1999.	All funds routed through Panchayat, some of them allocate more resources. Panchayat Education Committee monitors schools including utilisation of resources. HMs present status report to PEC at regular intervals.
Bihar	Utthan programme to address inclusion of Maha Dalit (Musahar)	Tola Sevak interface between families and school, escort, provide academic support and motivation to enrol, attend and learn.
Karnataka	Namma Shaale (<i>My school</i>), a school-community connect programme since 2007 (in 4 clusters). An SSA-APF joint initiative in the state of Karnataka, with support from KSTC (Karnataka State Trainers' Collective).	Proactive engagement with community of parents, Panchayat, school and local NGO/facilitators to build ownership and enhance quality.
Madhya Pradesh	Jan Shiksha Adhinyam (1998) the overarching framework and power to manage school devolved to Panchayat in 2002	Palak Shikshak Sangh (PTA) to oversee school functioning, help identify CWSN and also inclusion of girls through Mahila Shikshan Abhiyan and Ma Beti Sammelan
Tamil Nadu	Activity Based Learning (since 2005)	Child-centred and activity based pedagogy has re-energised the school and provides for multi level learning in the classroom. Has been very effective in integrating CWSN in the school with all children.
Gujarat	Legislative approval for Village Education Committee and Ward Education Committee in 2003. Training of HM initiated in collaboration with IIM.	Clear delineation of roles of different decentralised structures—district, Taluka and village. With exception of teacher salaries all funds transferred to school.
Andhra Pradesh	Efforts in promoting MLE (Multi Lingual Education); Preparation of MLE Primers; KGBV identified as a best practice in the country; Under RTE, Academic Monitoring Committees have been notified in 2010. Extended statutory status to these committees and schools treated as community assets.	The AMCs yet to take off. KGBV well run and managed, with great autonomy and extended up to class 10.



Case Study 1: KGBV in Andhra Pradesh

Hemalata Lavanam Memorial KGBV, Kotaiah Camp, Varni, Nizamabad District, AP

The establishment of the Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya is of historical significance as they exclusively focus on girl children, especially those outside the mainstream formal education. At Kotaiah Camp under Varni Mandal in Nizamabad district the social significance of the KGBV is more pronounced. For, this is renamed after the most reputed Dalit woman social reformer from Andhra Pradesh, late Hemalata Lavanam (a building with an approximate market value of Rupees 1.5 Crore for housing the KGBV was donated by the NGO, Samskar free of cost). Both these women have played their roles for the benefit of fellow Indian women who were left either unsung or uncared or excluded or suppressed. While Kasturba Gandhi was the wife of M.K. Gandhi, Hemalata Lavanam was the disciple of Vinoba Bhave (almost an undeclared heir to Gandhian modes and methods after the former's death). The Indian Nightingale, Sarojini Naidu, must have reflected on the sacrifices made by most unassuming Indian women like Kasturba and Hemalata, when she writes, "We strive for the joy of morrow and water your seeds from the wells of our sorrow."

Between 2004-05 and 2008-09 the government sanctioned 395 KGBVs to the state of Andhra Pradesh.⁹ In addition to this, Government of India recently accorded sanction for 348 new KGBVs.¹⁰ As per official statistics; the KGBVs in the state could cover approximately 54000 girls so far. The transition rate of girls (2008-09 academic year) from class VII to class IX has been highly impressive in the state and stands at 94.8%.¹¹

In the state of Andhra Pradesh the KGBVs have some unique features: KGBVs are run by government agencies viz., APREIS (Andhra Pradesh Residential Education Institutions Society), APSWREIS (Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Residential Education Institutions Society), APTWREIS (Andhra Pradesh Tribal Welfare Residential Education Institutions Society) and Disabled Welfare and Senior Citizen (DW & SC) Department. In addition to these societies, the district units of SSA are running 21 KGBVs where the operationalisation of the programme was initially fraught with a few field level difficulties. The KGBVs in Andhra Pradesh are providing education up to the level of class X. During the session 2008-09, eighteen girls secured admission in IIIT and during 2009-10 eight girls secured admissions in IIIT from the KGBVs run by APREI Society.¹²

The KGBV at Varni is a residential institution mainly for tribal girls. It is run by APTWREIS. It has a total strength of 170 girls out of which 156 are ST girls (belonging to Lambada tribe), 07 belong to SC and 07 are drawn from families below poverty line. There are no CWSN children in the school at present. The school reports 100% retention of children and the rate of transition too is 100% as on date. The teaching hours extend for 5 hours in day and there are two periods of one-hour duration conducted for children in the form of remedial coaching.

⁹Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Andhra Pradesh, *Annual Report, 2009-10*
¹⁰9th Executive Committee Meeting, SSA (RVMA), Andhra Pradesh, January 24, 2011.

¹¹SSA, *Annual Report, op cit*

¹²The idea to create IIITs in Andhra Pradesh came in April 2007, at the request of the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. In the following year the AP Government created RGUKT (Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies) by an act of the Legislature as a full-fledged university which would initially admit roughly the top 1% of the rural students into the three residential campuses. For details see <http://www.rgukt.in/home-aboutrgukt.html>.

The interesting aspect about the school is the highly protected and modern kind of residential facilities. They are as follows:

- The Varni KGBV is run in a building donated by local NGO, Samskar. The building is now registered in the name of the government. It is renamed, following the donor's suggestion, as Dr. Hemalata Lavanam Memorial Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya. The original budget allotted for the construction of the school is now utilised for raising additional classrooms and dining hall.
- The KGBV has a massive and modern building in two floors with full electrification.
- The school has 10 rooms for girls to stay and every room has attached toilet facilities.
- The school has 24-hour bore well water facility with tap connections running through the entire building with separate overhead tanks for two blocs. In addition, the school gets water supply from local Gram Panchayat.

Quite interestingly SAMSKAR, the local NGO has given its second campus now to Mahila Samakhya of Andhra Pradesh (AP Mahila Samata Society) to run its residential programmes for women and also NPEGEL activities. The campus is now renamed as Hemalatha Lavanam Education Resource Centre for Women and Girls.

The school is within the immediate reach of local PHC for medical help. In KGBVs, the in-charge of the facility is called the Special Officer (Warden). Generally the Special Officer (SO) is appointed on deputation from government schools or DIET colleges. But the Varni KGBV has a male retired MEO (Mandal Education Officer) as the acting SO on contract/outsourcing basis. The teachers are known by the name CRT (Contract Resident Teachers). There are 7 teachers in the Varni School and many of them hold B. Ed. (Bachelor of Education) degree. There are eight non-teaching staff members in the institution (five for cooking, one ANM, one accountant and one physical training instructor).

The supply of reading and learning material is regular and sufficient. Since the classes are from class VI, the institution gets regular government textbooks and workbooks that are used elsewhere. In addition, the school receives additional teaching material in the form of charts, science lab material, measurement kits, etc. The school has sufficient grant funding (non-recurring as well as recurring) in place (in school bank account) for purchase of utensils, furniture, stationery and related items for use in school. But it is observed that owing to lack of intra-department cooperation and coordination, a major amount remains unutilised in the school despite an immediate need for doing so.¹³ The SO of the school is an experienced man who retired as MEO (Mandal Education Officer). His experience and subject guidance are helping the teachers in the institution. He regularly monitors the lesson plans of all teachers and helps in the preparation of the same as per the revised guidelines under SSA norms. There is no separate TLM grant given to the school so far. Though support from local MRC/MRP is very occasional, the services of the SO in the school are more complementary in nature. Students are assessed through regular tests (following government norms on examinations and their schedule). In addition, special classes and tests (subject-wise) are conducted for children studying in class X. The school reports no corporal punishment.

No hitches are reported in the fund management for routine operations of the school. A fund tracking mechanism is in place and money gets transferred online. The SO and the parents' committee monitor the expenditure and usage.

¹³For example, children are seen squatting on floor in every classroom. The KGBV has received fund amounting to INR 367000 almost three years ago and it remains still unspent. This is simply due to the fact that purchase committee was not constituted by district administration so far. See *Proc. RC. No. 3965/Accts. I/KGBV/2007-08 dated 10.3.2008 and DV4925/KGBV/F3/07-08 dated 6.5.2008.*

Special Officer and CRTs in the school are positive about the outcome of decentralised process in school administration and academic routines. Work completion is now fast under the new process. Learning has become more child-friendly and the concentration of teachers in view of regular monitoring by parents/parents' committee (SMDC) has increased.¹⁴

Monitoring of mid day meal scheme is very interesting. Children in the school are formed into different groups to monitor school activities, and the following is a good example of how effective monitoring by the children has been. The supply of vegetables is contracted. The contractor himself is a tribal man (belonging to the same Lambada tribe).¹⁵ His supplies of vegetables vis-à-vis the ordered quantity had been noticed to be highly erratic. Smelling something irregular in the process, the members (children) of food committee weighed the vegetables on a particular day and found that he supplied less quantity of vegetables. The children made a hue and cry. They brought the matter to the notice of all concerned. The contractor was severely warned of dire consequences. Now, the children weigh the vegetables every day and report the same to the SO. The children in the institution extend their monitoring supervision over aspects of child discipline and sanitation in the campus. They are supported by subject teachers in the process.

The SMDC (School Monitoring and Development Committee) was formed very recently during the month of June 2010. Earlier, the parents used to have an informal body to coordinate with the school and local institutions. There are 12 members on the committee now and they get elected from parents' general body.

The relation between the committee and local governance bodies can be said to be very cordial. The KGBV at Varni was earlier run in a government ICDS centre with just one building and one bathroom for all the children. At this point in time, the local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), district tribal welfare officials, the elected representatives

from the region and the parents requested the local NGO, Samskar to provide space and accommodation for the school. The government even proposed to pay rent for the accommodation at Rs.1.50 per square foot.¹⁶ Following the request from the government and elected representatives, the Executive Committee of Samskar (NGO) decided to give one of its spacious buildings (Chelli Nilayam) in Kotaiah Camp, Varni, free of cost provided the Government of Andhra Pradesh gave its consent to rename the facility after Late Dr. Hemalata Lavanam, founder of Samskar.¹⁷

One of the local vested interests instigated a few women at this juncture and tried to claim the property of Samskar. At this juncture the parents committee convened a meeting under the leadership of the local elected representative (ZPTC), gathered all the children and marched towards the building. They forced the occupants outside and asked the children to occupy the building meant for them. Soon the building, as per the suggestion of the local NGO, was transferred to the government and registered. This episode is a good lesson in the triangulated governance model involving elected representatives/government, parents' community and NGO.

After the incident the parents' committee members have become highly pro-active in their roles. The current Chairman of the SMDC has identified 10 OOSC (Out Of School Girls) on his own and

¹⁴Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted with SO and CRTs on 26.01.2011.

¹⁵Mr. Kishan Rathod from the locality is the contractor. His misdeeds are observed by children who recommended to the parents, committee as well as SO cancellation of his contract. *Interview with children of food committee*, 26.1.2011. He is still continuing. Axe may fall on anytime.

¹⁶FGD conducted with elected representatives from the Varni Mandal on 26 Jan 2011. Members present were- M/s Radha Sreeram, Local Sarpanch; Y Srinivasa Rao, Vice President, Varni Mandal Praja Parishad; Ranja Naik, Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency Member, Varni; P Nagaraju, Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency Member, Kotaiah camp, Varni; K Saya Reddy, Chairman, Agricultural Market Committee, Varni.

¹⁷Interview conducted with Mr. Lavanam (Chairman, Samskar) on 17.1.2011. Mr. Lavanam (81) is the husband of Late Dr. Hemalata and is the co-founder Samskar.

admitted them into the KGBV at Varni. It is also observed in other KGBVs that teachers and warden (SO) are highly motivated and adjust the existing budget in order to provide expensive items like Boost (nutrient powder to be mixed with milk) to the children. In another place, the SO spent from her own pocket to purchase a belt and a tie for all the girls so that they too feel they are attending an elite educational institution.

Some of the innovative measures SMDC members of Varni KGBV are now undertaking to monitor the school routines and quality education are as follows:

- a. Most of the girl children come from the local tribal hamlets (called Thanda) which are scattered. The parents' committee identified one person per tribal hamlet as the nodal communication point and even (in needy cases) purchased mobile phones for them. When children go home during vacations, these contact persons from every tribal hamlet monitor the children and make sure that they go back to school on the first day when the school reopens. They also contact other nodal persons from different tribal thandas to crosscheck the status of children from the respective locations.
- b. Many of the parents are illiterates. The new method of monitoring children's education is quite interesting. Whenever the children come home during holidays, parents ask them to write a few paragraphs of what they learnt from

different subjects. The parents then get a local teacher or educated youth to check what their children have written.

- c. Recently the parents' committee members demanded the introduction of +2 level education in the KGBV. The main reasons they cite for their demand are: higher education will get employment for girl children; marriage for girls could be postponed as long as they study. Parents are now prepared to contribute towards the cost of the KGBV at Varni. They said, "We used to send our children to private schools and pay around 2000 to 3000 rupees. They are now admitted here and we are relieved to that extent. In case of need in the school, we are now prepared to contribute a major part of the amount we used to spend earlier on our children. We are ready to support the cause of continuing education of our children."¹⁸ In the recently held SMDC Meeting also the members discussed this and passed resolutions on some of the other issues in school viz., need for mosquito nets, furniture and raising the height of the compound wall.

The local governance model, pro-active SMDC inspired parental committee and highly aware students make the process of learning in the present school interesting and noteworthy.

¹⁸FGD, *Ibid*

Case Study 2: Care, Inclusion and Innovation in a UPS, Andhra Pradesh

Mandal Parishad Upper Primary School, Yendada Village, Chinnagadili Mandal, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh

As we entered we saw a school with old buildings, leaky roofs and patchy walls, classrooms requiring improved infrastructure, mid day meal kitchen needing repairs and a sparing use of sanitation facilities in the school. We wondered if these features of a government school paint the image of a good centre for learning. Certainly, they do not under normal circumstances when the other attributes of learning atmosphere are not counted. Then what is it that makes a place of learning interesting? Human element, urge for innovation, commitment, empathy for children with special needs, experimenting with designs and procedures that enlarge the mind space of child learners, unanimity of purpose in teaching and mutually rewarding relationship with local communities form the basic structure of the process of learning. It is this basic structure that is effervescent, strong and resonant at Yendada village school in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh state.

The Mandal Parishad Upper Primary School at Yendada village under Chinnagadili Mandal in Visakhapatnam district makes an interesting study from the human perspective. The ongoing efforts for child improvement and school development sustain the readers' interest and offers valuable cues for others to emulate. The school has a strength of 188 (boys 84; girls 104) mostly drawn from backward classes of the locality. It has seven classes with nine classrooms (including administration and kitchen rooms). The school reports 100% retention and 95% attendance (average). Children in classrooms are provided all the needed textbooks and joyful learning kits (Snehabala kit for joyful learning by children in primary sections). In addition to this, the teachers in school donate notebooks and the local community donates pencils and other stationary needs. The centre is free from all forms

of punishment and child abuse. Teachers provide a healing touch and have a caring heart, leaving no space for any occurrence of child-related abuses. The school gets regular and approved grants from SSA that is routed through a bank account. There is no delay reported in fund disbursement.

Some schooling processes of utmost importance that emerged during the course of interactions and visit:

- Care and concern for CWSN
- Innovative methods of teaching
- Experimenting with user-friendly systems of student assessment
- Proactive role of teachers and head teachers
- Inter-generational support from community
- New twist to co-curricular activities
- Shaping children as change agents in the school

Young children often want to play truant from school. They do so not out of any premeditated act or calculated design, but because of a lurking fear. The fear is all about the required care and concern in the school. The fear is also compounded by the presence of newcomers in the school in the roles of teachers, as children see them. The fear becomes compounded when the child suffers from any physical or mental challenges. Children have a bountiful imagination where they imagine themselves to be centres of pristine pure caring, love and concern. For these precise reasons and, perhaps, unfounded fears, these children tend to stay out of the school as long as they can. For them, admission into school is a kind of a forceful parental act, where they feel that they have entered the field of unwilling drudgery. For children with challenges or children with special needs, this is almost a state of confusion and bewilderment. Unknowingly and yet briefly, they curse the paternal despotism during the first days in school. All this regurgitation takes place in their minds for one single reason viz., the fear arising out of absence of a personal touch in human relations and a motherly approach towards their emotional needs. These children, especially those with challenges tend to think that everyone who is not friendly with them has no mother. They

start feeling at home whenever they find persons providing space and scope for satiation of these emotions.

Each and every teacher and vidya volunteer¹⁹ in the Mandal Parishad Upper Primary School at Yendada village, is striving their best to provide emotional empathy and space for the CWSN children, and to create a homely atmosphere in the school. There are three CWSN children in the school under study. One is a boy with cerebral palsy and other two have minor physical/hearing challenges. These three children feel highly confident of their presence in the school and this is reflected in their behaviour. The methods adopted by teachers are simple, innovative, indigenous and child-friendly. The steps are as follows:

- At the outset, children are allowed free access to any classroom, anytime. This method of approach is designed at the school by the teachers and head teacher.²⁰
- Teachers involve children in all the school level activities for the sake of participation. At a recent function, a child with cerebral palsy was the centre of attraction and even uttered a few words into a mike from the stage.
- Children with special needs are not treated as separate from others. In every school and classroom activity, they are involved in groups at par with other children.
- Some teachers regularly carry sweets and savouries with them to school for distribution to erring heads and special needy children
- All these children in the school are involved in co-curricular activities and cultural celebrations (like fancy dress).
- As a matter of routine, almost every teacher shakes hands with all children every day and this physical action serves as an effective token of an enduring human touch in social relations in the eyes of children.

- Parents of CWSN children are allowed in the school any time they want.

These efforts by teachers have yielded expected outcomes. Whether it is one child or more children, the effort and method of approach of these teachers is one and the same. The entire process has a human touch. All these measures are not part of any scientific guidelines and usage of therapeutic artificial devices/aids.²¹ The fundamentals of what a special needs child requires are provided by teachers with a human touch. *Pandu, a class one student suffering from cerebral palsy, mild mental retardation and speech problem stands out as an example here.*²² *The way the child behaves with confidence in the school, mingles with other children and interacts with teachers is commendable. He thinks that he belongs as much to the school as he belongs to his parental home. This sums up the efficacy of efforts by teachers at the school in reference.*

The school has a problem with attendance of children. Many families migrate to the adjacent Vijayanagarm district during vacations. These migrant families leave the village with children and often do not come back when the school reopens.

¹⁹All the teachers and vidya volunteers are women. The only male teacher is the head teacher. This is only coincidental. They may get transferred in future.

²⁰*Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment*, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, , p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_institutions_December_2008.pdf

²¹SSA, AP has released leaflets with detailed literature on the method of identification of children with challenges and the required actions on part of the teachers in dealing with these children. Guidelines for teaching are provided in these leaflets. They are printed in local Telugu language. See for example, *Have you noticed these characteristics in children?* (Telugu), State Project Office, Rajiv Vidya Mission (SSA), Hyderabad, 2008

²²He demonstrated his skills during the school visit on January 22, 2011. He sang a song (using mike), uttered a few alphabets in Telugu and his lip movements can give you an idea of what is confidently singing or uttering.

The teachers and village committee members decided on a three-pronged strategy to deal with this situation.

- Firstly, conduct a parental awareness meet at school
- Secondly, conduct household visits to migrant families
- Thirdly, counsel children directly.

Of all the strategies adopted, student-counselling sessions proved highly successful. The counselled students pressurised their parents to return to the village soon after vacation. Over a period of time it has been observed that the problem of late attendance had come down substantially.

New and offbeat experiments were introduced in the school as part of improving quality of learning. The measures adopted by teachers in the school are not directly related to textbook learning. Instead these efforts are aimed at improving the mental faculties of child learners. As part of the effort, teachers introduced four methods in the school: focus on slow learners, conducting teacher training by head teacher who is a member of SRG, introduction of puppet-making in the school and conducting cultural programmes regularly. Children in the school recently released a brochure on the harvest festival (locally known as Pongal/Sankranti festival). They have also prepared and released a separate booklet on the celebration of Child Rights Week in the school. These additional programmes have complemented the classroom attention, levels of reception and learning.²³

The methods of testing/assessment of children adopted by teachers in the school are again interesting. They are:

- Story telling (if possible from textbooks itself)
- Read and explain exercise (child is asked to read a lesson and explain it to the class)
- LEP (Learning Enhancement Programme) Modules of SSA
- Unit Tests/Slip Tests as per government guidelines

Project work for children (Tasks given in groups of three). A group of children is asked to prepare a road map from their homes to school, capturing approximate distance and landmarks on the way to school. Another group, for example, is asked to observe and collect samples of flora from the nearby hills (Visakhapatnam is part of Eastern Ghats Region). Children in the group are also asked to stick these samples on paper and display these in classrooms. One group of children even collected a pitcher plant from the hills and hung it on the classroom wall.

Teachers attribute the modest success of their efforts in the domain of quality education to the changes being brought under SSA to the levels of self-confidence among young learners that have shown considerable improvement. The decentralisation process has helped teachers to take more initiatives. The responsibility of school development is now shared with the village community thereby improving school-village interactions and relationships. Monitoring of teachers by village community members has certainly enhanced the levels of responsibility. Utilisation of school grant is now free of tension and teachers were seen taking their own decision on what to buy.

The role of local community is supportive and complementary in nature. An inter-generational support structure is seen in the school. Land for the school was donated long ago (around 1950s) by a local philanthropist. The support did not stop with this. His progeny too studied in the school. The grandson of the donor and his nephew too were present during the time of school visit.

²³It is amazing to note that children in classes III, IV and V have exhibited prodigious memory and awareness on contemporary social happenings. During classroom interactions in the presence of teachers and district officials, children recalled all the major social and welfare schemes introduced by the government Andhra Pradesh during 2004-09 and their impact on poor families.

In addition, five old students of the school (all in the age group of 50-65 years) took part in the meeting conducted on the day of visit. In a departure from traditional ways of maintaining village funds collected for religious purposes, the committee took a decision two years ago to spend a major amount on school development.²⁴ The old school required urgent repairs for which SSA provided no funding support. The school ground was uneven consequently water stagnated, and the area was full of mosquitoes and pigs, creating an unhygienic atmosphere. It was at this juncture the village committee decided to divert funds collected for a religious cause to attend to school repairs. This decision found appropriate support, and the committee spent around Rs 150,000/- towards filling of pits in the ground, repairs to the entrance gate and installation of a main gate. The local municipal corporation sanctioned a bore well for drinking water needs. Today, the school looks normal even though the building and classrooms (including mid day meal kitchen) are still in need of substantial repairs.

