

# OXFAM IN ACTION

## SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES:

### Bringing in Accountability in Schools and Overall Education – Learning from the field



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## SUMMARY

**The Essential Services (ES)-** Education Programme of Oxfam India works towards increasing the access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in the mainstream public education system. It does so mainly by focusing on the realization of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, with a targeted focus on the marginalized communities like tribals, Muslims, dalits, and girls. It works along a range of themes through numerous partner agencies across the country, intervening in areas most needed in that particular region.

This note focuses on OIN's work with School Management Committees (SMCs) in the government schools of India with the aim of improving the quality of education delivery system in the country. It will describe the processes employed by six different partner agencies of Oxfam in three states of India, working within different demographic contexts -

- ▶ **LOKMITRA IN UTTAR PRADESH** – Formation of SMC Federations
- ▶ **MARG, SIKSHASANDHAN AND CHALE CHALO IN ODISHA** – Strengthening of SMCs.
- ▶ **LEADS IN JHARKHAND** – Formation and Strengthening of Federations of SMCs.

These models, along with their achievements and challenges are discussed in the subsequent chapters for larger learning and replication to inform similar future initiatives of Oxfam India or other organisations working in the field of Education.

## INTRODUCTION

The government recognizes the importance of community participation and involvement in education, by making this a core mandate of various government programmes and schemes. Community participation is deeply interwoven in the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Every school has to have a School Management Committee (SMC), which consists of members from the local community and in

theory; this SMC makes and approves plans and manages the overall school performance. The Act has entrusted parents with certain powers through the SMC elected by them, for improving the functioning of schools. This is possible with the necessary training and support to the SMC members and the larger community who need to be aware of the provisions of the RTE Act, their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the effective implementation of the same. The RTE Act 2009 has gain brought focus on it by the formation of School Management Committees (SMC) with representative participation from communities mandatory for all schools falling within the ambit of RTE Act.



Over the years, there has been almost a complete decline in space given to local community in managing schools. This has led to disconnect between the community and the schools leading to overall decline in the schooling process. The RTE Act has made an attempt to restore this legitimate space, to the community. The essential components of a good school need to be understood, especially by the parents. Thus, understanding the child learning processes, teacher child relationships, role of the school management, issues that schools face and role of SMC in taking schools out of this present mess, etc, are some crucial issues. Most of the organisations working on education across the country have realized this opportunity and had initiated efforts towards mobilizing community on the issues of education and the RTE Act. Trainings, orientation

programmes, awareness campaigns were undertaken to support SMC take up their role effectively. SMCs were further being trained in preparing School Development Plans<sup>1</sup>.

As per the Section 21 of the RTE Act, all government, government aided and special category schools shall have to constitute a School Management Committee.

## KEY FUNCTIONS OF A SMC

The RTE guideline mentions some of the specific functions to be performed by the SMC:

- ▶ Monitor school activities and its working
- ▶ Prepare and recommend School Development Plan (SDP) as per the RTE guidelines/norms
- ▶ Supervising and supporting implementation of SDP
- ▶ Supervision/monitoring of finance, management, academic progress, distribution of entitlements
- ▶ Monitor teachers' and students' attendance
- ▶ Creating and maintaining an educational database
- ▶ Coordinating with the local authority, generating funds from other sources for development of schools
- ▶ Monitor Mid-day meal (MDM)
- ▶ Ensure 100% enrollment of children in the age group of 6-14 years

## STRUCTURE OF A SMC

In the Central Model Rules, the composition suggested is as follows:

- ▶ Three-fourth (75%) members of the SMC should be either parents or guardians. Out of which, there should be 50% representation of women.
- ▶ The rest one fourth (25%) can be 1/3rd local authorities, 1/3rd school teachers, 1/3rd academicians/students etc.

The States can adapt this as per the local context and requirement of the state. The important aspect is that, it recognizes the power relations that exist in a community and its heterogeneous nature by ensuring 50% representation of women and also giving importance to the representation of the weaker sections in proportion to their population.