The School Education Committee (SEC/AMC) is present in the school like the MRC and CRC at the upper levels.²⁵ They meet periodically. The AMC was established in the year 2009. Often it works jointly with the village committee and supports all its activities. The members of the committee came to know about RTE 2009 during the Gram Sabha meeting. Members of the committee are elected from parents' body in the school and conduct monthly meets. Communications between AMC and

CRC/MRC are not regular. The AMC members said that they do not generally meet officials from CRC/BRC.

The present government school is the only public educational facility in the locality. There is now a unanimous demand from the community to upgrade the school to a higher secondary school (up to class10) and a representation has already been made to the government in this regard. The community is in a state of preparedness and a local business house has already announced a donation of Rs 3,000,000 towards the cost of classroom construction when the government takes a decision in favour of the local demand.

Suffice it to say, the superstructure in the school needs assistance and funding. The schooling process needs replication, emulation and upgrading of classes to tenth grade.

²⁴The village fund is generated from membership contributions from households at the rate of one hundred rupees per annum. This amount is most often spent for the conduct of religious car festival and other religious gatherings in the village.

²⁵The former village education committees and school monitoring committees are now called AMC (Academic Monitoring Committees). It is stated that AMCs are in place due to nonfunctioning of earlier bodies. These bodies are expected to have a representative membership from all sections concerned. They are expected to monitor school development activities. The MRC (Mandal Resource Centres) are exclusively quality academic aspects. *Interview, SPD, SSA, AP, December 24, 2010.* In view of the role definition the name AMC appears to be a misnomer.

Case Study 3: Head Teachers are a Driving Force, Bihar

School: Rajkiya Madhya Vidyalaya, Village: Amarpura, Cluster: Amarpura Block: Naubatpur, District: Patna (Rural)

On a winter morning, some 80 kms away from main town of Patna, accompanied by the VSS Coordinator, we drove to Amarpura village. While the major part of the journey was on pucca roads, the last stretch of some 15 kms was on a kutchra road, winding through mustard fields that were turning yellow in early December. In between the fields one could spot dwellings, where men and women went about their routine chores.

Enrolment, Attendance and Dropout

We reached the school a little before the morning assembly, and went around the campus of the school. The school has an enrolment of 1,120 boys and girls, with 13 teachers and the Headmaster. There are no children from the minority group, nor any CWSN. Almost all children are from families engaged in farming in the feeder area. There are 15-20 private schools in the vicinity. The HM confessed that there are an equal number of children not enrolled in this school, and he has no option but to advise quite a few parents to instead seek admissions to the nearby private schools since his

own school's infrastructure does not permit him to enrol any more children. The shortage of teachers continues despite a massive recruitment drive undertaken by the state.

The high number of children enrolled speaks of the changing perceptions of parents towards education. Most children belong to farmer families from OBCs and SCs who see the role of education as empowering and providing a certain social status to their sons and daughters. Issues of inclusion and equity are not of any relevance here. There are no signs of discrimination in seating, eating, playing, and teaching as the school caters to a more or less homogenous social group. Parents and family provide limited assistance with studies. They are mostly uneducated themselves. Problems have to be resolved at the school itself.

Attendance of children was almost 100% on the date of visit. This may have been because of the scheduled examination. Attendance registers for the previous month indicated an average attendance of 75%. The number of girls enrolled was higher than boys, and they were also more regular than boys. The reason was not hard to find. Parents sent boys to the 15-20 private schools in search of better education, while girls were enrolled in the government schools. However, once the boys were in, they stayed on. There had been no dropouts.

Enrolment of children class wise and category wise

Class	Total Enrolment		SC		OBC		Minorities		CWSN	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
1	12	8	-	-	-	-				
2	20	12	4	5	10	8				
3	22	33	4	7	18	20				
4	30	29	11	4	11	30				
5	28	46	9	3	18	32				
6	125	162	27	18	108	92				
7	135	161	20	11	105	107				
8	146	161	12	15	99	79				

Note: Remaining children are from the "General" category.

School Infrastructure

The school has two pucca buildings. An old one with 10 classrooms for classes 1-8 and a new building with 5 additional classrooms. A dedicated room for the Headmaster is under construction and expected to be ready by March 2011. All classrooms are equipped with benches and tables. Children were seated very close to each other. Some children sat in the corridor connecting classrooms as the number of classrooms were inadequate. The building appeared neat, clean and freshly painted in pink. It appears that all schools across the state are painted in the same colour. The ground in between the new and old buildings was the playground. The school had a high boundary wall with a steel gate where a guard keeps check of entry/exit of children and visitors.

There is a ramp for CWSN (with no handrails)– however, there were no CWSN enrolled. No CWSN have been identified in the last village survey.²⁶ Toilets for both boys and girls were functional. One toilet had been upgraded for use by CWSN from funds received from SSA though there were really no CWSN. There was a hand pump for drinking water. Clay pots are used to store drinking water.

The sound of children singing the morning prayers attracted our attention to the group of students who had gathered for the morning assembly. The prayer was an ode to the integration of all religions and urged everyone to pay respect to all. Children lined up in an orderly manner and four girls led the prayer, while others (including teachers) joined in the chorus. This took about 10 minutes, and was followed by a girl student from Class 8 who read out the headlines from a local Hindi newspaper. Later, an announcement from a student informed the assembly that there was an examination in English on the day of visit, and wished everyone good luck.

If there is one area where significant improvements have taken place, it is in the infrastructure. Besides pucca buildings, functional toilets and drinking water, the classrooms have usable blackboards with adequate supply of chalk and duster, a table

for the teacher and provision to store the registers safely. Among the achievements of the school are provisions of access, and its promotion as being attractive to parents.

The mid day meal (MDM) was to be served at 2 pm. Not prepared in the school campus, the meal was supplied by an SHG, promoted by an NGO 'Ekta Parishad' against a contract. The weekly menu for the mid day meal was displayed on the wall. The HM informed the team that all children actually eat in the school.²⁷ Good hygiene practices, such as washing hands before eating, cleaning the space before and after eating were followed. Children ate and shared the meal together. There were no visible signs of discrimination and the objective of MDM as a medium for social integration was achieved.

Teaching-Learning Process

Since the day of visit happened to coincide with the day of examination, no teaching learning process could be observed. Teachers provided clear instructions on question papers, time limit, etc. Since they were sitting so close to each other, chances of them looking into each other's answers could not be ruled out. Indeed the teacher was in no position to supervise and invigilate as there was no space for her to move around. Some children experienced difficulty in reading sentences.

In Class 2, while 26th January was the right answer placed by some children in the blank space, they failed to read the sentence preceding the blank "Republic Day is celebrated on -----." And again,

²⁶*Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, , p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_Institutions_December_2008.pdf*

²⁷As per SSA circular, the meal has to be prepared by women from the scheduled caste community only. This is to eliminate any exclusion at its very source. Once a child eats the meal prepared by a member of an SC, inclusion is already well managed.

it was indeed amazing to find that though they were unable to comprehend the meaning of some questions, the answers they wrote were absolutely correct.

The handwriting of most children was another disturbing issue. Some children could not read their own handwriting. Teachers said there was no time allotted to practice and improvement of handwriting skills. Teachers had a general idea of who were the 'bright' students, and those who needed 'help'. It appeared from comments made by teachers that there was remedial coaching available to those needing 'help', in the form of extra classes after school, peer assisted learning, or in extreme cases home tuitions.

TLM (Teaching Learning Material)

All classes displayed charts and posters on issues relevant to their curriculum. Teachers received TLM funds. Decisions on the utilisation of this grant are however taken collectively, through a committee constituted by HM. Selected members of this committee along with some senior students jointly prepare a list of class specific and subject specific TLM, along with a list of required raw materials. A couple of teachers are then assigned to go purchase the raw materials. TLM prepared jointly by teachers and students, is either displayed in classrooms or is stored in HMs room where teachers can access it easily.

Computer Education

A room close to the gate had been identified as the "computer room". With support from Prakriti Enterprises, a local entrepreneur group, the school received three desktop computers, a printer and a projector. A generator was also supplied by the company to overcome problems of power failures. A teacher trained by Prakriti Enterprises is available to the school. However, there were no visible signs of the room being in use on a regular basis: computers were not even plugged in, and broken furniture occupied nearly half the room.

Library

The school had a small library with just about 500 books (mainly story books), quite inadequate for a school with an enrolment of 1120. They are given out to children during school hours only. Once the new building is functional, plan is to set up a room with reading facility. Part of the TLM grant is utilised for purchase of books for the library. Teachers as a group felt that since enough TLM has been developed, only minimal amounts are required to replace the worn out material.

Sports, Games, Extra Curricular Activities

The school functions from 10 am to 4 pm. The timetable includes a time slot for games. However, with the exception of a cricket bat and ball, and

Class-wise/subject wise quantities of TLM available in school are as follows:

Class/Subject	Maths	Science	Social Studies	Hindi	English	Total
1	10	-	4	3	4	21
2	12	-	6	7	4	29
3	15	-	9	8	4	36
4	15	-	10	5	5	35
5	16	-	12	4	5	37
6	12	7	6	-	-	25
7	Kit	Kit	12	-	-	12 + Kit
8	Kit	Kit	10	-	-	10 + Kit

a football, no other sports equipment was visible. Girls outnumber boys, but there was no activity mentioned by the HM/teachers on any specific sport that has been planned for them. The reason given was that there was not enough time. Moreover, girls prefer to study and complete their home assignments during school hours. There is no evidence of any children's forums, clubs or groups. There is no Bal Panchayat.

Corporal Punishment

As a policy, there is growing momentum against corporal punishment. State governments have issued directives or announced policy banning corporal punishment. The National Policy of Education is categorically against corporal punishment and calls for its eradication from states. The Ministry of Human Resource Development has recently written to all state governments to abolish the practice of corporal punishment in all educational institutions.²⁸ The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has also issued a set of guidelines to abolish punishment within the educational system. The HM, teachers, and dialogue with ex VSS member did not reveal any patterns of punishment meted out to children. This was also crosschecked randomly with some children. HM and teachers categorically denied using any kind of punishment, or verbal discrimination. They appeared to have a general idea on the government policy against it, though the school did not have the policy guidelines in their records. The method most commonly adopted was to inform parents of the erring child and if need be organise home visits to counsel parents and child together.

Performance Evaluation

The details of CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation) are still to be worked out. HM and the teachers have heard about this system, but look towards BRCC to explain and provide support. In the meantime the school continues to follow the quarterly examination system. As per new norms,

no child till Class 5 can be detained. The records did not indicate that any children have been detained due to inadequate learning outcomes. Evaluation of teachers is limited to their timely and regular attendance. However, HM does monitor the performance inside the classroom randomly, and offers assistance in teaching whenever asked to.

Role of Head Master/Teachers

The HM joined a year ago at the end of 2009. Prior to taking on this assignment, he was a member of the gram Panchayat. He is a Post Graduate in Education and is deeply involved in the progress of the school. According to him, his responsibilities include:

- Organising community surveys, the 'bal panji', at regular intervals, to locate out of school children.
- Providing assistance and advice on enrolment of those children who cannot be accommodated in his school.
- Making arrangements for and supervising repair and maintenance of school campus/building.
- Coordinating with BRC for release of SSA funds for school maintenance & TLM.
- Following up on incentives provided under SSA which includes textbooks for all children and uniforms for girls.
- Supervising the MDM, and providing solutions to related problems.
- Monitoring attendance, and organising tracking of children not attending school; visit or arrange for home visits to parents of children not attending
- Ensuring 100% attendance of teachers and supervising their performance.

²⁸*Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment*, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, , p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_institutions_December_2008.pdf

- Assisting in the procurement/preparation of TLM.
- Monitoring quarterly performance of children and taking necessary corrective action.
- Coordinating with ex-VSS members²⁹ and soliciting their support.
- Being a team leader and keeping the team members motivated.

In short, he is expected to ensure that the school functions well; teachers come on time, are regular, and are teaching; children attend classes regularly and are learning; the campus and building are well maintained & clean; materials required for effective teaching learning are available; there is rapport with parents and other community members to solicit suggestions for improvement and support; and finally, be available for solving all kinds of problems. The HM provided an insight into the activities of the previous day—refer to box below.

Training of HM

Effective school management requires a special skill set. However, HM of this school depends largely upon his own experiences to run the school as effectively as he can. He has never been through any training specially designed, developed and conducted to facilitate his needs and functions as HM. The only training he has undergone is the pre service training for prospective teachers, or subject specific in service training, again for teachers. Some HMs, he says, are given training in maintenance of accounts and made familiar with financial reporting. However, he is not aware if there is any training designed specifically for HMs to build their capacities in school management. Others like him have learned to manage through learning on the job, through models that they may have developed as teachers, or simply followed other head teachers. It may be safely concluded that in the absence of any formal training on school management issues, it is ultimately the personality, leadership, commitment and vision of the HM that contributes to making the work of a HM successful or otherwise.

Role of CRC/BRC

The school is the centre for CRC. There are no additional benefits for the school because of this though some coordination is expected with other schools in the cluster. The BRC was also situated within the campus. The BRC Coordinator, present on DoV, informs that twice a month, 2-hour meetings are held with Resource Persons (RPs) to discuss a wide range of issues like sourcing a particular material for development of TLM, resolving issues related to part time teachers, keeping children motivated & involved in the teaching learning process.

Interaction of RPs with teachers/HM is focused on obtaining general information and provision of technical support wherever necessary. However, dialogue with the BRC Coordinator conveyed that visits were planned for routine data gathering on issues like enrolment, dropout, retention, number of children clearing Class 8, distribution of textbooks/uniforms, MDM, etc. for transmission and collation at district level, and follow up on administrative/financial issues. Academic support activities were planned only at the district level, and their frequency was limited. Observing the ground level realities it appeared a little unfair and perhaps ambitious on our part to expect the BRC Coordinator to not only have the knowledge but also the skills to provide support to HM on school management issues, monitor and evaluate the professional skills of teachers, and carry out problem solving on different aspects of teaching-learning. The BRC coordinator had a limited understanding of his roles and responsibilities, and was inadequately equipped to carry out these tasks. Additionally, no orientation/training/capacity building programmes for BRC coordinators themselves had been conducted to familiarise and

²⁹*Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment*, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, , p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_Institutions_December_2008.pdf

A typical day in the life of the Headmaster

The HM leaves home at 7.30 am. On the way to school, he visits a VSS member and requests him to call a meeting at the school to discuss how they can mobilise funds to protect the trees he has planted on the campus. This discussion goes on for an hour. Realising he may be late for school, he starts his motorbike and travels half a kilometre before a community member accosts him: "HM Saab I need a little advice from you. Please grant me a hearing." He looks at his watch as he is getting late, but he simply cannot ignore the plea of the community member. He shuts off the engine of his motorbike, parks it on its stand, and hurriedly pulls out his cell phone to dial the number of one of his teachers. He informs the teacher of the situation he is in and requests her to proceed with the morning assembly. He patiently listens to the community member, who wants to get his daughter admitted to Class 1. Much though the HM would like to grant him this admission, he has no room left in his school. The PTR is already 60, and if he gives in now, he will be compelled to grant admission to many other children too. He explains his problem to this parent. "So if you cannot take my child, where do I take her? Can you advise me which other school to go to? Do you know anyone there? Can you recommend my case? I might get some concession in her fees if you certify that cannot admit my child in your school".

The HM sits down in the field with the farmer and discusses the pros and cons of some of the schools. This takes him through another hour. It is nearing 10

am now and his school is still 15 minutes away. He kick starts his motorcycle and rushes to school. The assembly is nearing completion, and the children are already dispersing to go to their classrooms

On reaching, the HM takes a round of the school. He inspects the water storage facility. He had asked for the clay pots to be replaced and the area around the hand pump to be cleaned. No, the clay pots had not been replaced. Reason being that the size of pots required was not available that day. He then attends to some other cleanliness and administrative issues. At around 1 pm, he visits the classrooms and gets the first opportunity in the day to meet the teachers individually and see the children. He advises some on sitting arrangements, some on TLM, and some on participatory teaching. He checks the attendance registers, enquires about absent children, and chats with children at random

The HM has been able to monitor only 5 classes and it is time for MDM. He rushes out and inspects the food and the arrangements. He supervises the MDM, reinforces the importance of washing hands before eating, inspects if there is soap, water and towel, etc. After the meal, the children play for a while before returning to their classes. Teachers have their lunch. The HM himself settles for just a cup of tea and is on his makeshift desk. He will have a designated space once the new building is completed. Thereafter, he briefly attends to his correspondence.

help them understand their roles and support them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) had no formal linkages with SSA. The only course being conducted is on the lines of a Teachers Training Programme conducted by IGNOU. However, there was a huge staff presence. School level teacher training programmes were conceptualised and curriculum

framed by SCERT. However, such programmes are generic in nature and not need based.

Fund Utilisation

The HM said that there were huge delays in receiving these grants. Funds reached finally only in December and utilisation was to be shown by end Feb–early March! It was simply not possible

The school received the following grants:

Type of Grant	Quantum	Purpose	Criteria	Who spends it
School Development Grant	Annual Rs.5,000 for primary school and Rs.7,000 for upper primary school	Replace blackboards, sitting mats, buy chalk, duster, registers, other office equipment	Whether it is a primary or an upper primary school	Only the VEC, SMC/PTA authorised to spend the money
School Maintenance Grant	Annual Rs.5,000 if school has 3 rooms, Annual Rs.10,000 if school has more than 3 classrooms. As per SSA norms, should not exceed Rs.7,500	Maintenance, repair of school building, white washing, beautification, boundary wall and playground	Whether the school has three classrooms or more	Only the VEC, SMC/PTA authorised to spend the money. SSA norms also say that community must also contribute for this purpose
TLM Grant	Rs.500 per teacher per year for all teachers in primary and upper primary schools	To buy low cost teaching aids, such as charts, posters, models, etc.	Number of teachers appointed in the school	Teachers are authorised to spend this grant
Classroom Grant	Minimum amount provided is Rs. 2 lacs however, the unit cost varies from state to state	To build one additional classroom in existing primary and upper primary schools	Enrolment and availability of classrooms	SMC/VEC monitors and supervises the work. How much is given to schools? For what purpose? What does it depend on? Who spends it?

(VEC-Village Education Committee, SMC-School Management Committee, PTA-Parents Teachers Association)

to spend all the money in three months. They had worked out a system: *borrow funds form Panchayat and return to them after receipt of SSA funds*. Government officials were aware of such a system, but expressed their inability to resolve the issue.

Additionally, HM's reach was just till the BRC, but on questioning the BRCC we found that there was confusion on the reasons for delay. Part of the reason for this confusion was because the roles and responsibilities were not clearly demarcated. The Panchayat officials said that the school grants

were the problem of the HM entirely. They were not responsible for any financial and administrative inefficiencies and delays. The block officials claimed it was the responsibility of the District Project Coordinator (DPC), who in turn states that it was the state's responsibility.

In the process of decentralisation, 15 members from the school, community, cluster and block level constitute a School Managing Committee, and are authorised to take decisions on financial, administrative and academic issues, including performance and evaluation of children, as also

monitoring performance and capacity building of teachers. The reality is that there is much confusion. Even within a single administrative unit, say for example the district, there were some individual officers that were given dual roles each with different lines of accountability. For example beginning at the district level, the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) is the district head of SSA, answerable to the State Programme Director for programmes under SSA only. At the same he is also the District Superintendent of Education, reporting to Director Education on implementation of all education programmes in the district outside SSA. This is true of all districts within the state. Moving downwards at the block level, in some districts one individual serves as Block Education Officer (BEO), accountable to the state education department, at the same time working as Block Resource Centre Co-coordinator (BRCC), accountable to the state SSA society. The situation is not necessarily better in blocks where the two posts (BEO and BRCC) are performed by different individuals. The HM thus, even while he has access to information finds it impossible to move ahead as it is not clear as to who is really accountable. The system allows each official to easily pass the buck.

Even within the school environment, HM has little authority over his team of teachers. There is a dichotomous situation here: While the HM has the authority to monitor attendance and performance of teachers and hold them accountable for quality of learning outcomes of children, the teachers view this differently. For them the HM is only a supervisory administrative head in their place of work/posting. Their promotions, transfers other personnel related issues including leave sanctions are decided by other district officials, where HM holds no authority.

Community: Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti (VSS)

At the time of this study the VSSs had ceased to exist. There is a legislative arrangement for election to the new VSS. Members would be elected by secret

ballot after the Panchayat elections scheduled in the state in February 2011. Currently a two-member ad hoc committee, comprising of the HM and one Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) member exists in several schools. The school visited for study did have such a committee. Interactions with an ex VSS member revealed that the one noticeable change over the past year has been the growing interest of some community members in school activities. As members of VSS they understood their responsibilities to be limited to three areas: children, teachers and school infrastructure and administration. For children the focus was on enrolment and attendance. They visited the school on a regular basis (twice a week at least), provided HM with support for conducting surveys to identify out of school children, interacted with parents to convince them to send their children to school, and also enquired whether children were learning in school. Concern for teachers was confined to their timely and regular attendance. He confessed that he was himself not that 'educated' to be able to differentiate between good teaching practices and ones not so good. This did not mean that they (other VSS members) were not concerned with equity and quality. They held HM in high esteem and relied on him for monitoring performance of children and teachers. Members took a keen interest in school infrastructure development and its maintenance. Any constraints were because of lack of clarity in the relationship between VSS and PRIs, as also their expected roles and responsibilities.

Partnering with local communities for effective governance, and the ability to mobilise community groups and initiate them into not only decision making, but to act as pressure groups in their geographical area is undoubtedly a critical skill. There can be several levels of this engagement. In this case it was obvious that in level one a demand from parents to educate their girl child has resulted in provision of educational facilities and some social norms have undergone a change. Education has transcended caste, gender and religious barriers and is thus more inclusive. This thought was clearly articulated by an ex VSS

member, who said: “Bihar ab badal gaya hai. Ab jaat aur dharma mein bhed bhaav nahin bacha hai. Agar koi antar hai to woh kewal amir-garib ka hai” (Bihar has now undergone a change. There is no discrimination on the basis of caste and religion. If any differences exist it is the difference between the rich and poor classes).

What do we Learn from this Case?

- School Management is restricted to following issues:
 - Children: identification of OOSC, enrolment and attendance
 - Teachers: regular, timely attendance
 - Infrastructure development and maintenance: Lot of time spent on this and significant progress visible
 - Greater understanding required in areas of teaching –learning methods and their efficacy and performance evaluation
- Decentralisation Process:
 - A committed and motivated HM can provide leadership
 - HM formally trained in school management issues. Has learned only through personal experience and examples of others.
 - CRC/BRC offer functional support, and advice on financial matters
- No clarity of roles and responsibilities at cluster/block level
- Capacity building of officials at block level if they are really to provide academic support
- Inclusiveness:
 - Limited to certain social groups, as these constitute the major population in the area
 - Infrastructure facilities exist for CWSN, but none enrolled. No CWSN identified in the survey
 - No aids/appliances for CWSN available
 - No formal training of any teacher for CWSN
 - Dependence on Resource Person at cluster level to conduct sensitisation programmes for community members
 - Social taboos prevent parents from disclosing identity of such children. Survey to probe further
 - Teachers need to be trained and linkages to be in place for aids and appliances
- Quality:
 - Government incentives available
 - Routine methodology of teaching adopted by teachers
 - TLM available and being developed regularly. Children participating in the development of TLM
 - Evaluation system on basis of quarterly examinations

Case Study 4: Utthan, Inclusive Education with a Difference, Bihar

A Case of High Expectations with Meagre Resources

School: Primary School, Village: Alawalpur
Block: Naubatpur, District: Patna

Village Alawalpur is situated about ninety minutes drive from block headquarters of Naubatpur. It is a remote village approachable through a narrow mud road winding in between paddy fields. After an hour of a bumpy ride on this winding road the thatched huts become visible signifying habitation. On nearing the huts, the vehicle traverses on still narrower paths, and at places it is almost scraping past the cows/buffaloes tied in spaces in front of huts. On a couple of occasions, the driver has had to get out of the car to move the cattle away to enable him to drive through. The vehicle is really close and one can literally see inside these huts. A kilometre later we suddenly come face to face with a double storied pucca building, with a gate and a boundary wall. This was the Primary School at Alawalpur.

We enter and are greeted by the Head Teacher (HT). She introduces us to the Tola Sevak. Children are in their classes, 3 rooms on each floor.

Like the other schools visited in the districts of Patna and Vaishali, this Primary School is also painted in pink and appears neat and clean. Infrastructure wise the school has all the requirements—classrooms, functional toilet for boys and girls, drinking water facility, ramp, kitchen, HT's room and a small playground.

The Bihar Education Project officers have selected this school for our visit, as an example of an intervention focused on special groups to provide them inclusive education. The SPD-SSA Bihar said that the programme called 'Uthan' has been conceptualised as an "innovative programme under elementary education, to complete the coverage of all Bihar's children, particularly those who belong

to the most excluded category".³⁰ He added that the attempt here was an integration of the programme Utthan, focused initially on children of selected districts belonging to dalit communities who had the least indicators of development. Following the success of the intervention in a small geographic area, the state government decided to roll out the programme throughout the state. The target population was out of school children of primary school going age from 'mahadalit' castes.

Dalits constitute nearly 15% of Bihar's population of 83 million. The economically and socially most deprived were declared Mahadalits. A state government commission identified 18 of the 22 dalit subcastes, including Musahars as Mahadalits. They constitute 31 % of the dalit population in the state.³¹ The Utthan programme is based on the concept of social justice that seeks to address socioeconomic, caste based and cultural issues that have been embedded in the collective consciousness of Bihar for centuries. Its focus is on those communities who from birth were labelled as polluted. The programme seeks to achieve the empowerment of the dispossessed Mahadalits by providing a strategy to keep their children within the formal school system. Among the Mahadalits, the Musahar community is one that is landless, living on the periphery of villages, and dependent upon daily wages in cash or kind in exchange for menial labour. Their caste name stems from 'mus' or rat, and 'ahar' meaning food, because of their consumption of field rats for sustenance.

This Primary School at Village Alawalpur is one such school where children from this mahadalit community are integrated with other castes and creed. Initially the Musahar community had

³⁰*Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment*, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_institutions_December_2008.pdf

³¹Ibid

misgivings that their children would not be welcome in school. This was based on their collective social experiences going back many decades. On the other hand, the teachers had certain 'attitudes' about the children being unclean and dirty and were also prejudiced against the community. This has all undergone a change with the intervention called 'Utthan'. This case documents observations on how this inclusiveness works at the ground level.

Strategy

A Mahadalit Tola or Mahadalit village was identified, and activities in this area were undertaken by a designated change agent called 'Tola Sevak' (TS) meaning a neighbourhood volunteer. The post of TS was not conceptualised to be that of a teacher. The primary task was to escort the children to school thereby ensuring attendance in school. For every 25 children there was one TS. Later, when it was realised that the children required a 'bridge to school' the TS was given the responsibility for providing two hours of learning in the evening at a common place in the Tola, so that children do not lag behind in class.

Additionally, TS performed the following roles:

- Collect the children (ages 6-10 years) from their homes and lead them to school
- Ensure that younger siblings of these children access the nearest Anganwadi Centre
- Ensure that all children enrolled in Utthan Kendra as well as their siblings have received immunisation and possess their 'health cards'
- Pay personal attention to the hygiene of children—ensure that they are bathed, and dressed in clean clothes for school.
- Check schoolbags to make sure they carry all required material.
- Ensure that children are served their mid day meals and observe that there is no segregation, discrimination of any kind of Maha dalit children.

- Motivate parents of out of school children in age group 11-14 years to send their children to Utpreran Kendra (residential bridge course centres) for mainstreaming.
- Spend a couple of hours in school and make note of any instances of unfairness, abuse or intolerance within the school environment.
- Meet the teacher and get information about the children's academic progress and thus identify those in need of special attention.
- Evaluate the learning level of each child and prepare a learning level baseline. Children to be placed in groups according to their learning baseline and TS to conduct need based remedial teaching
- Organise games and exercises on a daily basis for the children under his/her care and encourage children to play.
- Ensure that children participate in school level and block level sports activities and organise training sessions for children.
- On Sundays, supervise the cleaning of school uniforms.
- Reach school before closing time and accompany children back home, and see that they change out of their school uniforms.
- Identify child labour, arrange for enrolment in special residential schools set up for former child labourers. Inform authorities at block, district in case of resistance by child labour.

It is obvious from the above list of responsibilities that the TS is a parent, teacher, counsellor, mobiliser, governess, guide, instructor, trainer all rolled into one. One individual and so many functions!

The underlying theory in the Utthan strategy is based on three assumptions:

- That the local community will cooperate and participate

- That the concerned Head teacher and teachers will provide support
- That the TS will be diligent, motivated, committed and meticulously carry out all tasks listed above

Enrolment

The school caters to the children from the neighbouring areas that have a population of approximately a 1000. Children belong to different scheduled castes and other backward communities.

Enrolment of children class-wise and category-wise

Class	Total Enrolment		SC		ST		OBC		Minorities		CWSN	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
1	30	17	8	4	2	1	6	4	3	-	-	-
2	20	18	7	5	1	1	5	5	2	-	-	-
3	15	16	6	6	1	1	6	4	2	2	-	-
4	15	15	7	6	1	1	7	4	2	1	-	-
5	10	9	7	5	2	1	5	4	3	2	-	-

Note: Numbers do not add up to total. Missing numbers are of children from general category.

There are a large number of Musahar families and a little over 50 children were enrolled in the school with the help of services of two Tola Sevaks.

Approximately one third of the children in the school belong to the Musahar community (50 out of 165).

Inclusiveness

The school successfully exhibits an example of inclusiveness of social groups- scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities and Mahadalits, with gender cross cutting. GOB through its unique and innovative programme 'Utthan' has brought education to the doorstep of the child, including first generation learners, through fast track initiatives, and ensured full participation of the relevant group hitherto excluded. This is in conformity with the policy goal of social inclusion of GOI, recognising the dignity of each person, particularly the disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised group, while promoting people's engagement and participation. This is also in line with the Dakar Framework (UNESCO 2000) which outlines that inclusive learning environment

education is an essential attribute for high quality education and substantiated by the components of the education plan in the Eleventh Year Plan (2007 -12).^{32 33}

The Tola Sevak said that ever since the school started in the neighbourhood, the enrolment as well as retention has been 'good'. She said that earlier the children were not being looked after as both parents were engaged in earning their livelihood. With the introduction of Utthan—a programme focused on these children, the situation is changing. Through the support provided and efforts made by TS, the children were now integrated in the school system and were able to access government incentives like textbooks and uniforms, as well as mid day meals.

³²Protection of Children against Corporal Punishment in Schools and Institutions: Summary Discussions by the Working Group on Corporal Punishment, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2008, , p 14 available at http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Protection_of_Children_against_corporal_punishment_in_schools_and_institutions_December_2008.pdf

³³Status of Education in India, Prepared by NUEPA for MHRD, GOI, 2008

The Tola Sevak's view was that while the community appreciated her effort in collecting children from home, escorting them to school and dropping them back home, there were many occasions when she has had to deal with parents who still need to be persuaded to send their child to school. Even if she repeatedly tells them to send their child regularly to school they do not pay any attention. Again, many times the TS has to personally supervise the cleanliness of the child as some parents do not pay attention to this issue. Often they come without having a bath or cleaning themselves.

Nevertheless, some change is taking place. Some parents have begun to pay attention to their child's study. The interest is limited by their capacities to comprehend and follow what happens in school. It is a complex situation for both parents and their children. While for most parents the concept of their child going to a school is absolutely new, their children face problems in adjusting to the school environment. This obviously poses many challenges to the TSs as well as teachers.

Quality Issues

The school has 50 children from the mahadalit community, and therefore two TSs. While one TS was from the mahadalit community, the other was an OBC. On the day of visit TS Sangeeta Devi was physically present. TS Nirmala Kumari was away on some official work. Some of the observations are as follows:

- Children were in their classes. In some classes they were engaged in reading from their books, while in others, they were seen drawing or writing.
- There was no furniture in any room. Children sat cross-legged on the floor on old jute sacks. No 'taat-patti' (jute mats). It was winter season and floor was cold.
- Children had taken off their chappals and these were lined up outside the classroom in the verandah.
- Classrooms had no furniture. Even teachers did not have any table/cupboard to keep their registers and books.
- All classrooms had blackboards, but the chalk pieces were so small that they could hardly be held. Dusters were worn out.
- Children of classes 1, 2 and 3 were writing on small boards—either resting them on their laps, or on the floor.
- There were no teaching-learning materials displayed on walls, though there were some charts and posters available in the Head teacher's room.
- There was no library.
- It was examination time. Some children had completed their examination and were sitting idle. The answers to questions had been written out by children. However, children were unable to read the answers they had written and unable to comprehend the question itself. Yet it was amazing to find that the answers were correct.
- Only some children carried school bags. Some bags did not have the required books- perhaps because it was an examination day.
- Only some girl children were wearing uniforms.
- In one class the teacher was asking the children to write faster so as to complete the question paper in time.
- Only a few children could be described as neat, clean and prepared for school.

There was no mid day meal being served that day. The HT informed us that the contract for preparation of mid day meal had been given to a local woman and her family. They carried the hot meal to the school campus everyday and served the children.

Unfortunately, on the day of our visit, this woman had lost her newborn child, and the family was unable to provide the meal. Genuine reason—but no alternative arrangement made. Under the present circumstances, the contractor's family would not be in a position to supply the mid day meal for the next few days, but it appeared the HT had not communicated this to CRC/BRC and had no plans. The MDM menu for the week was however displayed outside HT's room.

Support from CRC/BRC

While the HT carries out the day-to-day functioning of school independently, academic inputs in the form of stories/diary notes for TS were provided by the BRC. Preparation of TLMs, lesson plans were made by the teachers themselves.

In the initial stages of the intervention, CRC assisted in the identification of the TS and recommended the name for selection to the BRC Coordinator. BRC Coordinator granted approval. Subsequently, resource persons at district level, who had been trained by state level trainers, conducted a seven-day residential training programme for TS.

At the cluster level, a one-day orientation and reflection is conducted monthly. A diary and a set of stories, songs and activities were provided to help TS conduct qualitative remedial classes in the evening.

Cluster level meetings were organised and conducted regularly. There is no fixed schedule, and meetings are generally need based. The last meeting was held a month ago and the issue under discussion was participation of community in school activities. The TS is normally included in all cluster level meetings. The thinking was that this sends out a message that the TS is a valued member of the programme. And the programme seeks to ensure that quality education is inclusive and universal.

In the three-tier system of decentralisation (village, cluster and block) responsibilities have

been demarcated. Table below gives an indicative list of what needs to be monitored, who will monitor what and at what level.³⁴

School, village and cluster level are responsible largely for infrastructure (development and maintenance), assist in conducting household survey, undertaking micro planning exercises, validating information collected through the DISE, etc., keep updated information on 0-14 years children in the village, maintain rapport with the parents, monitor enrolment, retention, drop outs.

The nature of responsibilities assigned at school, village and cluster level and their monitoring is fundamentally infrastructure related and data gathering in nature.

Even at the block level, a large chunk of monitoring is in the area of consolidation of data on children, teachers, funds utilisation, distribution of government incentives and school infrastructure.

Quality of education issues, training and orientation of teachers, performance evaluation and feedback form a higher level of inputs and monitoring and are managed at the district level.

No training and orientation of cluster, block, and district level functionaries to build capacities and understanding of the work assigned to has been planned. It is astonishing to find that the TS, who works at the ground level is required to undergo a seven-day residential training, followed up with a monthly orientation, but a CRC or BRC official who is assigned a wider range of responsibilities, works without an orientation. They are presumed to be either experienced or sufficiently capable of learning on the job. In any case, there is little input by way of academic support from CRC/BRC. Their

³⁴Monitoring Framework and Set of Indicators Arun C. Mehta Fellow, NIEPA, New Delhi, accessed from www.educationalforallinindia.com/page177.html

Who monitors what?

TASKS	Responsibility of	Frequency of Reporting	Info passed to	Feedback
School Level				
School grants received and its utilisation	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	CRC	
Teachers grant received and its utilisation	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	CRC	Quarterly
Enrolment and Class-wise attendance	School HT and VSS	Daily	CRC	Quarterly
Absenteeism, dropouts	School HT and VSS	Daily	CRC	Monthly
Names of teachers and whether present	School HT and VSS	Daily	CRC	Monthly
Teaching-learning equipments available in the school	School HT and VSS	Monthly	CRC	Monthly
Details of incentives and number of beneficiaries	School HT and VSS	Monthly	CRC	Monthly
Village and Cluster level				
Construction of school buildings, boundary wall.	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	BRC	Monthly
Construction of additional classrooms	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	BRC	
Major and minor repairs of school buildings	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	BRC	
General toilets and toilets for girls	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	BRC	
Drinking water	School HT and VSS	Quarterly	BRC	
Construction of CRC buildings proposed if any, initiated and completed	CRC	Time to time	District	
Construction of BRC building	CRC	Time to time	District	

Progress towards opening of new schools/EGS schools	CRC	Time to time	District	
Number of school buildings constructed	CRC	Time to time	District	
Functioning of CRC's/CRC meetings held and follow-up	CRC	Time to time	District	
Teachers' vacancies	CRC	Time to time	District	
Training programmes proposed and conducted	CRC	Quarterly	District	
Number of untrained primary and upper primary teachers (backlog)	CRC	Quarterly	District	
Teachers involved in other activities	CRC	Quarterly	District	
Teachers vacancies	BRC	Biannual	State	
Training programmes proposed and conducted	BRC	Biannual	State	
Number of untrained primary and upper primary teachers (backlog)	BRC	Biannual	State	
Teachers involved in other activities	BRC	Biannual	State	
Teachers vacancies, recruitment and transfer of teachers	BRC	Biannual	State	
Training of VEC/ Panchayat members, teachers, head masters, master trainers et	BRC	Biannual	State	
Vacant positions of teachers including the para-teachers and head masters	BRC	Biannual	State	

Access, retention, management, research, innovation, quality, civil works	BRC	Biannual	State	
Variety of indicators need to be developed and critically analysed	BRC	Biannual	State	

monitoring checks seldom go beyond collection of data to also include quality checks.

Community Involvement

By and large the community is appreciative of this effort towards inclusiveness. However their understanding is inadequate. Their level of interest and enthusiasm is low. Though they participate in the process, their time and lives are engaged in earning a livelihood. Involvement and ownership was limited. They were of the opinion that the TS provided support to the best of her abilities. After all she came with limited education and capacities. With 10 years of schooling, average scores, and a salary of Rs 2000 a month, were they not overburdened with the responsibility of implementing Utthan? Undoubtedly, recognition by the government to offer the job of TS, preferably to one of the members from the community, has raised their status, and provided them a sense of worth. They were perceived as the most disadvantaged class, meant for only very menial jobs. As TS says: "A teaching job was something offered only to higher castes. I could not even dream of getting one... By choosing me the government has raised the status of the community, and given me and all other women respect".

As for the change in the community, she goes on to explain that after seeing her go from house to house, there is a visible change in the women of the community. Entering other people's homes,

explaining the importance of education and assisting them to get their children into school is considered praiseworthy. Some of them exhibit a hidden desire that perhaps some day their children would grow up and take on this profession. Others say that by the time their children grow up and become parents the situation would have changed so much that they may not require the help of TS!

The TS says the community has begun to realise that sending a child to school is a "good" thing to do. They are extremely poor and have no resources to provide for books and uniforms, and perhaps this was one reason that they did not send their child to school. They can now see that their child receives books, food, and uniforms. More importantly, there is no discrimination and abuse by teachers. They feel that such inclusiveness has encouraged them and they feel happy at their rights being protected.

However, this is just the beginning of a longer and more meaningful engagement with the school. The process has just begun. It will take a while before the parents are involved in the teaching-learning process. Right now their concerns are limited to regular attendance, and cleanliness of their child. They feel reassured with the presence of the TS, who they view as a being preferable to the government teacher in the school. TS was like a 'family member' and replaces work of parents. She is perceived as somebody close and concerned.

Decentralisation

An innovative intervention like Utthan involves activities that are fairly simple. Programmes include basic activities like repair and maintenance of school buildings, arrangement for drinking water, toilets, distribution of government incentives, etc. It is an accepted fact that the Gram Panchayat and VSSs have considerable experience in dealing with such issues. Besides having the requisite information on technical/logistical issues, they are also sufficiently interested and motivated to pursue such tasks.

However within the school, other activities also to be monitored include enrolment and attendance of children and timely arrival of teachers. The VSS feels comfortable and has no difficulty in carrying out this responsibility also. However, when it come to participating and providing feedback in the teaching learning process, what happens inside the classroom, and how learning standards can be improved the VSS members face problem. They express their inability to do so.

It is therefore apparent that decentralisation needs to be understood in the context of what the VSS members are able to do. As long as the tasks require simple administrative skills the level of participation is high. The problem arises when under decentralisation VSS members are held accountable for academic supervision, monitoring and teaching learning inputs. They have neither the knowledge nor the capacities for these higher level processes.

Role of Head Teacher

The HT, walks from village Agwara—a distance of 3 kilometres from the school every day. At the end of the day she has to make this journey back home. She has three children—all school going, and her husband runs a grocery shop. School activities and

official/administrative work keeps her engaged through the day.

She has an understanding of the programme objectives and feels committed towards their achievement. She has made efforts to explain these objectives to concerned PRI members, VSS, and other community groups earlier. Now that the VSSs have been dissolved, she has little contact with the community, but regular interactions/feedback from the TS provides her an insight into the problems.

She has been a part of the selection process of the TS, and has realised that since the TS is the backbone of the programme, only an appropriate person needs to be hired.

Importance is being given to infrastructure development and rapport with the community. She however, looks forward to a higher level of support provided from cluster and block level officials. Provision of furniture, performance evaluation, improving quality of education, training on teaching methodologies, development of TLM are some of the areas where she would want additional support. She categorically said that she would like to be oriented on what constitutes 'school management'. She understands this to mean daily reporting on enrolment, retention, attendance of teachers and children; distribution of uniforms, books and mid day meals; building repair and maintenance and utilisation of funds received. As long as this constitutes 'school management', she thinks she is doing well with her team of 4 teachers and 2 TSs.

Challenges

Utthan is a programme targeted at social inclusion. It has to some extent been successful in achieving participation, active involvement and inclusiveness. It is a bottom-up process where people concerned

take action. Social groups with disadvantages and groups that are discriminated against or marginalised are undoubtedly the beneficiaries of these inclusive policies. A beginning has been made. So far indicators for social exclusion have been identified and steps taken to address these (for example Utthan). There is a greater need to identify factors of social inclusion, as in the long run it may not be possible to promote social inclusion working in independent areas like education. It is widely recognised that the nature of inclusion is multi-dimensional.³⁵ Changes in one area quite often affect other areas.

The programme rests on the abilities, commitment and skills of TS. The sensitivity, orientation and training of the TS thus are core issues. Since the TS are from the community, selection is restricted as there is only a limited pool of eligible candidates with the required minimum qualifications. This in turn affects the quality of on-site support—both academic and non academic. The role of the TS is that of a motivator, mobiliser, teacher, escort, guide, friend and supporter. Developing the skills of TS will ensure quality teaching-learning through continuous monitoring and feedback.

TS is the backbone and a foot soldier of the programme. It is a bit unrealistic to expect a person who is Class 10 pass with average scores and is given a salary of Rs 2000/- to perform such a wide variety of tasks. (See roles and responsibilities of TS in the foregoing pages). The roles obviously get diluted and the quality suffers. This is certainly a case of high expectations with meagre resources—both financial and human. Need is to re-assign some responsibilities to resource persons at the cluster and block level.

VSS members (only Ad hoc committee exists at present) and HT control disbursement of salary as well as learning material to TS. They often misuse this power, resulting in loss of motivation

and commitment of the TS. This may spell the collapse of this programme. Decentralisation is a double edged sword here. One option could be to make salary disbursement similar to teachers. TSs are more effective than teachers—they spend long hours at school as well as in the community.

While there is local enthusiasm for primary education, the quality of education provided was poor. Teaching-learning was not happening at times. Adequate numbers of TLMs were not available. Children appeared passive recipients. More academic support is required from CRC/BRC to liven up the classrooms. The problem of getting children into the classrooms and overcoming the dilemma of parents to send their child to school has been successfully overcome as a first step. The quality of education need not be compromised just because the community is poor.

Focus seems to be more on achievement of targets, rather than on core teaching-learning process. Monitoring process also thus includes issues like physical structures of schools, incentive distribution, enrolment and attendance. Aspects like community participation and performance increase does not dominate discussions. Indicators for qualitative outcomes in terms of performance and learning outcomes are non-existent. More thinking as well as action is required on these issues. Support from BRC/District is essential

HT has little understanding of what constitutes 'school management'. There is need for training of HTs, CRC, and BRC officials on what school management is and how this is to be monitored.