## CONSTITUTION OF A SMC

The process of constituting SMC could be as follows:

- ▶ General Body (GB) meeting of parents/guardians - all parents/guardians of children studying in the school will constitute the membership of the GB of the SMC.

1 School Management Committee and The Right to Education Act, 2009- Dayaram

- ▶ The GB members will elect representation of parents as per RTE norms for the Executive Committee of the SMC, by consensus or, if needed, by voting.
- ▶ Teachers and other members (1/3rd of the SMC) along with the elected members from the parents will constitute the Executive Committee of the SMC
- ▶ In turn they will elect office bearers of the SMC as per norms specified in the Act.
- ▶ The SMC can also constitute sub-committees including members from the GB for specific functions, and all these committees would be responsible towards the GB of the SMC.

There are various advantages of increasing the participation of the citizens and having a bottom-up-approach. Oxfam India's working paper, "People as Changemakers"<sup>2</sup> elaborates on the benefits to be derived from the same. Citizen's participation not only helps in mobilizing public awareness, but also builds a "strong sense of ownership of government policies and programs". It "creates greater transparency and accountability, holding public officials/politicians responsible on their promises." It also empowers the marginalized communities and provides the possibility of having local solutions to the problems and issues brought forward. The SMCs (or as they are envisioned to be) are meant to be a step forward from the VECs (Village Education Committees), which were started in the year 1994 as committee to overlook the education in the village. Officials, teachers and elite groups dominated the VECs and the parents were nominated to the committees by the non-parents.

The SMCs, on the other hand, have a majority composition of parents who are nominated by other parents. This is to reduce the dominances of teachers and other officials. Since the parents of the children in the schools have a direct stake in the improvement of the school delivery system, their active involvement and authority in the committee ensures that the SMCs are committed and unwavering in their goal. Thus the membership requirement of the SMCs, unlike the VECs, ensures that the school monitoring and management stay in the hands of the direct stakeholders.

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF SMCs

During field visits to the partner locations, a common concern reported was the wide-scale violation of the SMC guidelines. Despite working in diverse demographic field areas, similar worrying practices were reported in the schools in most of the regions. For instance, it was common for the so-called SMC members to not even be aware of their membership. Selection of the members took place without the knowledge of the parents; the headmaster

2 Richa Kapoor; People as Change makers, Essential Services: Community Based Management for Right to Education; Oxfam India working papers series, OIWPS II; June 2010.

and/or teachers undertook the process. After this, they prepare minutes and resolutions of meetings, which are not held, and ask the parent members to put their signature or thumb prints on them. These parents neither know of the decisions that are passed in these ghost meetings that they regularly have their signatures on, nor are they aware of their membership status and that they actually have a say in its proceedings.

Due to the vast cultural and socio-economic differences between the teachers and the community where the former often earn much more than the parents of the children they teach, the teachers enjoy a sense of superiority and authority. Neither the teachers, nor the community themselves, think the parents have the authority or the capability to monitor the functioning of the school (which until now happened unquestioned on the behest of the headmasters/teachers). The following chapters will describe how Oxfam partners have worked towards the building of confidence and capacity of the parents and have tried to ensure the proper formation and functioning of the SMCs.

## TAKING SMCs BEYOND SCHOOLS: EXPERIENCE FROM LOKMITRA AND LEADS

### LOKMITRA- UTTAR PRADESH

Lokmitra was founded in the year 1997 in Raebareli, working on education along with other development issues. From 2004-05 onwards, however, there was a strategic shift and education became their primary focus of work. Today Lokmitra, building on its experience and expertise of almost 20 years, works exclusively on education, extending its work into different themes with aim to bring about a positive change in the public education delivery system of the state.

Lokmitra has been working with the Oxfam since 2004, though their current education project with Oxfam India is two years old. Their strategy over the years with regards to education has remained similar and they follow the same strategy with all their other education projects as well. Lokmitra, as mentioned above, gradually shifted their focus from community advocacy to pedagogy, working towards ensuring quality of education in schools. This remains the main approach in the Oxfam project as well.