³⁵ *Expert Group Meeting "Promoting Social Integration" Draft Aide Memoire:* www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/...social.../AIDEMEMOIRE_REVISSED.pdf

Case Study 5: Vibrant Learning Environment in Rural Gujarat

Mahadevpura (Dhabala) Primary school Taluka Vijapur, Mehsana District, Gujarat

One was not very sure what to expect in the school and was prepared to be taken by surprise by whatever one saw. As one approached the school, its compound wall said it all; well built, clean and well maintained and with trees lining the outer perimeter. On entering, were the real surprises? Well maintained open ground, not very large but enough for children to play, two buildings with spacious verandas, and with every corner demanding attention. There was something or the other to see and we wondered how all this was possible in a government school!

As soon as one entered, 2 teachers quickly took us through their detailed photo documentation of how the school has developed, the various quality initiatives in the school, and above all conveyed their excitement of being part of the quality initiatives. The HM, a quiet confident leader allowed his colleagues to talk about the school intervening only to add some details. What came through was a sense of solid teamwork.

School Profile

This is an upper primary school with an enrolment of 168 students- 97 boys and 71 girls. The school was upgraded to class 8 in 2010. There are 7 teachers, 2 of whom are women. For class 8, teachers with postgraduate degrees have been hired especially to teach English, math and science. The PTR is a very comfortable 1:24.

How Inclusive is the School?

Issues of social inclusion do not seem to be a major problem here as the village has primarily forward caste and OBC families. The VEC President

informed that there are no Dalit or Muslim families in the village. There are no special needs children in the village! All OBC children are in school and constitute around 18% of those enrolled. The VEC members also reported that some OBC children, around 10, came from a nearby village as this school is seen as being good.

The Headmaster and the VEC members reported that the village does not have any out of school children. Between 2007 and 2010 enrolment went up from 143 in 2007, 160 in 2008 to 168 in 2010. Apparently the quality of schooling has improved so much that about 4-5 children were withdrawn from a private school and enrolled in this school. The HM was confident that all children were not only enrolled but also attending school regularly. This confidence of the HM was borne out by the attendance data that for the months of September to December we examined. Attendance ranged between 95-100% and dips to around 80% during November, which the teachers and VEC members attributed to the festival season. Quite obviously something is going right in the school that is pulling and keeping children in school.

On the day of the school visit 10-11 children were absent. The VEC president was quick to point out that this is not the usual case and that on that day the children had gone to a nearby temple where some special "*prasad*" (food that is offered to the Gods and then distributed) was being distributed.

When probed further, we were informed that sometimes the OBC children around 5-10 tend to be irregular. But given the fact that attendance tends to be very high, both the teachers and the VEC members were not concerned about this small number. This raises questions for the future orientation and sensitisation of both the teachers and the VECs. Now with RTE coming into force maybe this last marginalised small group will get the attention they need, with specific families being targeted. The VEC takes responsibility for this.

Infrastructure

The school has steadily improved its infrastructure over a 10-year period and has utilised all SSA grants optimally. There are 8 classrooms spread over 2 buildings, with a veranda running along the classrooms. There is a spacious office for the teachers, which also doubles up as the computer classroom.

The biggest surprise of all was the toilets. One may wonder why toilets take precedence over classrooms in the case study. Far too often one has seen either no toilets, or toilets with no water and hence unusable. Here there were two separate blocks for boys and girls, with a washbasin at the entrance, with running water, clean and hygienic. The pathway to the toilet stalls was well laid out lined with bricks and flowering plants.

The higher classes had benches to sit on while in the lower classes children were sitting on individual burlap mats with plastic desks to write on. Children were neatly turned out, hair in place and in well washed uniforms.

Teachers too have made their own contributions to improving the infrastructure. They contributed to cement seats around a tree, which is used by teachers for their meetings and for children to sit, talk, eat and relax. The classrooms have a quiet air of learning. They are full of TLM, and all children have textbooks, a bag, as well as notebooks. Outside the classroom are the more interesting ways in which science and math have been visualised as part of the BALA initiative.

Community Participation

As in other places this school has its PTA, MTA, VEC and the School Construction Committee. The roles of these various committees were clearly defined. MTA and PTA meet specifically to discuss issues of absenteeism or if there is a special occasion

or event in the school. The VEC and the School Construction Committees are the key committees. These two have defined powers of oversight, monitoring and financial management as well of various school level allocations. The VEC is the key body participating in all decision-making processes at the school level.

Involvement of the VEC

The VEC was actively involved in raising resources for the school. The HM and teachers were confident that whenever there is a shortfall of resources the community would not hesitate to contribute. For instance the community contributed 1 computer to the 5 already bought with SSA funds. The community had made many contributions to the school over time for repairs, whitewashing and recently in building a small Saraswati Mandir around which the morning assembly and prayer takes place. Quite obviously the VEC's role has also been validated and empowered through the various decentralisation measures. The HM sees the VEC as the dependable arm, which would bail out the school if there were any problems. Quite obviously having clear delegation of powers to these local level committees has created not only space for community participation but has enhanced a sense of involvement and ownership among the VEC members. During interactions the VEC members were clear that this was "our school" and that unless they were involved the school would not develop.

Quality Initiatives

This school is part of a cluster of 15 schools (3 Primary and 12 UPS) where several of the SSA quality initiatives are being implemented. The distribution of the quality initiatives is as follows: In 2 schools there is the BALA (Building as a Learning Aid), ADEPT in 7 schools, Prang (Activity based learning) in 6 schools and the Meena initiatives in 6 schools. This school is part of the

Some key aspects of the quality interventions

Reading corners	In the verandas and in each classroom
Garden borders for English practice	Names of fruits, vegetables
Compound wall, On doors, Window grills and water tank	Alphabets on benches of compound for Class I and II Information and visuals on yoga exercises, surya namaskar Geometric shapes pasted Geometric designs
Map stands and globe	In all classes. Maps of India, Gujarat and the concerned district. A very large globe placed near the play grounds
Festival celebrations	Christmas, Navaratri, etc. No mention of Muslim festivals
Question Box	Students pose their questions and teachers give answers on every Thursday
Picnics	For all classes
Akshay Dravya	Collect cash donations from teachers and the village to help poor children. Managed by teachers.
Yoga	For all children
English corner	Flash cards for the younger children For older children grammar and vocabulary cards
Use of ramp	As there is no CWSN in the school the ramp is used to teach numbers in ascending and descending orders
Land measurement	Land, measurement stripes are drawn at different places in the class so students can measure and compute
Periscope and kaleidoscope	Easily accessible to children and seemed to be used
Sand pit	For younger children to play
Eco club	Under this several activities are encouraged: Akshay Patra- children bring grain in matchboxes on a scheduled day. This is collected to feed birds Use of wastewater for watering the plants. A total of 219 trees and plants have been planted in the compound. Herbal plants (aushadi bagh) also grown and children taught to identify and use them
Health corner	A small dressing table with a full-length mirror. Oil, needle and thread, nail cutter, soap, first aid box, comb and napkins for older girls
Ram Dukan	Managed by 2 children at a time. On an open shelf pencils, erasers, etc. are placed with the price indicated. Students take what they need and put the money in a box. Seen as an important activity teaching responsibility and virtues of honesty
Khoya so Paya	Lost and found box also managed by children
TLM prepared by teachers	Teachers maintain elaborate files and scrap books on a variety of subjects- science, science experiments, jokes, historical sites and stories, leaders, etc. All this they said was used by them in their classroom
Computer Literacy	Computer literacy for teachers and children in the older classes.

ADEPTS (Advancement of Educational performance through Teachers support) and BALA (Building as a Learning Aid) programme. The HM and teachers are very proud of the manner in which they have been able to translate the special programmes of SSA in which the school is a part such as ADEPTS and BALA.

As the teachers repeatedly stressed, that both the interventions have enhanced teacher and child participation and interactions. "I am no longer confined to the blackboard," remarked a senior teacher. Several interventions are designed to be managed by the children themselves thereby enhancing leadership and accountability qualities among them.

During the DPEP phase considerable attempts were made to promote the idea that learning need not be confined to the classroom but that the entire space available in a school could be utilised for various learning purposes. In the late 1990s, one saw some example of this in Himachal Pradesh where in beautifully located schools alongside cliffs and where space was a premium, school compound walls had geometric designs built and used to teach children about shapes.

Taking off from such ideas, the BALA initiative is a SSA innovation where schools are encouraged to translate the concept into reality. One has seen many school design books on this concept but translation into practice at the school level has often been a very far cry from the concept. The biggest pleasant surprise was that the teachers were energised by the idea and all available spaces were put to very good use indeed. The teachers gave a small printout of what is involved in the quality initiatives.

What does one Learn from this School?

Obviously the dynamism of the HM makes all the difference in how state initiatives are translated and sustained at the school level.

This is a good example of what is possible with a team of teachers led by a HM who allows

his teachers space to participate equally in developing the quality aspects of the school. HM has a vision for his school- good infrastructure, a vibrant learning environment inside and outside the classroom, and generally to be seen as the best school in his cluster. Further the good rapport established with the local community, and mutual confidence in each other has worked beautifully for the school.

The feeling that the HM is setting the direction for development and quality education is very strongly held. Commitment and focus perceived at the top is seen as something to be emulated down the line.

Quite clearly the decentralisation to the VEC level has proved effective, as the VEC is sincerely involved in school development activities.

However still, some areas of concern remained to be addressed. As mentioned above, the school and the community need to revisit the notion of inclusion, especially since the initial hurdles of inclusion have been overcome like that of access, enrolment and the majority attending school regularly. The commitment to ensure that all children attend regularly and all successfully complete elementary education has yet to be fully internalised and acted upon. This perhaps would be true for SSA as a whole.

A more worrisome concern is the strong Hindu overtone in the school in terms of the visuals. When this was raised with the teachers, they felt that there was no tension in the school and the village as there were no Muslims. The idea that the school and education are secular spaces irrespective of whether the village community has a mixed representation is something that needs to be emphasised and reemphasised at several levels- community sensitisation, teacher training, the curriculum and in the classroom as much in the physical representations in the school. These would be the boundaries that would need to be pushed if inclusion with quality learning is to be assured.

Case Study 6: Harnessing Community Resources for School Development

Fatehpura (P) Anupam Primary school

Taluka Vijapur, District Mehsana, Gujarat

On reaching the school, we saw adults and children milling around in the compound. On the stage children were singing and generally there was lot of activity. It was the school health day, part of the Chief Minister's state-wide programme, and a monthly feature. PHC doctors came to check up children, and parents, mothers in particular were updated about their children's health status. Children with health problems are referred to the nearest government hospital and followed up by the doctor on their next visit to the school. The occasion was also used for children to display their talents in song, dance and drama.

In the midst of all the flurry of activities one managed a side conversation with 3 teachers, the BRC and 2 members of the VEC. The Headmaster was away in a meeting and hence one could not meet him. Everyone's attention was on what was happening outside and as one of them said this was a good example of the good relationship between the school and the community, not to mention the health department.

History of the School

One thing that was striking was the attention paid to highlighting the history of the development of the school. There were pictures of the thatched room in which the school started over 45 years ago and the gradual development as time progressed to what it was currently, the most imposing government building in the village. As one teacher said, children need to appreciate where we began and where we are today. There has to be an appreciation of how a school can develop if the local community is involved.

As in the case of the other school visited, there is a lot of documentation of all that takes place in the school. A printed file of the major activities and quality initiatives were shared that listed the thrust areas of the school.

Community Resources for Improvement of Physical Facilities

As one looked around, the involvement of the community was obvious in the imposing two storey building and well maintained open ground in the front which looked more like a function hall or a private college than a government primary school. The community and the teachers have a sense of tremendous pride in highlighting the contributions

Timeline of the growth of the school

1958	Located in temple with one teacher
1962	Small thatched hut with 2 rooms. 2 teachers and 35 students in classes 1 & 2
1985	Small thatched hut with 2 rooms. 3 teachers, 78 students in classes 1-4
1987	Small thatched hut with 2 rooms. 3 teachers 100 students for classes 1-4
1991	New single floor building with 6 rooms. 4 teachers and 110 students in classes 1-4
1995	Additional 3 rooms making total of 9, 6 teachers and 160 students in classes 1-6
2000	3 new rooms on the first floor, 8 teachers and 236 students in classes 1-7
2005	New Prayer Hall and computer room constructed with a cost of 4 lakhs, 8 teachers and 234 students in classes 1-7
2006	Additional 5 lakhs spent on improvements
2011	8 teachers and 257 children (147 boys and 110 girls)

of the local community to the development of the school which over the years has been to a tune of 20 lakhs. Started as a one room school about 50 years ago, gradually it was built up to a two storey imposing building with 11 classrooms, one big auditorium fully equipped with AV equipment, an office room, space in the front serving as a playground, an imposing compound wall all of which make the school stand out as a landmark in the village. The school has 12 computers, 3 of which were contributed by the community. There is a separate computer room and a separate laboratory. Here too there are separate toilet stalls for boys (5 for boys) and 3 for girls and with running water. The school is very proud to share its achievements and has its own website. As in the case of the other school, the teachers are confident that the community will meet any shortfall in resources for the school.

The list of areas supported by the community is impressive:

- Science Hall and computer room
- Prayer hall cum auditorium
- Benches, ramps
- Compound wall
- AV equipment, television, fax, Internet, computers, speakers, public address system
- Musical instruments
- Sports equipment
- Costumes and ornaments for cultural activities
- Pictures of national leaders, saints and scientists

All the above are cited as an example of growing community involvement not only in supporting the development of the school from a small community school to a full-fledged primary school but also of the financial investments made by the community in what is seen as a “national asset”. The VEC members were very clear that their primary role was in ensuring that the infrastructural needs of the school are met on time and that their children should not want on this score.

One could not fail to notice that the village is a very well to do village, and hence the quantum

of contributions to the school are not very surprising. What merits attention is the strong philanthropic trend, especially as it was clear that the school does not cater to the children of the rich, all of whom go to private schools. This suggests that the school and teachers have been particularly effective both in sensitising as well as advocating for community support to the school. And as the school document says, it is important to promote, nurture and develop a school-public partnership.

Profile of the School

The school is a primary school with classes 1-7. Class 8 will be added as per the requirements of RTE. The school has a current enrolment of 257 with 147 boys and 110 girls. The PTR is very close to the proposed norm and is at 1:32. There are 8 teachers, 3 of whom were women teachers. Several of the teachers had been in the school for over 5 years.

Issues of Inclusion

Children are drawn from SC, ST, OBC and other communities. This would suggest that the school has been successful in extending its social reach. A closer look at the data suggests OBC children outnumber all the other communities by a huge margin and constitute nearly 75% of those enrolled. This could be because of the social

Class	Registered		
	Boys	Girls	Total
1	25	25	50
2	25	25	50
3	23	8	31
4	30	16	46
5	20	8	28
6	12	18	30
7	12	10	22
Total	147	110	257

profile of the village but is an area that merits much closer attention by the school management. One was not able to get a very clear picture on this issue. There is one child with special needs who is an MR child.

As in the case of villages across the country, here too the BRC and VEC members were emphatic that there are no out of school children in the village, i.e., all children are enrolled. It is indeed surprising how well the notion that all children enrolled is sufficient to report and that there are no out of school children has been internalised not just in this village but across the country.

What then are the issues of inclusion in this school? While retention is reported to be 100%, attendance is a problem. When we looked at the attendance for the months of October to December 2010, it was quite worrisome.

We were informed that ST children, a small number of around 10 come from migrant families and hence tend to be absent for long stretches. Attendance is a problem among the other children as well. Boys, especially from the OBC community tended to be more irregular than girls. Most of them are child labour and work in cotton, potato farms and in agricultural work.

Everyone, the teachers, the BRC and the VEC members were quite blasé that every month these children are absent on an average for 6-8 days working as seasonal labour. The argument was that nothing can be done as they come from poor families and there is no escaping from fairly regular work even if it means regular absenteeism. These are perceived as issues beyond their area of responsibility or possible action of the school or the VEC.

Attendance			
	October	November	December
Classes 1-4	27-43%	23-38%	26-42%
Classes 5-7	22-28%	16-26%	21-27%

Here is a case where the VEC has utilised the powers given under decentralisation to the hilt in building up school infrastructure but seems totally oblivious of the glaring gaps in ensuring an inclusive school. One must be quick to add that the teachers share this sense of oblivion as well.

Quality Initiatives

This school is perceived by the state SSA office as harmonising all the quality dimensions of SSA. All the quality interventions are present such as ADEPTS, BALA, Pragna for classes 1 & 2, Meena Manch. As the school was busy with the health day it was difficult to get a clear picture of the quality dimensions. However, the brief interactions provided some insights. The classrooms and office were overflowing with TLM and sports equipment. It was difficult to gauge the extent to which the TLM was being used.

There is a long list of the quality initiatives operational as showcased by the teachers

The obvious differences were in classes I and 2 where the Pragna, activity based learning initiative had been introduced. All the basics were present- the learning ladders, activity cards, other materials such beads, etc., and children sitting in groups with an identified peer leader. The classroom was a hub of activity, but as this had just been introduced only 6 months ago, both the teacher and the students were trying to cope with the various dimensions of ABL.

Computer classes are held for 1 ½ hours before the school starts. A separate instructor has been hired. It appears that as per the time table, children of the older classes attend these classes. Once again it was difficult to assess whether this was a requirement for older children as part of the regular timetable

School Related Committees

Here too the practice of having VEC, school construction and maintenance committee, MTA and

Aspects of the quality initiatives as documented by the school

Technology tools used	Computer, tape recorder, TV,VCD, projector, audio system, CD library
Quality and Skill based interventions	
Ram Dukan Khoya Paya Bachat bank Akshay patra	Shop operated by children and not monitored by adults to develop qualities of honesty and accountability Students manage the lost and found corner in the school Students save their pocket money in school to learn importance of savings Students bring grain to feed birds in school
Prarthana sammelan	Morning prayer followed by yoga, bhajan, dhun
Educational activities	Weekly, monthly, quarterly competitions to encourage child participation and develop leadership qualities in them
Assessment and testing	Continuous assessment under ADEPTS ,Quarterly tests to track progress
English language for classes 1-4	English classes daily from 8-11
Computer education for students of classes 5-7	Classes held before the school started and conducted by a hired instructor

PTA exists. It is, however, the first two committees that are active and seen as having immediate relevance to the school. The school construction and maintenance committee manage and decide on the school maintenance and construction. The VEC from what one could gather, is the key structure that plays a proactive role on many fronts- mobilising resources from the community, mobilising children's enrolment, and monitoring the functioning of the school.

Overall Impressions

Even with impressive infrastructure and various quality initiatives, the assumption that assured quality would address inclusion issues automatically is questionable. Unless the teachers and VECs are sensitised and committed to addressing issues such as child labour, the problem will only be seen and understood superficially, and no efforts will be made to address it head on. In this school, the fact

of enrolment of children from various marginalised groups is seen as an achievement in itself and that these children would be absent for long periods of time is but natural.

The whole notion of what is quality seems to be confined to better and better infrastructure, a notion that seemed to be shared equally by teachers as well as the VEC members. What the teachers sought to communicate is the rich investments made by the community in developing the infrastructure of the school, with the quality learning dimensions in interventions as BALA being secondary.

As in the case of the other school, the strong visual representations of Hinduism bear down from all walls and nook and corners. Once again the place of secularism in an elementary school needs to be examined and built into the perspective building and training of teachers and the community.

Case Study 7: Urdu Primary School, Namma Shaale, Karnataka

Government Urdu Higher Primary School Kundur Block, Honnali Taluq Davanagere District, Karnataka

There is a traditional saying that a literate mother will benefit a generation to come. The logic can be better explained: a mother, if educated benefits all children in the family; an assiduous woman, if educated benefits the neighbourhood; a woman, if decides to take part in social issues of importance, benefits society and provides the connecting linkages which hitherto are missing. It is this last category of women from the minority Muslim community in Kundur block school that makes an interesting social discourse on primary education. Furthermore, the women in reference have another feather in their cap. They are responsible for admission of more girl students into the school where they are seen at the helm of SDMC (School Development and Monitoring Committee) affairs.

The school in reference is a government school with modest structures. Yet, it stands out for a few reasons: women have assumed a greater share in school governance; women have admitted more girl students into the school; most of the parents allow their children to learn basics in secular mode of education with a religious zeal.

It is all about connecting the community to school. A reasonable participation from the members of the local community not only enriches the schooling atmosphere, but it strengthens the process of community commitment to the basic learning of children. In the government upper primary school at Kundur merging trends of school governance are observed. The trends have a lot of inbuilt promise as women (mothers) and members of local women groups are involved in the management of school. The effort of these illiterate or semi-literate women is supported by a Rainbow of Stakeholders (parents, teachers, children, SDMC members, CBOs, Gram Panchayats and government education

department³⁶) in the new experiment of Namma Shaale.³⁷

The working of SDMCs in the state of Karnataka came under scrutiny of various research studies that had raised a few serious concerns on quality education, school governance and community mobilisation³⁸. To ensure harmonious relationship and to revitalise community-school connect, the government of Karnataka and Azim Premji Foundation have heralded an innovative experiment in the form of Namma Shaale. The declared goal of the project is to provide reasonable and logical understanding of the issues involved in education and, prepare the community to reflect on the process of education. It is an attempt at energising school management at the local level.

Process, participants, promoters and catalysts have been aptly put in the cocoon so that there is no risk of falling apart during the flow of the designed programme. The process of invigorating and improvising existing system of school governance has been nurtured and supported. As it is said, the stakeholders form the rainbow and one cannot imagine a single beam of radiating light doing a different symmetrical exercise in the process. Out of pooled up experience and aggregated wisdom, the Government of Karnataka and Azim Premji

³⁶The Phrase *Rainbow of Stakeholders* is coined by the SSA-APF project. For details vide, Aparna Kher, *History of Namma Shaale (2007-present day)*, Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore

³⁷*Namma Shaale* means *My School*. A detailed description of program strategy, goals, implementation and expected outcomes can be seen in Kishore Attavar, J Pradeep Ramavath and Y Ravindrakrishna, *Community participation as strategy in enhancing quality of primary education in Karnataka state: A case study of Namma Shaale initiative of Azim Premji Foundation and Govt. Of Karnataka*, Bangalore

³⁸Some of the studies in this direction are: *A study to evaluate the functioning of school development and monitoring committees in Karnataka*, Department of State Education Research and Training, 2005; *School Development and Monitoring Committee-A Study*, Centre for Child and Law, Bangalore; The Annual Status Education Report (ASER) 2005. In addition to these research works, the APF publications too shed light on the grey areas of SDMC functioning in the state of Karnataka. For details, see Kishore Attavar & others, *op cit*; and Aparna Kher, *op cit*

Foundation charted out a definite road map building on the experience of Karnataka State Trainers' Collective.³⁹ Various interactive tools have been designed as part of Namma Shaale:

- Intimate Interactive Theatre (IIT): Platform for deliberations and an introspective exercise within the community
- Participatory Planning and Action (PPA): An analytical exercise by people of the problems confronting primary education
- School Immersion Programme (SIP): Mapping larger issues related to school education at the village level
- Exposure visits: Opening a wide vistas before parents and other community members towards effecting a common vision
- Alumni Associations: A call for old students invoking nostalgia

These strategies and process tools are reported to have a positive impact on emerging outcomes.⁴⁰ The government Urdu higher primary school resonates with the efforts of Namma Shaale experiment in the Davanagere district of Karnataka. It amply reflects on participation of minority community in the school governance issues and demonstrates that what a community needs is an urge for educational development of their children and not the awareness of the technical parameters of quality education. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why semi-literate or illiterate women (both parents as well self-help group members) are taking immense interest in matters of school routines.⁴¹

The government higher primary school at Kundur is an exclusive minority (Muslim) educational institution and the mode of instruction is strictly carried on the academic guidelines given by the government. It has a total strength of 195 students. The interesting aspect about enrolment, as stated above, is the presence of more girls in the school than boys. It is as follows:

The meeting was held with parents, education committee members and local community and was attended by 59% of women and girl children studying in the school.⁴² The girl children who took

Class	Total Strength	Boys	Girls	% of girls
1	12	7	5	41.7%
2	20	9	11	55%
3	26	14	12	46%
4	22	01	21	95.5%
5	19	9	10	52.7%
6	31	13	18	58%
7	29	13	16	62%
8	36	13	23	63.9%
	195	79	116	59%

³⁹KSTC (Karnataka State Trainers' Collective), in a nutshell is a community of leadership created during the heyday of total literacy movement. It is an NGO of committed workers and robust trainers formed during the days of Total Literacy Campaign of late 1980s. The movement could build a strong base of volunteers participating in the campaign. One of the most powerful byproducts of the effort was the evolution of community awareness (among tribal and rural tracts of Karnataka). The combined effort of KSTC volunteers and newly aware communities posed a threat even to the strongly entrenched village polity and parties. During course of time KSTC volunteers drifted into different fields and activities. Their expertise has been meaningfully used by various donor agencies as well as Government of Karnataka. The set of senior planners of Namma Shaale of APF and many a government officer in the department of education today have been earlier associated the KSTC. The community of leadership and the cumulative wisdom of KSTC provided a basic platform for the evolution of new ideas in community communication process. Namma Shaale is one reflection of the historical effort for people's participation in rural educational governance. The efficacy of the KSTC is such that it calls for a separate documentation in the state of Karnataka.

⁴⁰The experiment has been executed in four clusters of the state with the help of local NGOs in Kundur, Rukmapur, Gaavadagere and Mirjan. For coordination and monitoring purpose CFT (Cluster Facilitation Team) was created with support from local NGOs (Spoorthy, ARRM-K, DEED and KSTC). For details see, Aparna Kher, op cit

⁴¹The president of local women's group donated INR 500 towards the repair of school computer on the day of visit to the school on December 28, 2010. She is aware that computer in school needs repairs and she cannot wait for the delayed response from the maintenance technician or government. Her donation has an implicit implication: anything can wait, but not child's education.

⁴²There are altogether 24 members present in the meeting. There are seven members representing APF and local NGO (Spoorthy). The rest, 17 members, are from community. Out of 17 there were 10 women and girl child members and seven male members (almost 59% of female participation).

part in the meet are members of school children's club. The level of confidence exhibited by these young children during the deliberations of the meet suggested that they were not acting under any duress. The school in reference reports 100% retention rate and the average rate of attendance is above 95%. Not a single drop out was reported so far in the academic year. There are altogether eight classes in progression and only seven classrooms. The existing old building is used to house class eight in the school. Additional classrooms are anticipated. The school has a sanctioned strength of seven teachers and the operating strength of six only leaving one vacancy. The school committee (SDMC) took up the issue with the government for immediate appointment of another teacher in the vacant slot. The school is served by tapped water supply and drinking water is stored in a safe vessel (earthen pot or steel drum). The institution runs a library in its vicinity with stack strength of 1400 titles (covering subject-specific as well as general knowledge books).

The learning levels are reported satisfactory. There is an ongoing assessment method, MLL (Minimum Level of Learning or Minimum Learning Level) adopted in the school. The government of Karnataka regularly supplies teaching and learning material. Modules for mathematics, language efficiency and science are seen in the hands of children in the classrooms. In addition, the school gets other supportive learning materials like charts, globes and flash cards. Like elsewhere in the state, the school too follows Nali Kali (joyful learning kits) for primary classes. The school has a regular teaching session lasting for five and a half

hours every day. All the students are given free textbooks by the government that were received at the beginning of the academic year. Separate remedial classes are organised for slow learners in the school. The available documents in the school state that around 50% of students identified as slow learners have improved their performance during the course of current academic year.

The SDMC and schoolteachers promote peer support and learning among children in the school to deal with erring students. This is again an innovative departure in the soft skills promoted in the school to tackle corporal punishment issue. As such, corporal punishment is not reported from school. The most interesting aspect is the promotion of peer counsellors from the school to deal with their friends. There are 3 broad aspects to this.

Handling Behavioural Problems:

- Formation of peer counsellor groups from among children of the respective class
- Work allotment (counselling session) to peer group members subject to the number of erring children
- Monitoring the activity of peer counsellors by teachers and head teacher in the school

There are two important lessons from this approach: first, the peer counsellors, being children themselves, interact with their friends (identified for naughty behaviour) on an equal footing, so that the flow of communication between the counsellor and the errant child is smooth and rid

of friction. Perhaps, this is one of the unexpected by products of community-school communication drive of Namma Shaale experiment; secondly, flow of results is fast and encouraging because child-child communication flow is devoid of egos. Interestingly, most of the erring children in the school are thus counselled and helped. The role of head teacher (a young and dynamic personality) adds the required strength to different activities in the school including the child-child connects.

The classrooms have figures of learning icons embedded into the wall. Numbers, shapes and some geometrical figures are seen on the walls of the rooms. This is an interesting sight to observe. The figures do not need regular maintenance. Children in the rooms look at them as a matter of routine. The idea is simple and effective. All they need is a whitewash on a periodic basis. The SDMC is ready to do it in the absence of support from SSA. The local SDMC has already raised a few thousand rupees to meet small expenditures in the school

Optimal care has been in place in respect of CWSN in the school. There are three such children with physical challenges. All of them are given aids and appliances by SSA and their maintenance is taken care by individual families. Of course, necessary guidance is extended from the school in case of need.

Mid Day Meal scheme is in operation in the school and there are no issues reported.

Support from BRC (SSA structure) and CFT (Namma Shaale derivative) has been regular and available

whenever the school calls for the same. The activities undertaken by both these bodies relate to classroom observation, attendance check and teacher interactions. The CFT specifically looks into SDMC activities and capacity building. The local SDMC⁴³ networks with local civil society organisations and self-help groups of women. The local NGO, Spoorthy is a part of Namma Shaale drives in the cluster. The SDMC members convene regular monthly meets. Often, they monitor school development planning, civil works, appointment of teachers (Vidya volunteers), expenditure of approved budgets and teacher performance. Recently they have taken up the issue of water pipeline to the school. The local gram Panchayat coordinated with the committee and sanctioned a new one. The SDMC donated meal plates and a water drum to the school. They donate cash to reward the best performing students in the institution at the end of every year.

This is one modest higher primary school that deserves attention because of an attentive community and role of women members in school development issues. However, the school needs to take up issues like closing the open drainage canal, classroom construction and playground for children.

⁴³The present SDMC was formed on 24.1.2008. There were 14 members on the committee. Among others, there were two nominated members drawn from local woman self-help groups.

Case Study 8: Federation of Autonomous SDMCs, Karnataka

Government Higher Primary School Yalavalli Village, Mirjan Cluster, Kumta Block Uttar Kannada (Karwar) District, Karnataka

Small is beautiful. So is the government higher primary school at Yalavalli village under Mirjan cluster of Kumta block in Uttar Kannada district. The SDMC here has been effective in its efforts at social equity measures, convergence, networking, linkages with corporate bodies, child tracking (drop outs emphasised), contributions to mid day meal scheme, advocacy efforts and monitoring of school development activities.

While the foregoing attributes constitute one side of the coin, the other side is more interesting with a wide canvas. Members (especially the president) of the SDMC at Yalavalli play an active part in the federated network of the cluster level SDMC body. This aspect, new in its form, content and operation is all set to create waves in the annals of school management and advocacy for rural educational progress in the state of Karnataka. The efforts hold lot of promise for future course of action in this regard.

A top ranking official of Karnataka SSA puts it, "We are certainly two steps ahead in matters of decentralised school management."⁴⁴ Her statement reflects the ricochet of the happenings in the select clusters/blocs of Namma Shaale programme in rural Karnataka today. The school at Yalavalli in the Western Ghats region too follows the suit. So the Western Ghats in Karnataka too echoes with the resounding proclamations of Namma Shaale today. Everybody hopes, especially members of local SDMCs, that the ongoing efforts meander their way to the larger confluence of people's advocacy for the inauguration of an ideal community-school connect in the few years to follow.

The government higher primary school at Yalavalli is nested in nature with protruding green hills at

the back of the school providing a scenic vista to the institution. The picturesque surrounding of the school would attract any visitor. In the contoured hill layout, the school has attained a natural protective environment to children and offers a two-layered security cover. In addition, the local SDMC members provided extra strength to the main gate (twisted and firmly fixed iron gate) so that children do not hurt themselves when they run in and out of the school. The strength of the students studying in the institution symbolically represents the size of the school. It has 51 children on roll call with 100% retention, no drop out and 98% average attendance. SDMC members track the irregular students through parent counselling sessions and household visits.

It has a scenic playground, solid structures (traditional Indian style with sloping roofs in order to flush out rain water) and four classrooms. The school runs seven classes altogether with only four classrooms. The school reports sufficient and timely supply of teaching and learning materials. Under Nali Kali programme it has received joyful learning kits. By default, the programme requires children to squat on the floor in circles while learning is in progress. The school has sufficient reading and learning material. In addition to Nali Kali kits, the government supplied subject-specific maps, charts, globes and science lab material. For reasons of security, the costly lab materials are locked inside a glassed cupboard. The local SDMC sought a donation from Infosys Limited (one of the global giants in Information Technology headquartered in Karnataka state)⁴⁵. The example from Yalavalli had a contagious effect. Following the SDMC experience at this school, other local SDMCs approached the Infosys Limited and received computers in the

⁴⁴Interview with SPD, SSA, Karnataka, December 2, 2010

⁴⁵The SDMC members of Yalavalli village interacted with a research scholar on ethnographic study in Western Ghats who stayed in the village and received details about Infosys. Then they took the initiative and corresponded directly with the company. Interview with Yalavalli SDMC Members, December 29, 2010. The computer is seen working in the school on the day of visit.

form of donation. The Yalavalli SDMC, on its own behalf, deposited rupees 4000 in the form of a fixed deposit in the bank and the proceedings on the amount are used for school affairs.

The staff strength of the school is 4 and there is no vacancy. But the SDMC has been demanding for a female teacher for the last few years, to take care of the needs of adolescent girls in the institution. There are no CWSN children in the school.

Support from BRC (Block Resource Centre)/CFT (Cluster Facilitation Team) is reported, but seems to be uneven. Visits from BRC take place once in two months whereas the CRC (Cluster Resource Centre) staff visits every month. In addition, the CFT team regularly monitors the school development issues. The CFT was promoted as part of Namma Shaale project initiative. The teachers saw a line of friction between the monitoring routines of CFT members and teachers themselves. CFT members were seen as potentially stepping into the shoes of teacher roles in government schools. But the misunderstanding was soon dispelled as the Namma Shaale programme operation picked up momentum. Members of BRC, CFT and local NGOs became part of rainbow stakeholder structure under Namma Shaale. Another level of slight friction unfolded when the Yalavalli SDMC members took a bold step and intimated their willingness to monitor the classroom. In a recent training workshop (October 2010) conducted at Gokarnam shore for the members of Yalavalli SDMC, a proposal for regular classroom observation by SDMC members was mooted. The same did not find favour with SSA/BRC officials. Instead it was suggested by the BRC staff that SDMC members could coordinate their visit with the BRC and involve themselves in classroom observation. Leadership training sessions for the Yalavalli SDMC are organised by CLHRD (College for Human Resource Development), Mangalore.

The SDMC in Yalavalli School meets regularly. There are a few interesting aspects of its operations: it concerns itself with all school related aspects; the vice chairman regularly donates fresh garden

vegetables to the mid day meal scheme; and coordinates with local youth groups. The local SHGs (of men) and youth clubs contributed around 20000 rupees cash for the construction of wall and gate. They regularly take part in the cleaning of school environs. The pro active role of SDMC is reflected in a few of its activities in the recent past. When a teacher was found addicted to alcoholism, the SDMC members passed strictures on the teacher during their meet, recorded the same in Minutes Register and requested the head teacher as well as authorities to do the needful. The teacher was transferred. Their persistent efforts resulted in the construction of a shed (under progress) for mid day meal scheme. The whole school community including SDMC are passionate about maintenance of hygiene and cleanliness on the school campus. The very sight of the kitchen reflects this. This high sense of environmental sanitation needs to be commended. The quality of food served is neat and tasty.

The flow of contributions from the SDMC forms an added strength. It has plans to raise donations from local philanthropists to support school activities. The SDMC achieved social parity in its operations. The committee is a mix of women and members from marginalised communities. The latter receive equal respect in the operations and no social segregation was observed. All the members are now given to a unanimous feeling that the school shall develop as a community asset rather than an isolated learning institution. The president of the Yalavalli SDMC, along with a few of his colleagues on the committee is an active member of the SDMC federation network. This new and fresh angle of the operations of school development and monitoring committees in Karnataka opens a different social discourse on the nature, emergence, content and working of the federated structures.

The interesting outcome of Namma Shaale experiment could be attributed to the network of SDMCs. Members of SDMCs in all the clusters took the lead in coordinating among themselves and in floating a federated structure on the lines of federated women groups.

The idea of a federated structure took its inception in the combined thinking of SDMC members. *Over a period of time there was a realisation among local SDMC members that individual SDMCs could not solve problems on their own.* For, the strength of one single body was not enough to argue their case. The response for demands of SDMCs from the upper echelons of power structures is seen as lukewarm. A federated structure has strength in numbers and cannot be ignored. Soon these local bodies took the lead in promoting a federated structure. Today, SSA supports the activities of federated SDMC network in the state and grants budgets to continue their programmes.

At present, SSA treats the SDMC federated structures as a major complement to the Namma Shaale project. There is, however a need to improve functionality of these bodies, linkages with local civil society groups like self-help groups and profile the success of Namma Shaale in many blocs of the state.⁴⁶ Another opinion that encapsulates the spirit of SDMC of Namma Shaale is echoed in the words of a district officer and earlier associate of KSTC: *“Through SDMCs the government of Karnataka have legalised community leadership and the net consequence is the enhancement in the level of self-esteem of respective community leaders through these bodies.”*

The Chief Objectives of this Federated Structure are:

- Collective sharing among members of various SDMCs
- Discussion of solutions for problems confronted by schools or individual SDMCs
- Scale up campaign in order to seek solutions for the problems (shaping problems as tools for collective advocacy and bargaining with the government)
- Sharing best practices of different SDMCs and explore possibilities of their replication in other schools for the larger benefit of individual schools and communities

- Cordial relations with local Gram Panchayat bodies in matters pertaining to school education and development
- To provide information about available educational opportunities for rural children and conduct special training/coaching classes for students passing out of the government schools (to seek admissions into prestigious schools like Navodaya Vidyalayas)

Though the SDMC federation is very recent, it has all the promises within. A few achievements of the federated network are symbolic of this at this juncture: all the SDMCs within the specified area are contacted and channels of communication are established; a bike rally by SDMC members was undertaken in order to make their effort known to civil society and to establish contact with weak SDMCs. There are plans now to raise the corpus fund for SDMC federation through membership fees. There is no immediate worry about the role and active functioning of the federation of SDMCs as they are now in receipt of support from government/SSA.

The federation structures are in their infancy. They need to be strengthened through training in all aspects of educational planning. The funding or economic base is still weak. There are plans afoot to link-up these bodies with self-help group federation in the state. It is too early to say if this strategy will work.

The members of federation plan to train all members of local SDMCs, take up issues of school management and quality education in a focused manner, initiate village awareness programmes to begin with and to keep scaling up option always open, establish networking relations with government line departments followed by district and state level efforts; conduct workshops for

⁴⁶Interview with the DDPI (Deputy Director of Public Instruction), Davanagere District on December 28, 2010

understanding of legal framework in respect of educational administration in the state of Karnataka and sort out initial hiccups present in some of the local SDMCs.⁴⁷ Most interesting aspect is the readiness expressed by serving government educational officers in support of SDMC federated structures. One of them said “we will certainly advocate with the government of Karnataka to take a policy decision in support of SDMC federated structures and meet their basic expenses so that they take care of better school management practices in terms of quality and maintenance for many years to come.”

APF (Azim Premji Foundation) is deliberating the sustainability of SDMC structures that have been created as part of its Namma Shaale programme. The original idea in APF is to extend support to these SDMC federated structures in order to enable them to emerge as grassroots pressure groups for education and enhance their bargaining capacity.

⁴⁷Interview with network SDMC members on December 29, 2010

Case Study 9: A School Where There is no Fear, Kerala

Government Upper Primary School Puthichal Village, Athiyannur Panchayat Trivandrum District, Kerala

A school where there is no fear about safety of children, where there is enough space for play. This atmosphere is what we observed in the Government Upper Primary School at Puthichal under Athiyannur Block in Trivandrum district. Child safety mechanisms, active learning, involvement of teachers in classroom transactions, Panchayat support, involvement of local NGOs/youth groups in quality reading habits of children, monitoring of school-based activities (MDM emphasised) by parents' committee members on shift basis, sufficient infrastructure and learning material and proactive SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) staff have really enriched the process of schooling at the grassroots level. A meaningful participation of local youth groups and NGOs has complemented academic inputs.

The upper primary school has nine classes-two are pre-primary and the rest are primary classes. The recorded strength of the school is put at 499 (60 in pre-primary and 439 in primary). For these nine classes, the school has fourteen classrooms with sufficient infrastructure.

A few more classrooms are under construction. The school environment vibrates with enthusiasm and activities. The school has a playground for children of primary classes and child-friendly play equipment for pre-primary children. The playground meant for primary children is protected by a boundary wall so that pre-primary children do not go into the main playground.

A state where there are spatial constraints, the allocation of adequate land for playgrounds for different categories of children catches the eye of any visitor. The commitment to the cause of education

of local children is writ large in the very sight of a school building and the space it enjoys in a small village like Puthichal. The institution has safe drinking water facility (piped supply of water) and the source is well protected so that children are safe. It has toilets with running water (separate toilet for CWSN children with ramp facility). The mid-day meal is regular and of good quality. However, some children bring lunch boxes to the school but sit with others. One interesting thing noted during the course of distribution of mid-day meal is the way children with lunch boxes were sharing with their friends. The menu for the mid-day meal is regularly followed and milk packets for distribution were observed outside the kitchen on the day of visit.

As per the records there are 499 students in the school and seventeen teachers (including the head teacher). This accounts for a PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) of 1:29. It is reported by all that there is no single child out of school in the area and everyone in the school-going age is admitted. There are around 120 children from minority community and 45 from Dalit community. The others are negligible. There are 13 CWSN children reporting minor to moderate disabilities. All the CWSN children are supplied with appliances, the maintenance of which is left to the individual families (in the absence of a trained technician to attend to maintenance aspects in the school). The IED teacher from the local BRC gives necessary advice to families during school visits. The cumulative average attendance rate is above 95% during the academic year under consideration.

There is sufficient learning material available in the school. Textbooks are given to each student in the school and they are being used. There were no signs of corporal punishment (physical or verbal) reported. The teachers (16 out of 17 teachers were present at the time of visit) are conscious of rules against corporal punishment. The learning levels of students are regularly assessed. The school uses separate books for each child during the course of the academic year and they are kept with the teachers. The student's performance in different subjects (along with grades) is monitored through these individual books.

Almost every class maintains a library with books and newspapers. There is a central library in the school with strength of 5000 titles. For a small upper primary government school, this is a luxury. These books are distributed class-wise to individual children.

The head teacher in the school and others have cordial relations with the children. The personalised way in which the teachers serve mid-day meal is reflective of this. All of them are involved in the classroom processes with the children. Among other kinds of support, the role of the head teacher in the maintenance of mid-day meal scheme for the children needs approbation. She regularly contributes to clear the pending bills. Since the fund release is often erratic, she takes personal responsibility in paying the vendors irrespective of the fund release. She is reimbursed as and when the grant arrives. She visits the classrooms on a regular basis and takes part in classroom observations. In case of slow learners, separate remedial classes are conducted after school hours for about 30 minutes.

The activity in pre-primary and lower primary classes is lively. Most of the teachers are involved in joyful learning activities with the children. All the children are involved in the learning process and seen making different articles with the help of locally procured material. The TLM (Teaching Learning Material) grant of rupees five hundred is used by individual teachers as per the guidelines of SSA and in consultation with the head teacher. The CWSN children are freely mixed in the classroom routines and they think they are a part of the classroom and feel no segregation. Though evidence of the existence of a children club is not there, all the children in the school are engaged in one or other activity.

The role of the BRC (Block Resource Centre) is supportive. At the outset, all the BRCs are sufficiently staffed. But there is a feeling that the existing IED teachers are not in a position to cater to the demands of the CWSN in the respective block. For, the skills required to deliver the needed

services are varied and the current level of training needs updating. Other BRC members (academic wing) have been very proactive in their roles. They perform three duties—administrative (spending almost more than 50% of time), school routines (monitoring teachers and classroom activities and spend 40% of time) and onsite academic support (around 10%). There is a feeling that the wings of most of the quality/subject specialist trainers are clipped because guidelines are issued from above.