They have extensive experience of working with parents through School Management Committees (SMC) and building forward alliances by federating them at the district and block levels. Their engagement with the parents was aimed at bringing about ownership of the education process among the community and support them take up advocacy initiatives at the higher level. Parent committees in 400 schools comprising of 20 parent members (before the

passing of the RTEA). But it was felt that certain problems were not being solved at the school level. Therefore, the need to federate these committees at higher level arose. At present six block-level SMC federations are functional of which three are under the Oxfam project- Salon, Rahi and Raebareli-Nagar Chhetra. In these three blocks, Lokmitra works extensively with 30 schools (10 from each block). With these 30 schools, they work in a focused and intensive manner on SMCs and pedagogy. They are also involved with 150 other schools in these three blocks in a less engaged manner.

Lokmitra provides training to the SMC members – both residential and non-residential. Three days residential training is provided to 1-2 members of the committee and non-residential training to about 4 members. In the residential ones, both men and women attend together, and it has been found to bring about change in the attitudes. Apart from the training itself, the experience of living, eating, working in a democratic manner has had a huge impact. Discussions and debates are held on topics like the purpose of education; characteristics of a good school and a good society; how teachers, parents and children can together improve the school, on SMCs and its role, etc.

During the reconstitution of the SMCs in August 2013, Lokmitra ensured a democratic and informed manner of selection of members. Meetings were held with the parents, in which they were oriented on the need for an effective SMC. Teachers and children were also mobilized to motivate the parents to form active and functional SMCs. All of this was done prior to the actual selection of the members, in which the parents democratically nominate representatives to the SMCs. Demonstration meetings were also held to drive the need for a democratic process of selecting members.

Once the SMCs are formed, Lokmitra's team ensures regular and effective functioning of the committees. They facilitate the committee meetings, and ensure that the parents raise their voice and express their opinions and views openly. Hand holding and constant monitoring by the Lokmitra members ensures that SMC meetings are held regularly and work towards improving the functioning of schools. The members are also provided with constant learning opportunities by the field staff on the RTE Act, functions of a SMC and roles and responsibilities of the parents within the SMCs.

The SMCs at the school level are then federated at the different administrative sub-divisions- Cluster, Block and District level as Parent Associations (Abhibhavak Manch). These federations support in adding strength to the voice of the SMCs through collectivization, thus building pressure to the advocacy efforts of parents. They also serve as a learning group where the members learn through mutual sharing of their efforts, achievements and challenges. The Cluster-level associations are composed of two members

(preferably, one woman and one man) from each SMC who are identified by the committee members. Further, from each cluster level association, four persons (preferably, two women and two men) are identified for representation at the Block level. Representatives from the Block level associations are then further federated at the district level. At the Block level, they meet every second month and every third month at the District Level.

During the meetings of the Federations, common issues across different schools in a Block are brought forward, and the members try to address these issues in a participative and democratic manner. The experiences of different members are shared leading to mutual learning and Lokmitra team tries to ensure a positive environment during the meetings. Further, these Federations are also actively involved in advocating their concerns to the District and State officials. The members participate in demonstrations and protests, send letters to the officials, engage the media and other powerful members of the Federations to build pressure on administrative bodies to have their concerns recognized and addressed.

## IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS

For Lokmitra, the biggest achievement has been the major policy level changes it has been able to influence with regards to SMCs. From the beginning, Lokmitra has tried to influence the political parties, to bring focus on education in their agenda. It has used the forum of Abhibhavak Manch to advocate for demands at the state and national level, so that it can bring changes across a wider range than their limited intervention regions. In 2013, the U.P. State Government adopted many of the suggestions made by Lokmitra made for the proper reconstitution of SMC like the provision of Quorum, admission of children at the close of session, involvement of NGOs in the functioning of SMCs, and the display of name of selected members, etc.

The implementation of the RTE Act in U.P. was delayed and came into effect only in July 2011. Lokmitra was actively involved in the formulation of state rules, especially giving their inputs on SMCs, based on their experience and learning from the field. These inputs were given due consideration and were given due space in the final state rules.

Moreover, Lokmitra was able to evolve the model of School Management Committee and its federation as Parent's Association, before enactment of RTE Act. It has directly ensured proper formation of SMC in about 300 schools, and half of the SMC members in these schools have been given training support and learning materials. It has expanded its impact by sharing its good practice to about 600 NGOs of Uttar Pradesh and a few NGOs of other states as well.

## CHALLENGES

As with most initiatives, there were many challenges encountered in the implementation process. The first and

foremost challenge was to get the Committee members to sit together for meetings and discussions. The traditional distance between the parents and the teacher, had increased because of the large socio-economic difference between the two and the feeling of authority and superiority among some of the teachers. But as the parents began bringing positive changes in the schools, the teachers gradually started accepting them and began viewing them as allies in their struggle.

As Lokmitra is based in Raebareli (U.P.), there is a locational disadvantage, since most of the advocacy efforts are concentrated in Lucknow (which is about 80 kms from Raebareli). This sometimes is a hindrance to both the Parent Association members as well as the Lokmitra team members in their state level advocacy efforts.

Further, Lokmitra hoped their efforts would slowly emerge out of a project-mode and become a movement, like the SMCs are now a prerogative in the RTEA, so will be the federation, advocating for changes in the education system across the state of Uttar Pradesh. However, it has not been able to achieve this as of now, and the Federations are, to their disappointment, still confined within their own project area, and not yet taken on rigorously by the State level institutions or community level advocacy.

## LEADS – JHARKHAND

Life Education and Development Support (LEADS) was established in 2005 to work for the empowerment and development of the under-privileged people of the rural areas and urban slums in Jharkhand and the adjacent states like Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Odisha. Although it has worked in various domains like Gender, Child Rights, Environment, it has a distinctive approach that is applied to all. This approach focuses on community empowerment and mobilization, networking, followed by advocacy and lobbying at the state level. The organisation believes in supporting and facilitating a community-led approach with a 'decentralized structure for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the programme'<sup>3</sup>. With the same principle, they work towards the mobilization of CBIs (Community Based Institutions) like SMC, Bal Sansad, Gram Sabha/PRIs on the RTE under the Oxfam Education Project.

Their work with School Management Committees involves the formation and then strengthening of federations of SMCs at the Block and State level. These federations, similar to the Lokmitra approach in Uttar Pradesh, build pressure on government institutions for effective delivery of the provisions under the RTE Act. The SMC federations along CBIs, support LEADS in their advocacy efforts at the state level.

LEADS is currently working in around 14 schools with the support of SMCs. SMCs that were previously formed had lot

3 LEADS: An Introduction; Introductory Pamphlet of Life Education and Development Support.

of issues. After two and half years of working with SMCs, they became cooperative and have been actively working towards improving the schools. There has been a lot of success achieved because of support and cooperation of SMC after their capacity building. During the formation process of new SMCs, LEADS and the SMC members ensured that the process as defined by RTE Act is followed and it is done in democratic and fair manner. This has been one of their most important successes.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES

The SMC members trained by LEADS are taking an active interest and participating in the implementation of RTE. As per their Annual Report 2013-14, the impact achieved by LEADS through their work with SMCs (as of March 2014) are as follows:

- ▶ SMC, Teachers and Gram Sabha member jointly formulated School development through a participatory and democratic process.
- ▶ Separate toilets for girls and boys in around 20 schools were provided due to the pressure and efforts of the SMC members and parents.
- ▶ School Development Plan was prepared in 15 Schools and a consolidated plan for 10 schools submitted to the Block level education officials by the SMC federation.