The support to the school from the Panchayat, community members, local youth groups (including women groups of the Kudumbasree programme), old students' forum, local business houses and NGOs is noteworthy. The local Panchayat, in addition to the planned routines, undertakes different errands like repairs to school building, electrical fittings, kitchen construction and sanitation work. According to teachers, the local Panchayat does most of the work without any specific grants from SSA for these activities.

On the other hand, contribution of local groups is more qualitative than quantitative. These groups are more involved in quality academics of the school. Ten copies each of Malayalam newspapers (2 papers) and English newspaper (one paper) are supplied free of cost to the school on a regular basis. These newspapers are placed in the individual classrooms (from class I onwards) and used by students. The main aim is to enhance the reading abilities and general awareness of the students in the classroom. This is a locally innovated method of improving academic performance of the students where they do not feel any extra burden. For them it is an activity being conducted in a mood of frivolous earnestness. A small contribution has a large-scale canvas. An activity like this with very modest economic implications needs to be pushed further. Replication is not only easy, but also meaningful.

The school needs to be commended for its measures on child protection norms. Presence of no smoking sign boards and fire extinguisher on

the walls of the school may teach us more about the local concerns, innovation, and care and support mechanisms than any enshrined rulebook procedures of SSA. The adage goes-a sound mind in a sound body. So also, there is a concern for innovation and offbeat mode of thinking in a concerned community at large. What needs to be emulated rather than replicated is the spirit of these efforts. Most interestingly, the members of the community (all shades of related stakeholders viz., teachers, BRC members, community elders and parents) never flagged these interventions as innovative. They did not even refer to them. This sums up the legacy of their identification with a social cause (education of grassroots children). Since they are not given to an impression that these measures are part of their duty; they are very casual in their talk. It seemed that doing acts like the present are part of their basic social behaviour. This aspect needs mention here. This is a social attribute that does not call for replication or emulation. It needs repeated mention among the circles concerned. One has to remember innovation does not come by adaptation or practice. It surges ahead from the unfathomed bottoms of people's social thinking. The current example may be very trivial. But its effect is encompassing.

School annual plan and related activities are developed as part of the Panchayat education plan. Specific needs from the school are brought to the notice of the planners. The head teacher along with BRC staff plays an important role while preparing the plans. Representative members from school development committee (parent committee) are involved. But the plans are generally decided from above as per the budget projections of the SSA. Scope for inclusion of all local specific needs is limited.

The role of the education committee (the school had a new committee formed on 31.5.2010 with

15 members) seems to be limited. They are elected from a general body of parents in the school once in a year. During discussions with a few members on the day of visit it was evident that they were playing a very active role in monitoring the mid-day meal scheme and civil works in the school. There is a feeling that they are allowed to come to school and monitor school routines like teacher attendance, classroom activities and student performance. They also take part in school functions and observation of special days like World Disabled Day. They are more bothered about facilities in the school and in the recently held meet of the committee they asked the head teacher to take care of two important items viz., separate toilet for older girls and separate counselling sessions for all adolescent girls in the school.

The latter request and suggestion is more reflective of the concerns of the parents of eligible girls (counselling session with an eye on life skills). If empowerment is to be defined from a life skill angle, the parents in the school committee are, perhaps, playing their roles to an optimal social scale. This role of the parents is not within the formatted structures.

The school needs a mention because the local community as a whole was concerned about child protection issues. The parents' level of understanding of social implications of mainstream learning too is noteworthy (request for social counselling sessions for adolescent girls) here. The innovative way of using newspapers by local groups to promote quality reading habits and general awareness levels among child learners is highly complementary in nature. These practices are perhaps meaningful sources of inspiration, for adaptation or replication elsewhere keeping in view the local specifications.

Case Study 10: Convergence the Key to Good Management

Government Upper Primary School Akathethara Gram Panchayat Malampuzha Block, Palakkad District, Kerala

What makes the school unique? The wish list of educationists was a reality in this small school:

- Children trained in making subject-specific learning material on their own
- Economical, cost effective and eco-friendly measures in running school routines
- Managing a local heritage museum to shape children as culture-conscious learners
- Organising learning material exhibitions to showcase child's ability in making the same
- Conducting English classes for parents to better appreciate child's academic progress
- A separate physiotherapy lab to attend to the needs of children with special abilities
- A fully painted classroom (including ceilings) for joyful learning activity for children
- Using all available and immovable school spaces for continuous learning activity
- A documentary film on the progress of school and local history
- Mainstreaming children of migrant families with care and concern
- Non-resident Indian donors contribution to school infrastructure
- Parents committee financing pre-primary class and exposure trip for students in the school
- Local community purchasing a bus and providing free transportation facility to children
- Local Self Government Body's financial support to school academic activities like printing of calendar, magazine, conduct of child parliament, free newspaper supply, organising craft melas for children

Interestingly most of the above details of schooling are executed with a modicum of success rate in the government upper primary school in reference. The school at Akathethara has a total strength of 525 (112 from Dalits) including minority, CWSN

and migrant children. The rate of retention is put at 98% and the average rate of attendance in the school is around 95%. There are seven classes and one pre-primary section in the institution. The total staffing strength is 22⁴⁸. The Pupil Teacher Ratio is approximately 1:24. The school has 22 classrooms in addition to a library, computer lab, science museum, a common hall and heritage museum. The school, on the whole, has all the attributes of a good school.⁴⁹

The quality teaching and learning aspects in the school is noteworthy. The process is driven by a group of committed teachers, a concerned community, a pro-active Panchayat Education Committee (PEC), a sincere PTA (Parent Teacher Association) committee and a supportive BRC structure. Participation from all the required ingredients is present in the learning design. The teachers who receive training on preparation of TLM (Teaching Learning Material) do not stop with the same, but they extend the training to its logical conclusion. They train children in the classrooms in the preparation of learning material using locally available sources. Today, students are capable of developing subject-specific and local-specific material. Though it is too early to estimate its efficacy, suffice it to say that a good beginning has been made and hence it is only half done. The children make posters and magazines in the school today. As usual the utilisation pattern of TLM grant is on the routine lines and follows guidelines laid down by SSA and the State Resource Group (SRG).

⁴⁸Twenty teachers, the local DPO, BRC and PEC members were present on the day of visit.

⁴⁹ There are, however, a few and valid apprehensions about the levels of saturation. In the state of Kerala, the first generation of learners almost reached saturation. SSA only talks about first generation learners. There is a need now to reorient policy framework as far as Kerala is concerned. Otherwise, the state will be offering examples of duplication rather than examples for replication. Interview with SPD, SSA, Kerala, December 3, 2010. Other social activists feel that Kerala needs to relook at SSA and initiate a public debate now so as to render the process of learning as an inclusive device (as an ideological tool and not as program tool). Interview with Krishna Kumar, KSSP Activist, December 4, 2010.

The school recently made a documentary film on various activities of the school with a brief episode on local history. SSA authorities, BRC staff, local Panchayat institution, community elders, parents and members of education committee, and children participated in the making of this documentary. It is an appreciable effort on the part of the school community. These activities infuse a learning spirit into children under instruction. Exposure to related learning activities does not fail to leave an everlasting impression on the formative minds of children in school.

Participation and contribution from the community to TLM in the school opens a new chapter here. The local community (members of community and Parent Teacher Association) sponsored preparation of exclusive electronic lessons (CDs) for mathematics and made a donation for purchase of subject-specific books for the library. They monitor their use in the school on a periodic basis. An amazing fact is the way the members of Parent Teacher Association are financing the pre-primary section in the school. They contribute towards the expenditure incurred by the school on this account. Except for reasons of close identification with the village school and respect for schooling in the life of a child learner, no other set of reasons can better explain the resolve of the members of PTA in the village.

Various guidelines under SSA and RTE 2009 dilate on the compulsory nature of parents' participation on school management committees. The fact is that the children of educated parents are admitted in private schools and those of illiterate or semi literate parents in government schools. Studies too are apprehensive of the role by semi literate or illiterate parents and their capacities⁵⁰. At places like Akathethara Government School, the teachers show a resolve to affect a change in this state of affairs. They conduct separate classes in English language (of course in other subjects too, subject to demand) for parents of children in the school. The main objective is to enhance the level of understanding of parents so that they can better

monitor the progress of their wards' education in the school and appreciate the learning processes in the institution.⁵¹

The teachers feel otherwise about the present day scenario. Asked about their local standing now they unanimously quipped, when we were doing our B. Ed. (Bachelor of Education), it was mostly about teacher-centric preparation for the class. Under SSA, the process is turned upside down. Now the classroom learning is child-centric and it is making each one of us responsive in terms of preparation for classroom activity⁵². A qualitative twist towards a child-friendly learning process is sighted in what they have to confess. This has nothing to do with directives from above. Rather it is a systemic change juxtaposed by a reorientation of self by the teaching community. New processes emerge not out of mandated suggestions, but out of free space and scope provided under new systems. Support from above and innovation from below is the logical derivative (perhaps with the strength of a conclusive verification) from the experience here. The phrase from above includes not only government structures, but also parents, community and related stakeholders as far as the child learner in primary classes is concerned.

Slow learners are identified in the classrooms and corresponding notes are entered in the student's file. All the teachers follow the notes in these files and concentrate on the slow learners in such way that the latter do not feel isolated from the mainstream.

The teaching community in the school makes optimal use of all available physical sources in

⁵⁰R. Govinda, 'Capacity Building for Educational Governance at Local Levels' in Govinda, R and Diwan, Rashmi, Community Participation and Empowerment in Primary Education, CED (Centre for Environment and Development, Thiruvananthapuram) Documentation, No. B.N21.G2

⁵¹As stated by the Head Teacher of the school, (Field Notes, December 8, 2010)

⁵²As stated by the Head Teacher of the school, (Field Notes, December 8, 2010)

the campus. Though BALA (Building as a Learning Aid) is profiled as an innovative programme design under SSA, the school under study has made most use of this. They have painted all convenient walls in the veranda of the school with lessons on fundamental English and mathematics. Pre primary classrooms vibrate with signs of vitality (walls painted in a child-friendly way) and a joyful learning process is happening and seen in the school. Even the ceiling of classroom is painted with stories and children are asked to narrate by looking at these pictures. Efforts at improving imaginative faculty and cognitive ability of children are duly practiced in the classroom. CWSN (MR) children are mainstreamed with others in an effort to make the child comfortable and accepted in school.

The school has a rich infrastructure and is well equipped with a science lab (a telescope installed and used by children), a computer lab (even HM having a desktop) and a library. Two things attract our attention. There is a separate physiotherapy lab for CWSN children (of course catering to the needs of physically challenged children at present) and the local IED teacher visits the school every Tuesday and Saturday. This facility is a boon for the children (irrespective of the number) studying in the school. The HM says that the local families too are allowed physiotherapy services subject to availability of the teacher and time slots.

Children in the school are involved in various co curricular activities. One group is involved in the organic kitchen garden in the school. Science teachers provide them necessary inputs. Ways and methods of purification of drinking water adopted in the school have a fair amount of learning as well as practice inbuilt into them. Drinking water is stored in steel vessels and it is boiled with cumin seeds to cleanse the water of impurities. Children drink this water (this is a practice across Kerala and it is reported that water borne communicable diseases among children has come down drastically in the last 30 years due to the popularisation of drinking boiled water).

Corporal punishment is not practiced in the school. Most of the parents and education committee members attested to this. In case of naughty children, the teachers give them extra writing work or school-related work so that they are involved in some time-bound activity.

Levels of participation from community (including PTA, PEC, NRI residents of the locality, Gram Panchayat, Community elders) deserve separate mention. Demarcating lines regarding the role played by these bodies is very thin. There is no watertight compartmentalisation observed. These bodies share most of the interventions and hence classification as falling under the role of a particular body is difficult to make. The local affluent non-resident Indian families constructed a water tank and a few structures in the school as early as the beginning of the century. The local community purchased a bus and runs it to the benefit of students studying in the school. The costs and expenditures are borne by the community and PTA.

Another notable happening is the establishment of a Heritage Museum in the school. Children in the classrooms are asked to collect antiques available within the village and exhibit them in the school. The local community contributed Indian Rupees 10000 towards purchase of necessary storage racks for the museum. Children collected various antiques from their households as well as neighbouring houses and brought them to school. Today there is a small museum running in the school compound. The small experiment has many lessons to offer to the child. The convergent ways of doing the act deserves our attention. More than the act, the process of learning involved in the process is a valuable lesson for the wards. An amazing innovative departure in favour of children and the school community is the establishment of a *gobar* (bio) gas plant within the premises of the school. Like any other school, the Akathethara School too has mid-day meal scheme in operation. Local groups and contractors of mid-day meal scheme very often use firewood or cylindered gas for cooking. Both of them are expensive—the former is a very expensive

proposition in terms of environmental destruction and the latter is an expensive thing in terms of pricing. It is here the local community, PEC and parents thought differently.

They jointly resolved to establish a *gobar* (bio) gas plant in the school and connect the facility to the kitchen in an effort to reduce pollution as well as facilitate an eco-friendly activity in the school. Cow dung and other biodegradable materials required for production of *gobar* gas are supplied by members of local community. Today, the plant is successfully running in the school. Children in the institution have learnt a valuable lesson in environmental protection. The school community has placed dustbins in a corner of the school so that the garbage is not strewn around the campus. The very sight of garbage bins in the school (that too arranged by teachers and children) offer lessons not for others, but to the local Panchayat upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of village sanitation. As repeatedly mentioned elsewhere in the description, convergence and cooperation are not given. They are inculcated from within. The example from the Akathethara School is firmly rooted in local traditions and popular mindset. Cows and buffaloes are not an uncommon sight in rural India. But certainly *gobar* gas plants and linkages with cow economy are. Nobody has any objection to the proposition that this local and simple experiment/innovation has pan Indian (global too) applications. No one needs to visit the school to carry a lesson home. It all needs one to take a cue from the innovation and replicate it with the help of locally available *gobar* gas plant techniques. More than the plant, the innovative idea needs to be implanted in the mindsets.

The School Education Committee has been in operation since 1994 onwards. There are 32 members on the committee and all of them get elected from the parents general body meet. Local Ward Member of the Gram Panchayat becomes the Chairman of this committee and the PTA President

becomes the Vice President of the committee. They convene monthly meets and monitor school activities with support from the HM and teachers. However, in the recent times, they are taking special care of SSLC students and have organising special classes for these students (eying 100% pass). In addition, they arrange summer camps for children free of cost. During the last vacation, a swimming camp was organised.

The role and contribution of the local PEC (Panchayat Education Committee) are many and varied. These activities are outside the approved and budgeted ones. On its own the PEC supplied meal plates and uniforms to the children. It supported academic activities like printing of the school magazine, supply of newspaper, diary and calendar. It sponsored a child parliament session in the school.⁵³ As and when need arises, it undertakes special education drives in the locality.

The role of the PEC is almost overarching in nature. Opinion of the outgoing Chairman of local PEC sums up the role: "The committee converges all educational activities under Gram Panchayat (SSA, Department of Education and Zilla Parishad). We monitor all of them. We conduct these activities to strengthen the process of learning in our Panchayat. After all, it is our village, it is our children and hence it is our responsibility. We cannot leave a subject like this to the mercy of others including elected governments."⁵⁴

⁵³In other schools under Palakkad SSA, there are efforts by school children in writing, editing and finalising children magazine. They are also involved in vocational trades like soap making in the school. Head teacher and her colleagues promote these activities. The publication grant for printing the magazine is given by local community and PTA members. The child magazine (annual number) entitled Rise can be accessed at gupsbemmanur@gmail.com.

⁵⁴Interview with the outgoing PEC Chairman, Akathethara Gram Panchayat), December 8, 2010. These sentiments were shared by the HM of the school

Good practices can be found in many places. But, all the best practices do not converge in one place. Quality and good practice are part of a continuum. Akathethara School is reflective of this. There are some areas where the school needs some more efforts to be engaged in. Irregular use of toilets by children and sanitation facility around *gobar* gas plant may be considered by school community for improvement in the days to come. For those people who are already bubbling with many a success story in the school, these two things do not need much of their energy and time for doing the needful. As SSA officials say there are sources within the state meant

for appropriate tapping in order to attend to pressing needs in school.⁵⁵ Owing to a plethora of reasons there seems to be a friction between teaching staff (perhaps BRC members too included) and local PTAs. This also needs to be tackled by schools like the one at Akathethara at their respective level thereby showing a path for others to follow.

⁵⁵Interview with SPD, SSA, Kerala on December 3, 2010. Non-road maintenance fund to the tune of INR 240 crore is available with the

Case Study 11: Partnership for Quality Improvement, Madhya Pradesh

Corporate bodies as school partners

Name of School: Middle School

Village: Satlapur Mandideep Block: Obedullaganj, District: Raisen

The officials at Rajya Shiksha Kendra state office in Bhopal explained that the school selected by them for the visit was rated higher than many others, and would provide answers to the objectives of the study in question. Discussions and interactions with the accompanying officials, head teacher and teachers, and community representatives, and observation of infrastructure facilities together with classroom interactions, facilitated in understanding the issues of decentralisation, and quality inclusive education.

Location and Infrastructure

Government Middle School, Satlapur is situated in village Mandideep, block Mandideep, and district Raisen. The most striking difference noticed on entering the village is the presence of factories like Lupin, Proctor and Gamble, Eicher, Heavy Electric Graphite, Nahaar Spinning and Weaving, and Indian Electronics. This is an industrial area, and the village

is inhabited largely by people who work as labour in these factories. Of course there are migrants from scheduled and other backward castes.

The school is a long pucca building with eight rooms in the main building, and another side building used as storage. The classrooms in the primary section do not have furniture for children. However, there is a table, chair and a small cupboard for teachers to store their registers and TLM. A long covered veranda, with a gate in the centre provides an approach to the classrooms. The school overlooks a sparsely forested area, and towards one end of this area is built the toilets for boys and girls. There is no boundary wall. The covered veranda is multipurpose—there is provision for drinking water; mid day meals are served here, teachers use one corner as their sitting area and some children were even seen engaged in a game of carom. At one end of the veranda is the ramp and the walls display information on enrolment, names of teachers, names of PTA members, weekly menu for midday meals, timings, DISE code, and a toll free telephone number for obtaining/providing any information.

Enrolment, Retention and Attendance

This is a fairly big school with more than 650 children. Boys outnumber girls (B= 357, G=314). The children are mostly from OBC category, though SCs also account for nearly 24% of the student

Enrolment of children class-wise and category-wise

Class	Total Enrolment		SC		ST		OBC		Minorities		CWSN	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
1	64	48	16	17	13	4	28	20	4	2	3	-
2	52	54	12	15	02	3	33	30	3	2	-	1
3	44	42	10	10	3	5	25	24	2	2	-	-
4	38	32	9	9	4	1	22	20	-	1	1	-
5	31	28	8	8	4	3	16	15	1	1	1	-
6	38	33	8	8	3	3	25	20	1	1	-	-
7	44	39	8	8	3	2	30	28	-	-	-	-
8	43	38	8	6	3	2	28	25	2	2	-	-

Note: Additional numbers are children from general category

population (164/671). District Raisen is not a tribal district and therefore it is surprising to find ST children though in small numbers, across all classes. There are some children from the minority community, and 5 CSWN children. (3 MR, 2 partially physically challenged).

There are 5 teachers in the middle school, 6 in boys' primary, and 5 in girls' primary. There is one head teacher each for primary and middle schools. The school functions in two shifts: Primary in the mornings and Middle in the afternoon. The Head teacher informs that enrolment and retention figures keep changing. A large number of children belong to migrant families and work as labour in the neighbourhood factories. On completion of their labour contract these families tend to migrate again. A random check of attendance registers in two classes revealed the attendance to be about 60 percent only.

Quality and Classroom Interaction

Quality improvement includes many areas—teachers, students, TLM, Head teacher, infrastructure, achievement, community participation, and funds. It is true that each of these are important in their own way, but the school is to be viewed, monitored, and evaluated as a 'totality'.

In Class 3, there were 44 boys enrolled, but only 32 were present on the day of visit. No particular reason for absenteeism was provided. The class teacher was teaching Hindi. Her teaching notes had a list of 20 words and she was explaining the meaning through their use in sentences. Despite the teaching being non-participatory children were attentive.

The classroom did not have any TLMs displayed. However, there were some charts available in the classroom cupboard for other subjects. The children were seated on a mat, and all children had bags, textbooks and notebooks. There had been no delay in distributing textbooks. A large number of them were in uniform. This is because the PTA members

have taken the initiative to suggest to parents that when buying clothes for their sons they could purchase blue and white, so that the children could wear these to school as well. This class had one mentally retarded (MR) child. He was sitting separately from the rest of the class. The teacher was appreciative of the learning capability of this child and asked him to recite a poem (which he did very well). On being asked why he was made to sit separately, she said that she needs to pay 'extra attention' to him. On further questioning it appeared that this was done because she was often being interrupted by this child, and requested to explain again. She found this hampering the speed of teaching. Clearly this appeared to be a case of segregating while including.

In Class 2 the teacher was engaged in a maths activity. Using the ABL method he had made 5 groups, and each one was engaged in a counting activity with coloured stones. The teacher was making a special effort to go from group to group, observing, prompting, praising. The class had three charts related to counting, and subtracting. Besides maths he had also undergone the 90 days Foundation Course training for teaching CSWN. In this class too there were 10 absentees.

Adequate TLM had been prepared in the school. Most classrooms displayed various charts, models and other material. TLM grant was being utilised well, with children also involved in the preparation of TLM.

Teachers

Teachers were all trained. There were more women than men. They resided in nearby areas. There was an unwritten rule: women teachers were given 30 minutes grace time in the mornings to enable them complete their domestic chores. The PTA members took this decision. They appeared enthusiastic and engaged in teaching. Training of teachers is not done on a regular basis. In the state of MP, District Institute for Education and Training (DIET) has developed training modules on

'hard spots' for each subject. However, only a few get an opportunity to avail of this training. The word of one teacher at school aptly summarises the value of training: *"Training say pharak to avashya padta hai. Kai problems door ho jaati hain, kai nayi techniques maloom padtie hain. Lekin mujhe, mere teaching career mein aisi trainings mein bhaag lene ka avsar keval ek baar mila hai. Iska phayada to tabhi hoga jab yeh trainings lagataar chalti rahein. Usi se motivation ban rehta hai."* (Training certainly makes a difference. Many problems are solved and we learn many new techniques. I have had this opportunity only once in my teaching career. Training can be really successful if it is continuous. It helps to sustain motivation).