### SOME OF THE BEST PRACTICES FOLLOWED WERE:

- ▶ Developing IEC materials on RTE Act and on the roles and responsibilities of the SMCs for easy access of information by community on the same.
- ▶ Mobilizing SMC and building its capacity on school development plan and sensitizing the SMC members on the various provisions of RTE Act, 2009.
- ▶ Formulation of School Development Plan by involving SMC and Gram Sabha members with specific roles and responsibility of each stakeholders. SDP reflecting financial and non-financial work with a clear division of state roles and SMC roles.
- ▶ Having a clear action plan in place and submission of plans to Government for its response by marking a copy to the concerned officials.
- ▶ Regular meetings of SMC where each component of the SDP are discussed and decisions are taken accordingly. Further, SMC implements its own activity plan and make efforts to mobilize resources including financial support. Tracking the outcomes and progress of the plan regularly.
- ▶ Documenting case studies and sharing for its replication with Government, like minded networks and organisation. Also using case studies as evidence for lobbying and advocacy.

## CHALLENGES

The LEADS team has faced certain difficulties in realizing their strategies on ground and achieving the above results, some of which are given below-

- ▶ The parents do not take interest in regularly participating in the meetings and school development plan formulation processes.
- ▶ SDP is not honored completely of the state education department. Many works are done at paper level and their issues are not responded properly at the grassroots level.
- ▶ Training mechanism of SMC members is still quite poor. There is still lack of information prevailing at community level across the state.
- ▶ SMC meetings are not conducted regularly and agenda is not followed up properly during the meeting.
- ▶ The process of proper formulation of SDP was not followed. Implementation of construction related department officials dominate work and usually SMC members do not have a say in it.

## STRENGTHENING SMCs FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: EXPERIENCES FROM ODISHA PARTNERS (MARG, SIKSHASANDHAN AND CHALECHALO)

MARG works in the district of Cuttack, Odisha with a special focus on education of Muslim children. They work along with a partner organisation, BIRD, to address three main factors, which, according to them, are the reasons for limited access of Muslim children to education. These factors are mind set of the community poverty, and poor quality of schools. Their work with SMCs is to work towards improving quality of education in schools. MARG conducts training of SMC members from rural as well as urban schools, primarily to make them aware about the provisions of the RTE Act and the roles and responsibilities of the SMC members.

Since, their main focus is on the legal empowerment of the stakeholders, the training modules of the SMC members focus on the legal provisions of the Act. Further, initiatives like district level interface meetings organized bring the SMC members and the Education officials together to discuss and seek redress of various issues.

Oxfam India supports Sikshasandhan and ChaleChalo, towards improving access to education of tribal children especially girls in two tribal-dominated districts, Mayurbhanj (Sikshasandhan) and Sundargarh (Chale Chalo) respectively. 'Capacity Building of SMCs' is one of the major initiatives in this endeavor.



**Sikshasandhan** has been working in the field of education since 2001 and has been successful in bringing about remarkable changes in their project area. The overarching aim is to bring about policy-level changes in education. But instead of approaching the administration directly, it uses the platform of School Management Committees (SMCs) to strengthen the capacity of the community to advocate for changes and effective implementation of the Act. The SMC thus becomes an effective instrument of governance through which each local community can 'influence and monitor implementation of the Act in their school'.

Regular awareness meetings are conducted with SMC members on importance of education and entitlements under the RTE Act. After this, the SMCs are trained on School Development Plan and the process of grievance redress. As of June 2013, around 294 SMC members (from the 11 schools of Noto Gram Panchayat) have been trained by Sikshasandhan. Further, a District level SMC Convention was organized with 94 SMC office bearers representing eight blocks of Mayurbhanj district. The convention was both an interface with the District Education department and also a forum to highlight school grievances and the issues and challenges faced by the SMC members and office bearers. A district level SMC members committee was formed with representation from all the blocks.

An interface meeting was also organized between the SMC and other community members and the District Education Department and other line departments (like the SSA, Department of School and Mass Education, Rural Water and

Sanitation, Civil Construction, etc.) to facilitate grievance redress at the community level. In this, the community put forward their grievances, and some of them also availed immediate solutions.

**Chale Chalo** aims to extend the Sikshasandhan model to the district of Sundargarh and started its work with the School Management Committees from last year (2013). Despite the limited time in the project area, it has already brought about observable differences in the functioning of the SMCs in the schools. The Committees have now started meeting regularly, and the members who until now were unaware of their membership-status, are now coming forwards with their demands and concerns. Since the Committees were already formed, it was difficult to influence the selection process of the members to ensure a democratic and fair process. However, during the second round formation, it will monitor the selection of the members and the chairman of the committee.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

All the three agencies have succeeded in building the confidence and awareness of the parents, and in bringing forward a 'community consciousness' where the community is encouraged to take ownership of the schools.

Parent-members, in the project areas are now aware of not only the role of the SMCs, but their own role and position within the committee.

The new SMCs have been formed in the schools in accordance with provisions of the RTE Act. The training provided to the members have increased their participation, and the SMC members are now raising important issues regarding the Mid-Day Meal, infrastructural requirements (like boundary walls, toilets, kitchen shed, etc.), teacher's regularity. SMC members have also ensured regularity of the students and increased their enrolment, by making home-to-home visits and spreading their awareness of the RTE Act to the other parents in the community. Teachers have also been sensitized and are now extending their support or at least accepting the SMC members' authority in monitoring the system.

But as above the experiences, the journey was not smooth and the agencies had to tackle various challenges along the way. All the three agencies from Odisha, during the beginning of their work, discovered that the already formed SMCs were functioning in an ad-hoc manner, with the so-called members unaware of their membership. These SMCs often did not have proper representation from the tribal community and functioned on the whims of the teacher/headmaster. Resolutions were passed without the knowledge of the members whose signatures/thumb-prints were later sought by the teachers. The parents did not have a say in the functioning of the school and were unaware of the SMC guidelines of the RTE Act. Tackling the traditional monopoly of the teachers, and the feelings of inferiority among the parents and community while establishing their rights in the functioning of the committees was a challenge that each of the agencies have faced or are still facing.

## OVERALL LEARNING AND CONCLUSION:

One of the most important lessons learnt is that bringing the reigns of the School Management Committees into the hands of the direct stakeholders (parents), as set out in the RTE Act, ensures the effective functioning of schools. Parents have a direct stake in the improvement of the schools and having a rapport and knowledge of the community and the local area, they are usually more successful in ensuring certain aspects like motivating other parents to send their children to the school regularly, monitoring children's and teachers' attendance, provision of basic infrastructure and seeking enhanced resource allocation in the schools.

As the primary stakeholders of the education system, it is parents and children who bear the brunt of a failing education system. Required opportunities and support needs to be given to them to bring about a change in the education system. Civil Society organisations have a key role to play by making them realize power they hold in bringing about change in the schools and the larger education system. Their positive and constructive

engagement with the schools and other stakeholders can help reverse the trend of declining quality of education in the schools.

It is also important to work with other important stakeholders like teachers and government officials by initiating dialogue between them and parents, so community concerns and issues are heard and addressed. Moreover, challenging status quo through enhanced community participation is a not an easy task. It needs a long and sustained engagement with the local communities. Oxfam India's partners engagement with the community has often predated the project support and, in a few cases, even before the RTE Act came into being. This long-term engagement took time and persistent efforts to empower the community. Based on these experiences, we can also infer that challenges are just not limited to the supply side (Education system) not willing to perform but also that demand side has historically kept itself away from demanding effective service delivery. Further, the strengthening of SMCs has not worked in isolation but has been complemented by a number of other initiatives at local level, within education programmes and other initiatives. Proactive local level leaders, CBOs, youth, collectives and other forums like the teachers' federation etc also supported the process.

The SMC (and the local community as a whole) form an important part of the accountability chain as an active part of decentralized governance. It provides a legal entry point for the community to monitor and oversee the functioning of the school. Therefore, it is important that the SMCs are strengthened to perform the role as expected of them so that they can play an active role in the improving the education delivery system.

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