Learning Outcome

Assessment was on the basis of Dakshata Sanvardhan Parikshan (Capacity Improvement Test), where students were awarded grades A to E. This testing is done on a monthly basis, and achievement levels are in the public domain. Education portal can be accessed to monitor progress of children in schools/blocks/districts. For Class 1 the levels are as follows:

- Level 1 Recognition of letters
- Level 2 Recognition of simple words
- Level 3 Recognition of difficult words
- Level 4 Recognition of paragraph
- Level 5 Recognition of more than one para

School organises remedial extra classes for children lagging behind in the D and E grades. These classes are held twice a week in the mornings. No additional teachers and no additional payment to the teachers for conducting these classes is provided .

Mid Day Meal (MDM)

A hot meal consisting of dal, one dry vegetable and rotis was served. It was a pleasant sight to see all the children assist in laying out the dari and thalis. They were being supervised while they washed their hands, sat down to have their meal (unlimited quantities). The meal was prepared by an SHG of an NGO, and not prepared in the school

campus. There was no discrimination in the service of the meal, or in partaking it. Children from all social groups sat together.

Overall School Environment and Facilities

The school has a library with 500 books. They have been purchased at low costs from money saved from TLM fund, while some have been donated. Children read these books in during school hours.

Games and sports equipment is limited. There was only one football, one cricket bat and one ball. Indoor games were more popular. Children played kabaddi, or carom, or even chess.

No corporal punishment was being practiced. Teachers said they did not use harsh or discriminatory words. One teacher said that she also belonged to a minority group. If she said anything discriminatory, it may boomerang. Most teachers said that they make children understand that they need to improve and behave in a certain manner. Constant attention was given to impart good/clean habits and values. None of them had heard of the GOI guidelines on corporal punishment.

Inclusion

Community level: A community survey had been conducted to identify CSWN. Cards are prepared for each such child, and PTA and VEC exert pressure on parents of such children to get them enrolled. Linkages have been made with companies manufacturing aids and appliances. A monthly camp is held where parents are trained in the use of these before receiving them. Block level officials participate in this event.

Government Level: Resource persons have been hired to identify and provide home base guidance, counselling and support. Camps are held at block level (once in 3 or 4 months). Information on CWSN is also available on the website.

School Level: A ramp with rails has been constructed. One teacher has been through the

Foundation Course at Shiva Kalyan Samiti, Bhopal. Some money from TLM funds is utilised for CWSN needs. Recently an eye testing camp was held. In addition a first aid kit was purchased.

School Management

Head teacher: Since there are two head teachers, coordination between them is crucial. Also the community needs to relate to two individuals. On the day of visit only the Head teacher for the primary section was available. He was meticulous and had facts and figures on his fingertips. All his registers were updated and neatly arranged. As a member of both the PTA and VEC, he had an important role in the management of the school. The Head teacher informed us that he spends a lot of time in other activities like elections and census. He would be happy if he were taken off these tasks. More time would be available for school improvement activities.

The school has been functioning normally. It is not generally closed except for gazetted holidays. The Head teacher informed us that even on the day when the court decision on Ayodhya was expected, and most organisations had closed their offices as a precautionary measure, the school remained open. District authorities provided police force and the school functioned normally.

CRC and BRC meetings are held monthly. The last time the Jan Shikshak came to the school was 20 days ago. On this visit he supervised teaching in classes 3 and 4. He asked children questions on what they had been taught and was satisfied with the responses. He observed that some children did not have writing material.⁵⁶ Officials suggested that some money from TLM grant could be utilised for making available the notebooks and pencils to needy children.

The Head teacher has at times invited the block coordinator to the school to sort out internal problems. The coordinator was called in last time to sort out the problem of an additional bathroom for girls. According to the VEC members, BRC officials

come as and when called and attend to problems. They are very supportive and handle all financial and administrative issues.

Community/Corporate Support

The PTA and Gram Shiksha Samiti (VEC) meet once a month and are extremely active and participate in almost every activity in the school. From assisting in community surveys to providing suggestions for uniforms, arranging mid day meals, textbooks, infrastructure development and its maintenance, CWSN issues, supervision and monitoring of teachers/students, they seem to have their hands full. One PTA member said that the Panchayat has donated Rs 12,000.00 for school improvement, and has distributed 8 cycles to children.

A noteworthy feature of this school is its linkage with Proctor and Gamble, a multinational company. This support is available because parents of most children were employed as labour in this company. It may well be a CSR activity too. (Officials of the said company were not available for discussion). In either case the support comes at two levels. One level is provision of financial aid (money given to PTA, VEC, Head teacher for books, some uniforms, taat patti and dari,). The other level is providing physical help and officials who can be hands-on with the project as identified by the company (technical staff were deputed to build additional classrooms, and the existing building is regularly maintained by them; arrangements for drinking water were also made). It appears that the company has identified children as their primary area of concern, and is deeply involved with the school at both levels.

The PTA and VEC were in regular touch with Proctor and Gamble and the members act as a channel for advocacy with the corporate. They are currently

⁵⁶While government (under SSA) supplies textbooks, notebooks and other stationery items have to be purchased by individual students.

negotiating for construction of a boundary wall and provision of furniture in the classrooms.

Other community-based organisations in the neighbourhood are: Jagruti Samiti and Jagjagi Samiti-both work towards generating awareness among community members. Jagjagi Samiti activities are centred on the involvement of mothers in school activities. Their focus is on five Ps: Parivar (family), Paryavarna (environment),

Parivesh (surroundings), Parampara (tradition and culture) and Parakram (bravery and courage).

School governance is certainly not one person's job. It is a team effort where each member from the community is an equal stakeholder. While community participation is an important link in decentralisation process, this case study proves that power needs to be devolved to other players/sectors as well.

Case Study 12: Community Engagement in School, Madhya Pradesh

School: Madhyamik Shala, Village: Bedakhedi
Block: Aashtha, District: Sehore

Location and Infrastructure

The school with a pucca building is situated about 50 kilometres from the district headquarters of Sehore, in a village called Bedakhedi, Block Aashtha. We drove on the beautiful newly constructed highway connecting Sehore with Indore, for an hour before we turned off into the village. Ten minutes later we were in front of an impressive single story building with a gate, boundary wall, driveway lined with evergreen trees, well laid out lawns with flowers and trees. The building was freshly painted and looked clean and beautiful. The land for the school had been donated by some freedom fighter many years ago.

The school has six classrooms, though 8 standards (standards 1 and 2 are joined, so are standards 3 and 4). This is a temporary arrangement as new rooms are under construction. There is no ramp. The school building is at level with the driveway and a ramp is not required. There is a tube well and arrangements made to draw out the water in the

morning for drinking. Toilets for boys and girls are constructed at the side of the main building. They are functional, with adequate water available.

It is about 2.30 in the afternoon. The visit has been delayed, as we took a wrong turn on way from Bhopal and lost time. On reaching Sehore we were accompanied by the District Programme Coordinator (DPC), Assistant Project Coordinator, Enrolment and Retention (APC-E&R), and Block Resource Centre Coordinator (BRCC).

The school building is impressive. Had the sign boards indicating the name of the school not been there, the complex could easily have been mistaken for a factory that one normally witnesses on the outskirts of the city.

The children are all in their classes. Their footwear is neatly placed outside the classrooms (children sit on dari and "taat patti" as there is no furniture). Teachers are engaged in teaching. The Head teacher (HT) along with a dozen members of the PTA/VEC is seated in the lawns of the school. They had been requested by the Head teacher to be available for a discussion.

Enrolment, Retention and Attendance

The children enrolled are from the neighbouring 5 villages. They belong to families engaged

Enrolment of children class wise and category wise

Class	Total Enrolment		SC		OBC		CWSN	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
1	5	4	4	2	1	2		
2	4	5	2	3	2	2		
3	2	8	2	4	-	4		
4	7	13	3	9	4	4		
5	7	7	3	7	4	-		
6	12	24	7	15	4	6		
7	20	20	12	10	2	6		
8	16	21	11	17	3	3	1	

Note: Approx 50 children belong to general category. Total enrolment is 175, classes 1-5 =65

in farming. In terms of inclusiveness of social groups there were only SC and OBC children, with none from ST, minorities or CWSN category. Girls outnumber boys in almost all classes (total number of girls 94/175). Most children walk to school, though some boys in classes 5 -8 had cycles. The survey to identify children between 6-14 years of age revealed 315 such children in the entire block. 175 of them were in this school.

There is 100% retention. No child has left the school except one CWSN (Visually impaired) who left very recently as he required special training. If a child is absent for 3-4 days continuously, a PTA member contacts the parents to find out the reason. They discuss and try to solve the problem. Seven teachers plus the Head teacher who also takes classes run the school from 10.30 am to 5 pm. Time for MDM is 1.15 -2.00 pm. All teachers live in Aashtha. All posts of teachers are filled in and no teachers were deployed for any other duties.

Teaching and Learning

Teachers were engaged in teaching and making children learn largely through recitation. In one class the girls sat in vertical rather than horizontal rows, and had to turn their heads sideways to read the blackboard. A large number of TLM was found displayed on the walls of each classroom, and there was more in the HM's room. Teachers had utilised the TLM money and formed a small committee of 3 persons including HT to decide what to purchase or prepare. One person does purchasing of raw material—as markets are far away. Both Visual and written TLM were seen displayed. All children had textbooks and writing material. They had received them in time.

Grading system is adopted for the assessment of children. Across the state learning student performance is assessed on the basis of 'dakshata sanvardhan' and grades A to E are placed on the website in public domain. Remedial classes are held both in the mornings and evenings for children lagging behind.

Inclusiveness

Situated in a geographical area, which is predominantly SC and OBC, it may be unreasonable to expect enrolment of children from other social groups. However, there is a gender balance. As for CWSN, facilities exist, but there is no enrolment. The reason provided by HT, PTA and DPC/BRC was that CWSN need special methods/aids for training/teaching. The expense on such methodologies is huge. It is not economically viable to incur such expenses in each school for a limited number of such students. A central facility catering to the needs of CWSN from 8-10 villages at the block level may be the answer, though such a system has currently not been set up.

No teacher from this school has been assigned for Foundation Course (90days training). However, during the survey, identification of such children had been done. There were very few such children, and linkages have been established with specialist organisations. Regular visits by the Resource Coordinator continue.

Community Participation

A noteworthy feature of this school is the tremendous support it receives from the community. The fact that a dozen of them were present for discussions is proof of their commitment to the school's development.

There are a total of 14 members in the PTA. Selection is as follows: Parents of children who stand first (classes 1 -5) = 2 parents from each class = 10 parents, HT, Sarpanch, Jan Shikshak and office bearers chosen on basis of voting (representation given to SC, OBC, and women). In fact the President was a woman. Meetings are held monthly and also when necessary. Some of the issues taken up for discussion at these meetings were: school uniforms-their quality, colour, collaboration with other schools on celebration of festivals, programmes, bal diwas,organising functions for distribution of cycles, press utsav,

etc. In the last meeting they discussed the need to raise the boundary wall to prevent children from jumping over it.

Members were quite vocal in talking about their roles as PTA members. They understood their responsibilities to be: ensuring enrolment, monitoring school teachers/students, maintain school infrastructure, raise boundary wall to prevent children from jumping over.

The participation of members in school activities was by way of supervision: construction and maintenance of school infrastructure, attendance of teachers and students; fund mobilisation: arrange for donation of materials to the school, planting trees. assistance maintaining contact with larger community base for follow up on students/ performance, linkages with local culture, arts and craft, follow up and giving feedback on the school and its activities.

They had heard about the RTE, but had no details. No formal workshop had been conducted. Information was through newspapers and television. To create a broader base of commitment, GOI needs to communicate messages on RTE at the community level in a systematic manner. As of now they know very little of the provisions under RTE. On being asked what according to them were the three most important issues that need to be addressed to achieve quality inclusive education, they answered:

- No additional responsibility should be given to teachers, such as census and election duties.
- Health of children must be given importance (The PTA had organised an eye testing camp).
- A healthy and clean meal must be provided (PTA supervised the MDM).
- Fund raising (One PTA member pointed out to the tree guards and said that community members provided money for these)

It was fascinating to see the deep involvement of the local community—most of them were illiterates

and had been selected because they could mobilise funds, establish contacts with key officials, supervise construction/maintenance of school infrastructure, etc. It is also interesting to see the issues highlighted by them as important in quality inclusive education!

Additionally, the focus of these members was more on 'official responsibilities' based on their traditional roles, rather than defining their roles on the basis of the needs of the school. While some members said that raising the boundary wall and maintenance of school complex was their responsibility, the priority for others was teachers timely and attendance, while for some others it was holding sports meet and exhibitions. Installing computers and hiring a computer teacher were also mentioned as responsibilities of the PTA. Whatever be their focus, one thing was clear that they were extremely committed to developments not only within the school campus, but also promoting the school in the neighbouring villages and town.

The relationships between the HT, PTA, BRC, and DPC appeared to be harmonious and strong, even though members were aware of their limitations and agreed that they need to be continuously informed of happenings in towns to facilitate them taking key decision in the school.

School Management: Role of HT

The Head Teacher is an MA., B.Ed. and has been in this post since 2004. He is in charge of the administration and in this role looks after the construction and maintenance of school infrastructure, monitors teachers attendance and their timely arrival. He keeps an eye on student attendance too. He makes efforts to increase enrolment. One way was by discussions with VEC/PTA on labour issues and the need for enrolling children of the labour class. He is in charge of the day to day functioning of the school, sees that the school opens in time, is cleaned, water/MDM is arranged, funds are available and accounts maintained properly and reports/data processed and made available to the CRC/BRC.

In his role as financial head of the school, he prepares requests for funds, follows up with CRC/BRC, maintains books/ledgers, is open for inspection, liaises with the VEC/PTA and keeps them informed. He resolves issues with PTA. Recently, some PTA members complained to HT about some teachers arriving late to school. HT called for a joint meeting of teachers and VEC/PTA, and now the teachers were arriving in time.

When asked about his role as an academic head, he simply answers that this refers to his monitoring the teachers' performance in the class, assign some teacher for training (if and when there is some announcement), assist in the preparation of TLM, and monitor student achievement. While sharing his commitment to the school he informed the team that he assisted in the decentralised planning and usage of resources by sharing and transferring well developed TLMs to other schools. He also discusses 'hard spots' with teachers, and provides guidance on pedagogical issues.

He has facilitated the development of a projector (with locally available material) in his school, which serves as an example to other HTs. Very recently he has set up a computer room with 4 computers, and had spread the word for a suitable teacher. When asked whether he had ever been trained in school management issues, the answer was no. However, he did attend a one-day orientation programme at the block level, which was basically to familiarise him with the financial procedures.

Decentralisation: DPC/CRC/BRC Interactions

There was a good rapport between the VEC, HT and BRC Coordinator. The DPC does not visit the school regularly and so her presence was insignificant. Information is constantly flowing from BRCC to HT. During this visit also the BRCC informed the members present about a recently established

50-seater hospital (named Bright Star) in Sehore for disabled girls between 6 -14 years of age. Set up by an NGO, the board and lodging was free. This message could be conveyed to the larger community through these members.

Training modules for PTA members have been developed by SCERT and DIET trainers conduct training. However PTA is a small unit at the ground level, and though the modules have been developed, there is a need to train them frequently. PTA training had been conducted by NGO-ISECT at school level. PTA members are in constant touch with BRC and district officials through the HT. They have made requests at cluster and block level for provision of games and computer teacher. PTA members regularly organise and attend camps for the CSWN with assistance from block level officials. Discussions are held with BRCC on selection of SHG, raw materials, and preparation of MDM⁵⁷.

Talks are also held regarding distribution of incentives. In the last meeting on 29th November, discussions were held on financial issues. It was pointed out by some PTA members that the money allocated for distribution of cycles was shown as less. BRCC followed this up at district level and the problem was resolved within four days. Members were happy with the way the school was managed. They are in dialogue with officials to grant them the status of a High School. There is sufficient evidence to show that there is a meaningful relationship between the community, the school and local governance officials (DPC/BRC/CRC). However, conscious efforts need to continue to sustain this interest and partnership.

⁵⁷In conversation with Assistant Commissioner, SSA, Bhopal, on Dec 8, 2010

Case Study 13: Communitisation in Action, Nagaland

Government Middle School: Block: Thahekhu, Dist: Dimapur

Location and Infrastructure

Dimapur is the only railhead and airport of the state and a large area of Dimapur District is in the plains. Dimapur is the ancient capital of Kachari tribe, who ruled till 13th century AD. The Government Middle School (GMS) is located on the outskirts of the municipal district of Dimapur, in the heart of village Thahekhu. The ancestors allotted the land for the purpose of school building and its campus. The VEC Chairman narrated that when they earmarked the land, it was “with a dream and vision that this institution will produce young educated and learned men and women who will bring about glory to the village and also help the village to develop and change according to the needs of time.”⁵⁸ The school ‘GMS Thahekhu’ was first established as a lower primary (L.P) School in 1960 from classes A to 2 with a strength of 12 students and one teacher. It was later upgraded to class 6 in 1975 and ran as a private school till 1979. It had the distinction of being the being the only middle school under Dimapur Sub-Division at that time. It was only in 1980 that the school was taken over by the government with 350 students. Today it has 787 students with 22 teachers and 3 non-teaching staff.

The first thing that strikes on approaching the school is the large gate on which is painted the school motto: “Determination, Diligence and Dignity”. This motto is for the students as well as the teachers. The aim of the three ‘D’s’ is to make a person a complete human being. True education should train both head and heart.

On entering, the team crosses a huge playground with classroom buildings on two sides. The team is accompanied the Deputy Inspector of Schools and Sub Inspector of Schools. The officials had met the

team at the airport and even though the flight was delayed by many hours, they escorted the team to the school as the VEC members had been waiting. And what about the children? Hesitatingly, the officials said that the school was closed for the winter break, and classes will resume sometime in February. Some schools open in end January, some in February and some only in March. It was our turn to be surprised, as the information on school vacations had not been provided when the visit was being planned and finalised.

Anyway, now that we had arrived, it was the Communitisation process that would be observed and studied; the VEC members were already there. We are informed that the school celebrated 50 years of its existence in November of 2010, and was communitised in 2002. Currently there are 8 classrooms, but additional classrooms were needed to accommodate 787 students. With community support and contributions in cash and kind (cement, wood and stone collected and transported from the hills, time and labour), a two-storey building was under construction. The school boundary wall was built only half way. Problems of stray animals creeping in and students finding it convenient to enter and leave from anywhere rather than the gate were talked about.

A bore well was the source of drinking water. Separate toilets for boys and girls were functional though numbers were inadequate. All classrooms had benches and tables. All schools in Nagaland have classroom furniture-the cold weather is not conducive to children sitting on ‘durries’. The Head Teachers room and the adjoining staff room were clean and well decorated. One wall of HT room displayed pictures of teachers employed in the school. The staff room was equipped with lockers for each teacher, and a shelf to keep their notebooks. There was a cupboard with TLM, and more TLM was packed into a steel box in one corner of the room.

⁵⁸Discussion with VEC Chairman, in a meeting with the team members on Jan 11, 2011

Both these rooms had adequate furniture and were well kept. Pictures, posters, curtains, flowers, and sayings made the room look lively.

It was already 4 pm by the time we reached the school, and as the entire state of Nagaland closes at 4.30-5 pm, the meeting had to begin straightaway. In the meeting besides the HT and VEC Chairman, 6 VEC members were also present for discussions.

Enrolment, Retention, Inclusion

The children enrolled in the school are all from the same community. Given that there are several private schools in the area, those attending this school are mostly poor. It is indeed interesting that there are more girls than boys. In addition to the local tribal community, there are a significant number of migrants who work as daily wage workers and are engaged in a range of agriculture and construction related activities. However, there were no migrant children in this school.

The migrants are seen as outsiders and temporary residents, as a result the village community and the school committee do not reach out to them.

Enrolment of children class-wise

Class	Total Enrolment	
	B	G
1	57	69
2	43	54
3	39	52
4	42	55
5	23	36
6	25	34
7	26	26
8	15	25
Total	270	351

Overall School Environment

Since the school was closed during the time of visit, classroom processes could not be observed. However, there was evidence to show that sufficient emphasis was being given to the development and use of TLM, evaluation of children, and their involvement in extracurricular activities. A separate computer room had been constructed, and a section of the room displayed traditional paraphernalia, like bows/arrows/ looms, etc. on the use of which the children were trained.

One of the most significant achievements of Communitisation is the regular attendance of teachers. There were post card size photographs of all the teachers displayed in the school with their names. Additional teachers, if required, are hired locally to fill the gap, and the community generates resources for payment of salary. The principle of 'no work, no pay' strictly adopted by the VEC, made them more responsible and 'sincere'. The DEOs no longer worry about teachers 'discipline'.

There was no teacher for CSWN, and none of the existing teachers had been trained in handling CSWN. Training and teaching of CSWN was done only at block level.

A group of women had been contracted to prepare and serve the mid-day meal. There was no provision to serve meat, however, the HM along with VEC decided to serve fish. Increased costs are borne by the community.

The government provides free textbooks and the community provides the notebooks. Free uniforms are not given, but in view of long monsoon, raincoats are given to girl children. Additionally, annual scholarships of Rs 500/- are being granted to girls, on merit basis. This, perhaps explains the higher enrolment of girls in the school

The HM, teachers and the VEC were unaware of any government guidelines on corporal punishment. The Head teacher said that they do 'show the stick' to children, but do not 'use it for beating'.

Decentralised Governance: Communitisation

As this school was set up 50 years ago a school management board existed before Communitisation and this was strengthened and formalised in 2004. This has immensely empowered the community and the VEC in Thahekhhu is an active and robust body.

The VEC Chairman and other members were of the view that it was only after Communitisation that the government incentives (textbooks, MDM) were introduced in the school. The VEC has improved the schools by galvanizing voluntary contribution of material, labour and funds. The principle of 'no work, no pay' has helped improve staff and teacher attendance, eliminate unauthorised absence and change attitudes to work. Improved attendance of teachers was reflected in improved attendance of children. However the VEC chairperson said that they have not had to invoke the no work, no play rule this year because the teachers have been regular. The learning outcomes and performance of children has improved. This automatically led to a steady improvement in enrolment and decline in dropout rates—however the team had no means to ascertain learning levels.

Recounting the contributions for the school the VEC members informed the team that shortage of benches and desks was always a serious issue, but this was no longer so. While some community members brought wood from the forest, others worked to turn them into tables and benches. An influential community member built a toilet for teachers. He also contributed sand gravel to level the playground. Similarly, community arranged

water pump machine, water pipes and taps. From time to time, whitewashing of school building and classrooms, repair of switchboards inside classroom is carried out.

A new double storey building and the completion of the boundary wall are in the process of being completed. VEC members feel that the school has been a 'real blessing' to the community. There has been tremendous support from the Church in terms of raising awareness about the school and its requirements, maintenance, community participation and contributions, as well as importance of education. The other major stakeholder in the progress of the school has been the army. The computer room along with the furniture and equipment inside has been donated by the HQ 3 Corps, under Military Civic Action Programme.

The 15 members of the VEC comprise members from students union, village council, and church. They have been appointed for a 3-year term. A specific training on how to utilise funds for development was given by the government. The school organises a number of co curricular and academic events and was awarded the 'best performing school' in Dimapur. This initiative has great potential. The state government is following Communitisation as a policy all over Nagaland, and the impact is clearly visible in this school. Surely, it enjoys the popularity of the tribal communities from top government officials to members in the community, and is well known for the developmental processes it has been able to create in the community.

As one VEC member remarked: "School should progress. It cannot be neglected. We will see that by next year the school runs Class 9, even though it may be run 'privately' ." The Head Teacher added, "When two hands meet a clap is born and when many hands meet, there is applause. Success of the school is credited to everyone in the community."

Some Challenges/Unresolved Issues

Inclusion: The children of migrant communities in the area are not enrolled in the school. It is not clear if the tribal council is interested enough to reach out to migrants. Given that the school was near Dimapur and given that the area does get a lot of migrant workers, inclusion of them is not clear.

The VEC members said that they look after infrastructure, facilities, teachers, but they do not have a role to play on ensuring learning or improvement of quality.

Almost all the VEC leaders do not send their children to this school—their children go to private/missionary schools in the village. While the facilities (including computers) have improved greatly, this has not led to better off children coming back to

government schools—even though all schools in Nagaland are English medium. However 3 parents of children in the school have been inducted into the VEC.

The VEC and the teachers said that they have heard about the Right to Education from newspapers and the media and that the admissions have to be done on a first come first served basis. They also know that the government has 'banned' examinations and tests up to class 8. But they have not heard of any other aspects of the RTE.

The school is not unique in Nagaland and we were informed that the VEC has become fairly active in most areas of the state—with the exception of very remote habitations. Communitisation is an administrative mechanism to improve the day-to-day functioning of the school and to ensure it functions regularly.

Case Study 14: Communitisation of a Cluster of Schools in a Panchayat

Village and Block: Jotsoma, District: Kohima

Location and Infrastructure

These three schools are situated in a village called Jotsoma. Situated at Phezhu, Jotsoma on the outskirts of Kohima, the capital town of Nagaland standing at 1671 meters above sea level on the scenic and delightful Pulie Badze mountain range are these three government schools, each a distance of 2-3 kilometres away. These are co-educational schools.

The Jotsoma village started off with one government school as early as 1900, after the British incursions into the Naga territory. Kohima was the first seat of modern administration as the Headquarters of Naga Hills District (then under Assam). When Nagaland became a full-fledged state on 1 December 1963, Kohima was made the state capital. Jotsoma's population grew and three additional schools came up with the intervention of the VEC. The team observed two of the four government schools.

Both schools were on a higher level and steps from the gate on the road lead into their campus. None of them have playgrounds, as the topography does not permit it. There are boundary walls, classrooms, teachers' room and toilets. For CWSN there is a ramp, but no users. The buildings are made out of stone, and there is furniture in the classrooms. The walls of some of the classrooms are painted brightly with pictures of animals, flowers and fruits.

Enrolment and Retention

There are a significant number of children of Nepalese origin. Besides them there are Bengalis and Katcharis also. More girls than boys enrolled in the government school. There are 4 private schools in the village, and it may be possible that boys are enrolled in private, while girls are admitted in government schools. As we did not get data on

total number of school age children and those enrolled in private schools, it is not possible to say if more boys are in private schools.

In view of the continuing effort of the VEC to hold regular meetings (sometimes even 2 or 3 times in a month!) and talk about the SSA programme and the incentives provided to children in government schools, we were informed that more parents have started enrolling their children in the government schools.

Quality

We met the teachers and members of the VEC. We interacted with the Head teacher, saw the TLMs, teachers' diaries, classrooms and other infrastructure. Since the relationship between teachers and students could not be observed, the observations are based on the assumption that certain basic infrastructural supporting mechanisms were in place to facilitate teacher-student interaction and improve performance.

The knowledge level of teachers could be gauged from the diaries and teaching lesson plans. Using relevant examples they seemed to have a grip over the lessons. According to the Chairman of the VEC there has been a shift from private to government schools. Many parents have pulled children out of private schools and enrolled them in government schools. These schools are 'Top 1 and 2 schools' of the village. This is because of the intervention of the VEC which stresses quality improvement. Their interactions are also affecting attendance; as this is perceived as a quality input.

Enrolment of children class wise and category wise

School	Enrolment		Total
	Boys	Girls	
GPS Phezhu	48	50	98
GPS Jotsoma Upper	27	27	54
GPS/GMS Jotsoma	58	62	120

Textbooks are provided to all children. A women's group in the village arranges mid-day meals. No kitchen is available for preparation of mid day meal in the school. "It is the kind of school I wish I had been to"—more than one parent has felt this sentiment according to the Head Teacher. On being asked whether his children study/studied at the government school his answer was a predictable 'No', elaborated by saying that this was a primary school and he would have had to change schools after class 5 and that it was wiser to admit his child into a privately run high school.

The teachers are friendly and helpful. The children hop and run up and down the undulating slopes, and as they do so they gather the fragrance of flowers, the colours of the sky and surrounding hills.

Besides a ramp, there were no noticeable interventions made for inclusion of CWSN. No community awareness meetings/programmes had been organised for purposes of identification (Reason: No trained resource person available). However, one of the schools observed had two mentally challenged and one visually impaired child on their rolls. No material in Braille was available. The child, now in Upper Primary, just listened to what was happening in class. No special facilities existed for the mentally challenges in class 1. School has no trained teacher. No teacher has ever been deputed for the Foundation Course in dealing with CWSN. The VEC feels the need, but this does not appear to be a priority for them.

Role of Head Teacher

The Head teacher is the 'leader' and the manager' of the school. He takes care of almost everything: finance, human resources (teachers), students, parents, community, VEC members, performance improvement, material and equipment and day-to-day functioning. At times he also takes classes. Some of the challenges he faces are the distribution of government incentives in time, supervising

teachers' performance in classrooms, and ensuring that the students learn and improve.

One major challenge is to deal with parental demand of providing speaking skills in English language. He admitted that technically the medium of instruction was English, but most of the teachers themselves did not know much English. "Nagamese" was the language used to explain. The aspiration of parents/students to speak in English takes them to private schools. Has he been through any training on managing school functions? "No, I have learned this on the job, and by the experience of others in similar jobs. It is not a difficult, it is only time consuming." What was his vision? Well he would like to see that additional classes were added to the primary sections, so that children from neighbouring village could also take advantage of this facility.

The EBRC (Educational Block Resource Centre) officials visit regularly. They collect data for onward transmission. They also supervise class teaching and encourage teachers to make lesson plans. Sometimes they go over the lesson plans and provide suggestions. SCERT has developed a 60-day training programme for teachers, but none of the teachers have been deputed for this course so far.

Communitisation

The school was communitised in 2004. There are 4 schools in the village of Jotsoma and one VEC in charge of all four. The same VEC oversees all the government schools in the larger village VEC meets often—sometimes 2-3 times a month. The VEC has 15 members, including a woman member. Are parents members in the committee? How are they selected?

Without going into details of the discussion that ensued, it was obvious that the selection was ad hoc, and did not follow any established procedure. The practice adopted by VEC chairperson and the

HM was to identify parents (all male) who could attend meetings and whose presence did not disturb other members.

The support provided by the VEC was largely in terms of infrastructure development, maintenance and supervision of construction. The Head teacher was of the view that there was a significant improvement in the school infrastructure and its image in the community ever since it was communitised. Support came in the form maintenance of staff room, procurement of first aid kit, procurement of plastic chairs for teachers, painting of board, procurement of woollen clothes for students living below poverty line, etc). The VEC is responsible for enforcing discipline in the students and teachers. There was increased enrolment, attendance was regular, teachers came on time and were not absent without prior information. The VEC also managed regular maintenance (such as polishing the blackboards, furniture repair, etc.). They have no role in academic matters—but VEC does keep an eye on whether teachers are teaching. They expressed that there was a continued shortage of teaching aids.

In short most pre-requisites for the smooth functioning of the school were met by the active participation of the VEC, such as opening and closing on time, regular and timely attendance of teachers and students, no drop outs, classroom processes going on smoothly, building and other infrastructure maintained, children learning. If this was 'school management' then the school was managed well. Before Communitisation the teachers had many grievances. But now the VEC chairperson helps in communicating their grievances to the government. It was heartening to hear from the VEC Chair that they had been successful in creating awareness regarding importance of education, and all children were enrolled in some school or the other.

One thing that made education in Nagaland different was the opportunities the school provided the children in being trained in their traditional arts/crafts. One of the two schools visited had some innovative interventions of weaving on looms, and carpentry. It seems to have involved the children by providing the additional benefit of creating a different learning experience besides their classroom studies. "The school is actually something special," the Head teacher said. "Most of the parents whose children study here are daily wage labourers, and farmers." Due to the inputs provided by the school it seems that the priorities are changing. The VEC along with the headmaster has changed the mindset of many parents. The entire village, as well as local government officials are now all in praise for the school authorities. "More and more villagers came to know about our school, and each year we are getting greater demands for admissions. However, we will not take students beyond our capacity to manage."

Government guidelines on corporal punishment have not reached the school. During observation, some sticks were seen in the corner of the room. Yes, we do use the sticks. The VEC Chairman vehemently argued in favour of the stick. "The new pedagogy (of not using the stick) is not applicable to us Nagas, our children need strict discipline. One has to use a stick to make them behave and learn."

The teachers admit that while the government provides support to the school through its regular grant schemes, many of these do not add up to much. For now, the VEC remains the spark that ignites the school, and while they are at their job, better fitted to take decisions, introduce changes, the school head teacher provides the necessary support.

Case Study 15: ABL in Practice, Tamil Nadu

Chennai Primary School, No 14, Majakollai Street, Aminjikarai, Chennai 600029

This is a big school, with an impressive building and a girl's high school adjacent to the primary school. The classrooms were clean and neat with desks and benches, colourful cupboards and bright mats for children to sit on. The ABL materials were neatly arranged and the classrooms were full of charts and work the children have done. There were beautiful drawings; lots of colour and the child level blackboards neatly separated with names of children allocated a column each. Attendance sheets were hanging over the blackboards and the children marked their own attendance. Each period was long, not the regular 45 minutes that we see across the country.

There are 405 children (177 boys and 228 girls) and there were 20 teachers (all women). However 6 of the teachers were working as substitute teachers in the high school. There were 13 CWSN. Almost all the children in the school are from disadvantaged social groups (SC, BC and Muslim) in the city. Being the children of casual and daily wage labourers, many of them are also migrants into the city.

Our visit started with a visit to class III A. As I walked in, the children were absorbed with their work. No one jumped up to wish the visitors and the children continued doing what they were doing. I went and sat with one group of children who were working on math cards. Some of them were using the ABL material to do some addition. There was one child who was struggling with numbers and could not figure out what she could do with the

material. Another child helped her for some time, but went back to her own work in a few minutes.

The Headmistress who accompanied me to the classroom knew every child by his/her name. They interacted with her naturally and did not seem to be intimidated by her presence or for that matter the presence of the BRTE or me, an outsider. The BRTE also seems to recognise many children by name, especially one child with physical disability.

There was a buzz in the room, children were talking and discussing, calling out to the teacher. What was palpable was that there was almost no distance between the teacher and the children, or for that matter even the headmistress. There was no fear. As I moved from one group to the next, children continued to be engrossed. I then moved on to class 2 and then to class 5. The atmosphere was the same. Children were happy, they were engrossed in their work and the teacher was working with children in groups.

The VEC members (actually they are formally known as Ward Education Committee, but the schools continue to use VEC) had arrived and we sat down to talk. Discussing the management of the school, they said that the ABL programme had made a big difference. Children were more confident, they were not afraid to go to school, they loved their school and their relationship with the teachers and the headmistress was friendly. Teachers are able to recognise every child by name and identify the learning needs of every child. They also said that their children now read newspapers and magazines. It was indeed noteworthy that almost all the children enrolled in the primary school were from very poor families and the parents—mostly wage labourers, street vendors and other casual

workers—had little time to devote to the school and they also had little financial resources. The parents of children with disabilities were more involved and said that the government’s campaign to enrol children with disabilities into the formal school system had made a big difference to them. One of the parents said that punishment has come down and when a child is late to school the HM speaks to the parents. They do not reprimand or punish the child.

The committee, in its last meeting held in January 2011, discussed three issues. One, motivating parents to send their children on time, this was particularly important because some children do a lot of household chores before they come to school. Two, distribution of free uniforms to all children—especially shoes that were donated and three, discussed the security of the school, the status of the boundary wall and the classrooms.

The Headmistress is the key. A motivated and energetic HM can galvanise the support of parents and the local business community and mobilise resources for the school. Under the ABL programme, a HM who understands and appreciates the approach can deploy teachers that could bring out the best in each of them. She can also call for academic support—mainly supporting teachers to understand ABL—from the BRtE. In Chennai city one BRtE is given 6 to 8 schools and therefore they are able to visit the school every week, spend time with the teachers and the children. Each school in the city has one dedicated BRtE who is the link between them and the educational administration.

The ABL programme has transformed the way the school is managed. According to the HM and the

teachers, there is greater inclusion in the classroom as children of different levels sit in small groups and work together. Children with special needs are also integrated into these groups. While CWSN children also attend a weekly special school, they sit and study with other children for four days a week. A resource teacher for CWSN comes once a week to the school, helps the regular teachers and also the children. The HM and BRtE said that the coming together of SSA policy of inclusiveness and the ABL method has made a big difference to the way the school manages children with special needs.

Can ABL Influence School Management?

In 2003 the Chennai Municipal Corporation introduced Activity Based Learning (ABL) and refined and expanded it to cover the entire state in 2007. This was not a sudden decision and was a culmination of a range of new initiatives of the government. In 2001 the government introduced a DIET strengthening programme to enhance the quality of ongoing academic support to teachers. The turning point (Dr. S Anandlakshmy, 2005⁵⁹) came in 2003 when a group of teachers from Chennai visited Rishi Valley. They worked with the RIVER team and adapted their activity based learning methodology for Chennai schools. The RIVER approach draws upon over three decades of child-centred pedagogy—starting from David Horsbrugh’s Neel Bagh in the late 1970s, followed by the experiments with rural schools in Rishi Valley in the 1980s and 1990s. Based on the

⁵⁹Dr S. Anandlakshmy: ABL-a report on innovative methods in Tamil Nadu, Government of TN, Chennai, 2005

Montessori approach, this approach essentially worked on three dimensions of classroom practice—positioning the teacher as a facilitator, breaking the traditional classroom sitting arrangements with children sitting in small groups while working through graded and sequentially arranged learning ladders and making available teaching-learning material that is actively used by teachers and children (for self learning and peer assisted learning) in the classroom.

Over the years a large number of research studies have shown that the activity based learning method has been able to energise the school and remove the fear that dominated the classrooms. While ABL is a pedagogic renewal programme, it is believed that a truly child centred pedagogy can transform the school. Discussions and observations in the Manjakollai Street School revealed that the headmistress felt more empowered to take decisions, reach out to the BRC and also liaise with the community.

What Makes this School a “Good Practice”?

Teacher deployment by HM is done with great care depending on the specific skill and aptitude of the teachers. All teachers are highly motivated and interested in ABL methodology. Many of the teachers in this school were resource teachers for TN SSA. The school tracks the learning of every child; they identify students who need additional teacher support and the inclusion of CWSN is done with sensitivity and care. The inclusion of CWSN children is done through a combination of integrated learning with all children, weekly special school and one Resource Teacher who visits the school once a week. There is no corporal punishment in the school and the HM has been able to communicate the need for a fearless environment to both teachers and parents.

While ABL is a systemic initiative, the unique strength of this school could be attributed to the HM and the teachers.

Case Study 16: Effortless Integration of CWSN Children, Chennai

Chennai Primary School Pulioor 240, NSK Salai, Kodampakkam Chennai 600024

We started the visit with the objective of exploring four questions. One, how relevant has ABL been in terms of bringing about decentralised management of schools? Two, to what extent has ABL been able to positively draw upon and impact on the community of parents and other stakeholders? Three, do the internal factors in ABL (such as classroom interventions, structures, systems and processes) have a positive impact on overall quality of education? And four, has ABL promoted greater inclusion of children not only from different social groups but more importantly of CWSN children.

A recent study commissioned by the Government of Tamil Nadu that interviewed 1860 HMs provided valuable insights (study results shared by UNICEF, Tamil Nadu). Apparently close to 91% HMs had received ABL training from SSA, and they were able to use that training to improve school management. Over 90% mentioned that they discussed the learning levels of all the children and worked with teachers through regular meetings and 98% of the HMs positively welcomed the support given to their teachers by BRTs who regularly visited them. These were indeed impressive statistics (R Akhila, 2009).

The study also interviewed 7080 members of the VECs, close to 90% said that VEC meetings were regularly conducted and they attended them. They also discussed ABL related matters. Interestingly only 38% of the members said that their VECs contributed aid to the school in cash or kind. However discussing matters about children's education made a big difference to them and to the school. They cherished their participation and felt that parents and HMs recognised their viewpoints. Many said that they discussed the new methods and their possible impact with other villagers also, and thus motivated them to send their children to school (R Akhila, 2009).

CPS Pulioor has received many awards for academic excellence, co-curricular activities, games and sports and inclusion of CWSN children. The headmistress has been the leader for the last ten years and before that she was a teacher in the school. Our school visit started with a meeting with the VEC (being the school level committee and not the same as the Ward Education Committee) that was attended by 8 of the members—all women. When I asked the parents what they could tell me about the school their first response was that the headmistress and teachers “respond to all our questions and problems.” The school lays special emphasis on overall development—starting with reading newspapers and ensuring every child has a good handwriting. The school has an active old students association and this body has contributed in kind to the schools. They said that when any of their families have a medical crisis, need blood or any other support, the headmistress gets in touch with the old students network and responds to the needs of parents. Any parent can walk into the school and into the office of the headmistress.

Three of the VEC members has enrolled their CWSN into the school and mentioned that they, as a group, are well represented in the school committee. One mother had tears in her eyes when she narrated how her child came to study in the school. Apparently the Chennai Municipal Corporation had aired a TV programme that showed the integration of a child with cerebral palsy into the school, and how this child used to sit on her special chair and learn with all the children. She narrated how SSA had done a door to door survey of CWSN and motivated the parents to send their child to this school There are 13 IED children in this school—a few hearing impaired, a few with orthopaedic impairment, a few visually impaired and the rest with cerebral palsy. The headmistress had sought the help of the local Lions Club for special equipment for children who need it.

The school has 30 orphan children from the Lawrence Trust for Orphans. Most of the children are from very poor families—mostly engaged in

casual labour or daily wage labour. Eight percent of the children are Muslim, even though the school is located in an area that does not have a significant Muslim presence. Most of the children are from Backward Castes and Most Backward Castes.

The school is large and has a capacity to enrol 1000 children; however there are only 497 children in the school (239 boys and 258 girls). The school has 21 teachers and interestingly on the day of visit 442 children were present and all the teachers were present.

I asked the headmistress and the children what makes their school unique. They thought for a moment, talked among themselves and said: "The teachers are kind and like mothers to the children. The parents appreciate this. When a child is late, they are welcomed and they are not reprimanded or scolded. The teachers call the parents on their mobile phone and ask them why the children were late. Given that many of the children come from extremely poor families the children are sometimes called upon to help fill water, look after the siblings and do other chores. They talked about one girl child who was always late and said that they discussed with the parents and now this young girl comes to school with her 5-year-old sibling. Responding to the problems and finding solution is what makes the school different."

"Fear has gone away." The teachers said that when ABL was introduced in 2003 they were not happy. They did not understand the methodology and resented sitting on the floor with the children. However as they learnt more about the ABL approach, they started appreciating the value of child centred and multi level/multi-grade teaching. Children feel free to come and talk to them, ask them questions and discuss personal issues also.

Teacher attitudes and behaviour has changed after the introduction of ABL. Teachers now take responsibility for the learning of every single child and they make sure they know every child by name. The teachers work as a team; they support each other and learn from each other.

The school building is well looked after; there are plants, learning corners, library and even a kitchen garden. The teachers and children take responsibility for maintaining these spaces and use them to educate children about the environment, about nutrition and about self-discipline.

They conduct a door-to-door campaign every summer to identify children who are not going to school and bring them to the school. However, given that the school is located in a middle class area and adjacent to a business area, not many poor people can afford to live in the area. As a result the school cannot do justice to the capacity of 1000 children.

All the teachers have been trained and go through annual refresher courses. More importantly, the teachers of the school have worked as master trainers and resource persons for the ABL programme.

	Boys	Girls
SC	85	97
ST	0	5
MBC	56	62
BC & Muslim	98	94
OC/forward caste	0	0
TOTAL (497)	239	258
IED	10	3

The BRTE visits the school every week, sometimes more than once a week, the school has a good rapport with the Directorate and visitors are brought to the school often. The school is one of the best in Chennai.

The school is genuinely inclusive- apart from enrolling CWSN, the school has opened its doors to orphans and is open and willing to take any child. They believe that every child has a right to go to school and as a school they will open their doors and heart to every single child. The school lends a helping hand to parents during crisis and provides additional support to the children who need it.

It is difficult to say if this “best practice” school is unique or is it something that is typical of the Chennai Municipal Corporation. It was quite obvious that this was a unique school, with a highly motivated and dedicated headmistress who has established linkages with the parents, the old students and the local business community (through Lions Club).

Does the ABL methodology have something to do with it?

This is not easy to answer. According to the teachers and the SSA Directorate, the ABL programme has energised the schools, bridged the divide between teachers and students, made the classroom free of fear and given the teachers a sense of purpose.

What lessons can we draw from overall school management? The headmistress and the block officials said that where the headmistress enjoys the confidence of the directorate and the immediate supervisors, she enjoys a great deal of autonomy. She can initiate a lot of innovative practices, can organise the school the way she and her team of teachers want, they can mobilise funds from local business and also from the municipal corporation.

However, when the current headmistress retires in the end of 2011, it would be interesting to see if the good practices she initiated over the last ten years are sustained.



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